

William
Wordsworth
in Context

EDITED BY ANDREW BENNETT



WILLIAM WORDSWORTH IN CONTEXT

William Wordsworth's poetry responded to the enormous literary, political, cultural, technological and social changes that the poet lived through during his lifetime (1770–1850), and to his own transformation from young radical inspired by the French Revolution to Poet Laureate and supporter of the establishment. The poet of the 'egotistical sublime' who wrote the pioneering autobiographical masterpiece, *The Prelude*, and whose work is remarkable for its investigation of personal impressions, memories and experiences, is also the poet who is critically engaged with the cultural and political developments of his era. *William Wordsworth in Context* presents thirty-five concise chapters on contexts crucial for an understanding and appreciation of this leading Romantic poet. It focuses on his life, circle and poetic composition; on his reception and influence; on the significance of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary contexts; and on the historical, political, scientific and philosophical issues that helped to shape Wordsworth's poetry and prose.

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Preface

Wordsworth lived longer than any other major British writer of the Romantic period. The eight decades of his life from 1770 to 1850 were years of unprecedented scientific, technological, political, cultural, social and literary change. Born in the era of the American revolution against British rule, Wordsworth came of age during the French Revolution and lived through twenty years of wars with France. He also witnessed the suspension of *Habeas Corpus* in 1794, the abolition of slavery in 1807, the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, Catholic emancipation of 1829, the invention of the steam engine and the introduction of regular passenger train services from 1830, and the radical democratic changes initiated by the 1832 Reform Act. It would be surprising if Wordsworth's writing did not respond in some way to the momentous social, cultural, political, technological and scientific changes of the almost-century of his life, and as Peter Simonsen comments in a discussion of his early reception, Wordsworth may indeed be said to 'capture and hold in precarious suspension many of the internal contradictions of the period'. But Wordsworth was also the poet of what John Keats famously termed the 'egotistical sublime' – a poet whose primary resource seems so often to have been his own life, thoughts, impressions, memories and moods. The two epic-length poems that he completed, *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, seem at first glance precisely to encapsulate this dichotomy of self and society and indeed to announce themselves as such: *The Prelude* is concerned with what its title page calls the 'Growth of a Poet's Mind' while *The Excursion* has to do with what its preface calls 'Man, Nature, and Society'. What recent criticism has managed decisively to confirm, however, is that these two modes overlap, interlink and ultimately merge. The poet of the egotistical sublime, the poet who writes the first great literary autobiography in English and whose poetry is remarkable not least for its investigation of personal impressions, memories and experiences, is also the poet who critically engaged with the transformative cultural and political developments of the era in which he

lived: he produces, as James Chandler comments, ‘extraordinary act[s] of cultural stocktaking to contextualize his own poetic experiments’.

This book’s division into four sections reflects the different contexts in which Wordsworth’s poetry is written and to which it responds. The chapters in the first section discuss Wordsworth’s life and the immediate circle of family and friends so crucial to his work, and explore questions related to the composition and revision of his poems and to the writing of his major prose works. Wordsworth’s immediate reception and later influence is then addressed in a series of chronologically arranged chapters that consider his contemporary and posthumous critical reception, and his influence on twentieth-century writers. The third section examines the various literary traditions, particularly the poetic genres and modes, on which Wordsworth so heavily depended and which he helped so decisively to transform. The final section of the book addresses the various historical, political, scientific and philosophical contexts that illuminate and help us to better understand Wordsworth’s poetry and prose.

Keats’s off-hand but influential comment on Wordsworth as the poet of the ‘egotistical sublime’ helped to promulgate one of the many myths and preconceptions that have grown up around the older poet’s work since his earliest publications – that he is unremittingly humourless, conservative and old; that he is obsessed by his own memories, thoughts and moods, and by Nature just in so much as it reflects aspects of himself; that his poetry is univocal, monotonous and preachy; that he writes in prosaic inconsequential detail exclusively of daisies and daffodils, or at best of children and beggars; that his work is either pedestrian and uninspiringly quotidian in emphasis, or that it is tendentiously transcendental and oppressively religious in orientation. The chapters in this book should help to separate Wordsworth from the many myths and popular misapprehensions that have developed around him in the two centuries since his singular and strangely haunting poems first began to be published. In their focus on the multiple literary, cultural and political contexts of his work, the chapters that follow will help to ‘liberate’, as Maureen McLane puts it in her contribution, ‘Wordsworth from “Wordsworth”’.

Chronology

- 1770
7 April William Wordsworth (WW) born in Cockermouth in the English Lake District, second son of Ann (née Cookson; b. 1747) and John (b. 1741) (brother Richard b. 1768).
- 1771 Birth of WW's sister, Dorothy (DW).
- 1772 Birth of WW's brother, John.
- 1774 Birth of WW's brother, Christopher.
- 1775
- 18 April American War of Independence begins.
- 1777
- 22 June Slavery outlawed in England.
- 1778
- March Death of WW's mother. DW sent to live with relatives in Halifax.
- 1779
- May WW enrolled at Hawkshead Grammar School, lodging with Hugh and Ann Tyson.
- 1782 James Watt patents the steam engine.
- 1783
- 30 December Death of WW's father.
- 1784
- 2 August First mail coaches in England (Bristol–London).
- 1785 WW composes 'Lines Written as a School Exercise at Hawkshead' (first surviving poem).
- 1787
- March WW's first published poem: 'Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress' in the *European Magazine*.
- Summer WW writes main parts of *The Vale of Esthwaite*. Enters St John's College, Cambridge University.

- 1788–9 WW composes *An Evening Walk* (first published in January 1793).
- 1789
14 July Storming of the Bastille: beginning of French Revolution.
- 1790
July–September With Robert Jones, WW undertakes 3,000-mile walking tour through France and Switzerland.
- 1791
January WW graduates from Cambridge University with a BA degree.
- February–May WW living in London.
- March **Part 1** of Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* published (**Part 2** published in February 1792).
- June–September WW stays in North Wales with Jones.
- November WW travels to London and from there to France.
- 1792 WW composes *Descriptive Sketches*. Mary Wollstonecraft publishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.
WW meets and has an affair with Annette Vallon (1766–1841).
- 2 December Napoleon proclaimed Emperor of France.
- 15 December Caroline, WW’s daughter with Annette Vallon, is born.
- December WW returns to England.
- 1793 WW living in London December 1792 to late June 1793.
- 21 January Execution of Louis XVI.
- February France declares war on Britain. WW writes (but does not publish) public letter to the Bishop of Llandaff defending the French Revolution.
- Summer WW walks across Salisbury Plain and sees Tintern Abbey on his way to visit Jones in North Wales. Writes first version of *Salisbury Plain*. William Godwin publishes *Political Justice*.
- September–October WW may have revisited France.
- 1794 In January WW is reunited with DW in Halifax, from where they travel to Keswick to live in William Calvet’s house Windy Brow; WW nurses Raisley Calvert (from whom, after his death in January 1795, WW inherits £900).

- 28 July
1795
August–September
1797
June
July
1798
July
16 September
October
1799
May
December
1800
1801 January
May
1802
25 March
- Habeas corpus is suspended in May until June 1795.
Execution of Robespierre.
Government introduces the ‘gagging acts’ outlawing mass meetings and political lectures.
WW meets Samuel Taylor Coleridge (STC), Robert Southey, and the publisher Joseph Cottle in Bristol. WW moves with DW to Racedown in Dorset, a house owned by the Bristol plantation-owning Pinney family, where they live rent-free until July 1797.
By June, WW has completed his play *The Borderers*; writes first version of *The Ruined Cottage*.
STC visits the Wordsworths at Racedown.
WW and DW move to Alfoxden House at the foot to the Quantock Hills in Somerset, four miles from STC’s house in Nether Stowey.
WW rewrites *The Ruined Cottage*; working closes with STC, he composes most of the poems included in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.
Thomas Malthus publishes *Essay on Population*.
WW revisits the Wye Valley with DW and writes ‘Lines Written a few Miles Above Tintern Abbey’.
WW, DW and STC sail for Germany, where WW and DW stay in Goslar for the winter. WW begins writing autobiographical verses that will become *The Prelude*.
Lyrical Ballads published in Bristol and London.
WW and DW return to England.
WW and DW move into Town End (Dove Cottage), Grasmere, in the Lake District.
Humphrey Davy first produces electric light.
WW begins *Home at Grasmere*; writes poems for second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* together with the Preface.
Act of Union creates United Kingdom. Second (1800) edition of *Lyrical Ballads* published.
WW composes ‘The Leech Gatherer’.
In March and June WW composes much of the ‘Ode. Intimations of Immortality’.

- Peace of Amiens creates temporary cessation of conflict between England and France until May 1803.
- April Publication of third edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, with revised preface.
- August WW visits Annette and Caroline in France.
- October *Edinburgh Review* founded.
- 4 October WW marries Mary Hutchinson (b. 1770).
- 1803 War with France resumes.
- 18 June WW's son, John, is born.
- Summer Meets Sir George Beaumont.
- August–September WW takes a six-week tour of Scotland with DW and STC, where he meets Walter Scott.
- 1804
- 9 April STC leaves England for Malta.
- 16 August WW's daughter, Dora, is born.
- 2 December Napoleon becomes Emperor of France.
- 1805 Publication of Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.
- 5 February WW's brother John dies when his ship, the *Earl of Abergavenny*, sinks off Portland Bill, Dorset.
- May WW completes the thirteen-book version of *The Prelude*.
- 21 October Battle of Trafalgar.
- 1806
- May–June WW writes 'Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle'.
- 15 June WW's son, Thomas, is born.
- August STC returns to England.
- 1806–7 The Wordsworths spend the winter in Sir George Beaumont's house at Coleorton, Leicestershire.
- 1807 Abolition of slavery in British Empire.
- 25 March British navy defeats French and Spanish fleet at Battle of Trafalgar.
- 28 April Publication of *Poems, in Two Volumes*.
- May The Wordsworth family move to a larger house, Allan Bank in Grasmere.
- 1808 WW writes *The Convention of Cintra* criticizing the British government's foreign policy.
- September WW's daughter, Catherine, is born.

- 1809
February *Quarterly Review* founded.
- May Publication of *The Convention of Cintra*.
- 1 June Publication of the first number of STC's *The Friend*.
- 1810
WW publishes an introduction to Joseph Wilkinson's *Select Views of Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire* (first version of what will become *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes in the North of England*, first separately published in 1822).
- 22 February WW publishes first of the *Essays upon Epitaphs* in STC's *The Friend*.
- 12 May Birth of son, William.
- October STC leaves the Lake District.
- 1811
May/June Wordsworth family move to the Rectory, opposite Grasmere church.
- 1812
Publication of first two cantos of Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.
- 4 June Daughter, Catherine, dies aged 4.
- 1 December Son, Thomas, dies aged 6.
- 1813
April WW appointed as Distributor for Stamps for the County of Westmorland.
- May Wordsworth family move to Rydal Mount, where WW lived until his death in 1850.
- 1814
February Publication of Scott's *Waverley*.
Napoleon abdicates.
- August Publication of WW's *The Excursion*.
- 1815
March Publication of WW's two-volume *Poems, including Lyrical Ballads*.
- May Meets Benjamin Robert Haydon.
- 2 June Publication of WW's *The White Doe of Rylstone* (composed 1807–8) in *The Courier*.
- 18 June Napoleon defeated at Waterloo.
- 1816
Publication of STC's *Christabel, Kubla Khan: A Vision, The Pains of Sleep*.
- 1 May WW publishes 'Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns'.
- 1817
Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine founded.

- July
December
1818
1819
April
June
July
16 August
1820
29 January
April
July–October
September
1821
23 February
1822
March
8 July
1824
19 April
1825
January
1827
May
1828
Summer
1829
13 April
August–October
- STC's *Biographia Literaria* published.
WW meets John Keats in London.
WW campaigns for Tory interest in Westmorland general election.
Corn Laws passed to protect British agriculture; Poor Law Relief Act passed.
Publication of WW's *Peter Bell* (written 1798).
Publication of WW's *The Waggoner* (written 1806).
Publication of Byron's *Don Juan* Cantos 1 and 2.
Peterloo massacre in Manchester.
Death of George III, succeeded by George IV. Trial of Queen Caroline.
Publication of WW's *The River Duddon*, a sequence of thirty-four sonnets.
WW tours Europe with Mary, DW and others.
Publication of four-volume *Miscellaneous Poems of William Wordsworth*.
Death of John Keats.
Publication of WW's *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820*, and 102-sonnet series *Ecclesiastical Sketches*.
Death of Percy Bysshe Shelley.
Death of Lord Byron.
Publication of William Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* in book form.
Publication of WW's five-volume *Poetical Works*.
WW tours Belgium, the Rhineland, and Holland with Dora and STC.
Catholic Relief Bill, to which WW was strongly opposed.
WW tours Ireland with John and James Marshall.

- 1830 Liverpool–Manchester Railway: first steam passenger service opened.
- 26 June George IV dies on 4 June and is succeeded by William IV.
- 1831 WW tours Scotland.
- September–October
- 1832 Great Reform Bill passed, opposed by WW, extends the franchise. Publication of WW's four-volume *Poetical Works*.
- June
- 21 September Death of Sir Walter Scott.
- 1833 WW takes two-week visit to Scotland with son John and Henry Crabb Robinson.
- July
- 1834 Death of STC.
- 25 July
- 1835 Publication of WW's 45-sonnet series *Composed or Suggested during a Tour of Scotland, in the Summer of 1833*, and of *Yarrow Revisited, and other Poems*.
- April
- 23 June Death of Sara Hutchinson.
- 1836–7 Publication of WW's six-volume *Poetical Works*.
- 1837 Death of William IV, succeeded by Victoria.
- 20 June WW tours France and Italy with Crabb Robinson.
- March–August WW undertakes final revisions to *The Prelude*.
- 1839
- 1840 Introduction of the uniform rate of a penny for letters sent anywhere in Britain.
- 10 January
- 1842 WW publishes *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* (including first publication of *The Borderers*).
- 21 April
- 1843 Death of Robert Southey.
- 21 March WW becomes Poet Laureate.
- April
- 9 July Death of Dora.
- 1845 WW publishes *The Poems* (single-volume collected works).
- December
- 1850 Death of WW.
- 23 April

Abbreviations

Unless otherwise stated, quotations from Wordsworth's poems are from the readings texts in the Cornell volumes listed below.

- BW* *Benjamin the Waggoner*, ed. Paul F. Betz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).
- DS* *Descriptive Sketches*, ed. Eric Birdsall (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).
- EPF* *Early Poems and Fragments, 1785–1797*, ed. Carol Landon and Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- EW* *An Evening Walk*, ed. James Averill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).
- EY* *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years*, 2nd edn, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).
- Excursion* *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James Butler and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).
- FN* *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993)
- HG* *Home at Grasmere, Part First, Book First, of The Recluse*, ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).
- LB* *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797–1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).
- LP* *Last Poems, 1821–1850*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
- LS* *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, VIII: A Supplement of New Letters*, ed. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

- LY* *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years*, ed. Ernest de Sélincourt, 2nd edn, rev. Alan G. Hill, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978–88).
- MY* *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, 2nd edn, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–70).
- Prose* *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).
- PTV* ‘*Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807*’, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).
- PW* *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 5 vols., ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford University Press, 1940–9).
- RC* ‘*The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar*’, ed. James Butler (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).
- SP* *Shorter Poems, 1807–1820*, ed. Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).
- SPP* *The Salisbury Plain Poems*, ed. Stephen Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).
- SSIP* *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1819–1850*, ed. Geoffrey Jackson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).
- TP* ‘*The Tuft of Primroses, with Other Late Poems for The Recluse*’, ed. Joseph F. Kishel (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).
- WD* *The White Doe of Rylstone; or the Fate of the Nortons*, ed. Kristine Dugas (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).
- 1799 Prelude* *The Prelude, 1798–1799*, ed. Stephen Parrish (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).
- 1805 Prelude* *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed, 2 vols. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).
- 1850 Prelude* *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, ed. W. J. B. Owen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

Other Works

- BL* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 1983).
- CL* *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71).
- DWJ* Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, ed. Pamela Woof (Oxford University Press, 2002).
- CH* *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage, 1793–1820*, ed. Robert Woof (London: Routledge, 2001).

PART I

Life and works

*Wordsworth and biography**Stephen Gill*

In Wordsworth's first published poem, 'Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress' (1787), the possessive pronoun 'my' appears five times in the first six lines (*EPF* 396). It was an augury of what was to become habitual practice. It was a practice, however, that evolved in a very important way over the formative period of Wordsworth's writing life. Although the name and status of the author were blazoned on the title page of his next publication, *An Evening Walk*, in 1793, the 'I' of that poem, the voice of the loco-descriptive wanderer, revealed little about him. When 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' appeared in the anonymously published *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, however, the unidentified 'I' by contrast invited, almost insisted on, the piecing together of inferences about the actual childhood and youth of this real person, the speaker of this poem – whoever he might be. Within two years, the title page of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* gave that information away. The man roaming the banks of the Wye five years after a first visit there, a man who had suffered in the city but was now ready to announce to the world the foundation of the soul of all his moral being, a man eager to share his most vital experience with his dear, dear Sister, was the William Wordsworth whose status as a graduate of St John's College, Cambridge, had been advertised on the title page of *An Evening Walk*.

Once the mask of anonymity had been discarded, the autobiographical foundations of this poet's work became ever more apparent. The weighty Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) offered a bold analysis of the ills of contemporary society, not as a poetic fiction but as the firmly held opinion of the 'I', William Wordsworth, and this intervention in prose in public debate was complemented by a lengthy introduction to the pastoral 'Michael', which explained how it was that the poet had come to choose subjects from 'low and rustic life' to serve in his campaign to rectify public taste. The identity of this poet – not his name but his nature, his concerns, his habitual attitudes – emerged more fully with each new publication. The expanded Preface to the next edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1802 revealed that

he entertained the loftiest vision of the nature and function of the poetic vocation, that of binding 'together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time'. The Poet, it was claimed, 'rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him' (*Prose* 1: 137–41). Evidence for this claim was forthcoming in Wordsworth's next collection, *Poems, in Two Volumes* in 1807 in the form of a cluster of lyrics presented as 'Moods of My Own Mind'. Not surprisingly, Francis Jeffrey amongst others became impatient of the pretension of this Mr Wordsworth and his Laker friends. It was not just the lyric poems with their *faux* simplicity that were an offence; it was the character and situation of their maker that offended, a self-appointed moralist who insisted on offering nostrums for the greater good of society at large from the standpoint of rustic seclusion.¹ And from Jeffrey's point of view there was worse to come.

Wordsworth was deeply wounded by the reception of *Poems, in Two Volumes* and he fell silent, publishing no new collection of verse for some years. When he did issue new work, however, *The Excursion* of 1814, it was much more than a demonstration in thousands of lines of blank verse that this poet was resilient and had not been silenced by critical hostility. It was a public announcement, through a prose Preface and a lengthy manifesto in verse presented as a 'Prospectus' to a newly announced philosophical poem, *The Recluse*, that its author conceived of himself as a prophet for his generation and that his life was being shaped by honouring his vocation and the holy service it entailed. The poem, so it was claimed, came into being from a specific choice of life and prolonged self-examination. The poet had retired to his native mountains in the hope of producing literary work that might live; he had conducted a rigorous examination of his own life to date; the present offering was only a part of a grand project. And the ambition of that project was sensational: to reconceive Paradise; to celebrate the wedding of 'the discerning intellect of Man' and 'the goodly universe'; to create verse of 'genuine insight' that might shed with 'star-like virtue' 'benignant influence'. It appeared, moreover, that all of the poet's minor work was vitally connected to the larger design, to the completion of which the author's remaining years would be dedicated. It was an extraordinary declaration of purpose from a poet who clearly had a sense of the shape of his own life and of its significance artistically. Here was someone who clearly thought of himself as equal and successor to Milton, 'the Bard, / Holiest of Men'.²

To some degree the Preface to *The Excursion* did lift the veil on its creator. By 1814 the location of Wordsworth's 'native mountains' was no mystery and the publication in 1800 of poems such as 'Michael' and 'The Brothers',

clearly set amongst them, would have provided a rough date for the poet's retirement there 'several years ago'. It would not have been difficult either for anyone in touch with contemporary letters to work out who was the 'dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius . . . to whom the Author's Intellect is deeply indebted' and some idea of the nature of the autobiographical poem referred to in the Preface to *The Excursion* would have been gained by attentive readers of Coleridge's *The Friend*, in which excerpts from it were published in 1809. What none but those closest to him knew, however, was that private engagement with the biography so tantalizingly glanced at in the 1814 Preface had preoccupied Wordsworth throughout the period in which his public persona was being created – that is, 1793 to 1814 – and that a great deal of other poetry existed, unpublished, in which the poet examined 'the origin and progress of his own powers'.

In March 1798, Dorothy Wordsworth reported that her brother had revised a recent composition, *The Ruined Cottage*, so radically that the character of the Pedlar who relates the story of the sad victim Margaret, had become 'a very, certainly the *most*, considerable part of the poem' (EY 199). Working through a large body of blank verse – some of which would eventually find lodging in *The Excursion* and *The Prelude* – to depict the character of the Pedlar, Wordsworth was in fact drawing together ideas about the formation of a child of Nature, of one nurtured by her ministry of love and fear, which led via 'Tintern Abbey' directly into his first attempt at avowedly autobiographical self-examination – the so-called *Two-Part Prelude* of 1799.³

This poem, addressed to Coleridge, explores how infant consciousness is formed and developed; the place of childhood joys and fears in the creation of the adult; what it means that some of them are remembered into later life as restorative 'spots of time'; how it might be that the influence of natural objects could give succour to the human spirit at a time of 'dereliction and dismay' (1799 *Prelude* Part 2, line 487). It is a remarkable, highly original achievement, which furnished Wordsworth with the language to analyze as well as evoke his most important experiences and which also beckoned him to push still more adventurously into a territory of poetic subject matter which he had only begun to enter so far.

The *Two-Part Prelude* opens with a question, 'Was it for this?' It is a question which serves as the unspoken introduction to the next autobiographical exploration, *Home at Grasmere*, for in this poem Wordsworth attempted to grapple with the implications of the question, now posed afresh, in effect as, 'What am I doing here?' At the end of 1799 Wordsworth had at last settled, taking a cottage with his sister, Dorothy, in Grasmere,

amongst the 'native mountains' where he was to spend the rest of his life. But was retirement there a retreat from social pressures and political engagement or an expression of confidence in his poetic vocation? Recognition that he had been granted 'genuine wealth / Inward and outward' (*HG* 42; lines 90–1) surely demanded something more than acknowledgement and thanks. Exactly: because 'the boon is absolute' and 'surpassing grace' (*HG* 44; lines 122) had been given beyond that known 'among the bowers / Of blissful Eden' (*HG* 44; lines 123–4), the chosen son must reciprocate with work worthy of the place, the people, and of his own holy calling. Declaring, 'Yet in this peaceful Vale we will not spend / Unheard-of days, though loving peaceful thoughts; / A Voice shall speak, and what will be the Theme?' (*HG* 98–100; lines 956–8), the poet concludes his celebration of homecoming with a manifesto of poetic intent. The answer to the question, 'what will be the Theme?', couched in nearly a hundred lines of impassioned blank verse, makes huge claims about the poet's vision of a new Paradise, but they were not claims which he chose to broadcast then and for the moment work on the greater philosophic poem, *The Recluse*, of which *Home at Grasmere* was supposed to be the first book, faltered. Wordsworth was writing and publishing lyric poems: privately he was also expending enormous energy on yet further autobiographical writing.

When work resumed on what would eventually be called *The Prelude*, it was to expand the poem's historical reach well beyond that of the 1799 two books. Coverage included Wordsworth's years at Cambridge, 1797–90, his two sojourns in France, 1790–2, his life in London and the West Country, 1793–8, with certain experiences highlighted, such as his crossing of Salisbury Plain. Between early 1804 and mid 1805 Wordsworth composed thousands of lines of autobiographical blank verse. It was, he confessed to Sir George Beaumont in May 1805 as he was nearing the end, 'a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself' (*EY* 586). Perhaps not quite unprecedented, but certainly astonishing. Why did he do it?

For a possible answer one needs to return to the question with which the *Two-Part Prelude* began, 'Was it for this?' A deft rhetorical figure, yes, but one acutely relevant to Wordsworth's situation in 1799. By the end of the summer of 1798 the poet who had just written 'Tintern Abbey' had recognized his vocation. It was to speak to his generation through a philosophic poem of majestic ambition: 'My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society. Indeed I know not of any thing which will not come within the scope of my plan' he told James Tobin in a letter of 6 March 1798 (*EY* 212). So the answer to 'Was it for this / That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved / To

blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song?' (1799 *Prelude Part 1*, lines 1–3), was at one level a confident yes. The aspirant poet had recognized his calling and identified what would surely be a life's work.

But a confident answer to the question on one level co-existed with troubled self-questioning on another. This was the vocation, but could the poet be certain it was not a delusion? He was 28 years old. What authority did he have to pronounce on 'Nature, Man, and Society'? Clearly he would have to draw on his own experiences, but which? And how could they provide a ground for assurance in his calling and choice of life?

The mass of Wordsworth's autobiographical blank verse shows him making the attempt 'in his poetry to take full possession of his own life' – *for a purpose*.⁴ This last phrase is important. The poet who could announce his intentions so confidently in the summer of 1798 already knew (or thought he knew) what his purpose in life now was; what he was not sure about was how he had come to that knowledge and why he felt so secure in it. In repeated attempts at autobiographical modeling, Wordsworth sought to work it out – that is, to understand how his own powers had come into being.

The *Two-Part Prelude* picks up from ideas formulated to account for the authority of the Pedlar in *The Ruined Cottage*. In the first part the poet's childhood is evoked, its joys and fears, to convey a sense of how the coarser pleasures of boyish days and their glad animal movements feed imaginative growth and emotional well-being. In the second, the development of consciousness, from the babe at the mother's breast to the youth rhapsodically joining in the song of the One Life, is traced as prelude to a lengthy passage (1799 *Prelude Part 2*, lines 465–96) in which the poet, affirming his 'more than Roman confidence' in human nature, even 'in this time / Of dereliction and dismay' (lines 489, 486–7), declares:

The gift is yours,
Ye Mountains! Thine, O Nature! thou hast fed
My lofty speculations, and in thee
For this uneasy heart of ours I find
A never-failing principle of joy
And purest passion.

(lines 491–6)

The lines are amongst the most important Wordsworth ever wrote, but their meaning is not self-evident. How can mountains feed speculation and provide never-failing principles, one might ask? The Wordsworth dedicated to the work of *The Recluse* knew from his own experience that they did, but quite how he had come to that certainty demanded further investigation.

The evolution of the autobiographical poem from two books to five and finally to thirteen tracks it.

The model established in the *Two-Part Prelude* consisted of an account of development from babyhood to late youth followed by a jump directly to the poet's frame of mind in 1798–9. But passing over the years 1787 to 1798, which is what this model does, elides the most turbulent years of Wordsworth's life, the experiences which formed the mature man. The thirteen-book *Prelude* makes good the elision and in so doing offers an explanation of how the poet came to be possessed of a 'never-failing principle of joy'. The impact of academic life on the youthful imagination, of London, of returning home and of foreign travel – all of these topics and more fill out the portrait of the poet in youth, but what matters most is the way in which the years 1792 to 1797 are presented. Wordsworth's engagement with national politics as war with France is declared in 1793, his sense of bitter alienation from his own country and countrymen, his clinging to false hopes and eventual despair, and finally his restoration not just to intellectual and emotional equilibrium but to a sense of vocation, all of these topics are shaped as a drama of Fall and Redemption. The agents of redemption are human – primarily Dorothy Wordsworth – but also, and crucially, Nature, as her ministry of love and fear is recalled in never-fading 'spots of time'. The poem ends with moving recollections of the *annus mirabilis* of 1798 and *Lyrical Ballads* and the rededication of Coleridge and himself as fellow labourers in the task of nothing less than mankind's redemption. By the end of the thirteen-book poem, Wordsworth had made sense of the current of his life that had led him to *The Recluse* and retirement to his native mountains, 'with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary Work that might live' (*Excursion* 38).

The Prelude is a magnificent achievement, but Wordsworth's examination of the pattern and meaning of the formative years of his life did not end with the completion of the poem on the 'Growth of a Poet's Mind' (the subtitle to *The Prelude* in its posthumously published form in 1850). In *The Excursion* (1814), the only part of *The Recluse* published, Wordsworth dramatized the encounter between three figures, the Poet, the Wanderer, and the Solitary. The first two are what Wordsworth thought himself to be now – a poet and a wisdom figure – but the Solitary clearly represents all that he could see that he might have become. Disappointed by the failure of political hope, battered by life's hurts and losses, the Solitary has retreated to the Lake District. Surrounded by the beauties of Nature, he is neither healed nor strengthened by them and it is the Wanderer's task to try to alleviate his despondency. What is very striking is that in Book Four, to

provide the Wanderer with persuasive formulations about the moral dimension to the Active Universe, Wordsworth returned to blank verse that he, Wordsworth, had laboured over when the character of the Pedlar was first conceived many years earlier. Some of that verse had found its way into *The Prelude*. Now some more of it was being drawn on for *The Excursion*.⁵ Unpublished work of 1798 comes together with published work in 1814. It was a conjunction that marked the end of the most productive years of Wordsworth's sustaining meditation on his own life. As if he recognized that fact, he issued a year later his first collected poetical works. The *Poems* of 1815 consist of two handsome volumes, containing all the lyric poetry to date and a new Preface to complement the long familiar prefatory material from *Lyrical Ballads*. They bear the authority of a poet who at last knows he has arrived.

Notes

1. For Jeffrey's campaign against Wordsworth in the *Edinburgh Review* from 1802 to 1814, see *CH* 153–9, 185–201, 224–9, 381–404.
2. Quotations from the Preface to *The Excursion* (1814) and from the lines generally referred to as the 'Prospectus' to *The Recluse* (*Excursion*, 38–41).
3. This title was never used by Wordsworth. *The Prelude* was the title given to the poem in fourteen books by his executors when it was published in 1850.
4. The phrasing is Robert Rehder's in *Wordsworth and the Beginnings of Modern Poetry* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 43.
5. Lines which describe the Pedlar as a 'chosen son' (*RC* 46) were incorporated into *The Prelude* (1805), Book 3, lines 122–67, now referring to the poet himself at Cambridge, but not, of course, published in his lifetime. Passages of verse which appeared in revised form in 1814 as *The Excursion*, Book 4, lines 1207–71; Book 8, lines 203–305, 315–32; Book 9, lines 1–26, 128–52, were all written in 1798.

*The Wordsworth circle**Susan M. Levin*

Community, set, group, garden, orchard, parish, vale, poetry, ecology, friendship, food, nature, walking, talking, writing describe the life of the Wordsworth circle. Creating a community of writers who helped bring about the romantic revolution in British literature, the group also addressed perennial concerns about the politics and morality of environmental sustainability, about the health and well-being of people and their ecological environment. Poetry, prose tracts, journals and letters express these writers' lyrics of the 'passions of men . . . incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature' (*Prose* 1: 124).

The immediate family circle numbered seven: parents John Wordsworth and Ann Cookson Wordsworth, and their five children, Richard, William, Dorothy, John and Christopher. Mary and Sara Hutchinson were primary school companions. When Anne died, the children were separated. Five years later, their father died, and the children, Dorothy lamented to her friend Jane Pollard, were 'squandered abroad' (*EY* 16). Through letters and visits the siblings remained part of each other's lives.

Reunification began with the determination of William and Dorothy to live together, a possibility adumbrated in letters describing the Christmas of 1790. Relatives – who were not supportive – considered the plan 'a very bad wild scheme'.¹ A circle of friends from William's college days at Cambridge, from London and from Bristol provided material, moral and artistic support: the radical philosopher William Godwin; Basil Montague and his son Basil (for whom the Wordsworths cared in return for a small payment); the philosophical radicals and poetic enthusiasts William Matthews and George Dyer; the Bristol publisher and bookseller Joseph Cottle; and, also in Bristol, John and Azariah Pinney, the sons of a wealthy sugar merchant.

William's nursing of his friend Raisley Calvert resulted in a monetary bequest. John Pinney offered his father's lodge at Racedown in Dorset rent free. At the Pinneys' Bristol residence, 7 Great George Street, William met Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He began the poem to Coleridge which became

The Prelude, giving one account of how with his sister's support he worked through disillusionment and despair to fulfil his plan of being a poet.

Life at Racedown was lonely. In October 1795, William wrote to Matthews: 'We are now at Racedown and both as happy as people can be who live in perfect solitude. We do not see a soul' (*EY* 154). The following March brought more of the same. 'Our present life is utterly barren of such events as merit even the short-lived chronicle of an accidental letter. We plant cabbages' (*EY* 169). But being with Dorothy, getting by through cultivating a vegetable garden, walking for miles while reciting poetry aloud and examining the world with a pocket telescope established a way of life that empowered literary production. William completed *Salisbury Plain* and *The Borderers*. Extolling his friend's genius, Coleridge gave *Salisbury Plain* to Charles Lamb and so brought him and his sister Mary into the group. The process of reading and commenting on each other's work and of helping to see works to publication evolved and expanded.

When they visited Coleridge at Nether Stowey, the Wordsworths got to know Thomas Poole and his mother. A substantial man of business who ran a prosperous tannery, Poole was generous, philosophical, a reader and a liberal thinker. He spent a summer travelling dressed as a labourer to experience the life of working men. Poole cut a door in the wall separating his large garden from Coleridge's cottage. Although plans for cultivating vegetables and keeping a pig did not fully materialize, the 'bookroom', as Coleridge termed the outdoor space, became a site for artistic creation, the production of food, and the fulfilment of his 'rustic scheme' (*CL* 1: 270, 240). In 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison', Coleridge wrote of remaining in the garden nursing a bad burn, owing to his wife's having accidentally dropped scalding milk on his foot. The Wordsworths and Lamb, who had joined the Nether Stowey visitors, walked the four miles to Alfoxden House.

With Poole as a reference, the Wordsworths were able to lease the spacious house for £23 a year. 'Our principal inducement was Coleridge's society', Dorothy wrote to Mary Hutchinson (*EY* 1: 190). On 23 July 1797 a dinner party celebrated the move, the growing group of friends, and their poetic and political concerns. Fourteen people attended, among them John Thelwell, the radical politician, lecturer and poet. His presence fed the growing local concern about these people who took camp stools and portfolios on their extensive walks, pausing to talk about 'spy nosy' (Spinoza), and who declaimed poetry sitting under the trees – on the 23rd a reading of *The Borderers* preceded the meal. Dinner was of local produce and featured a fore-quarter of lamb sent over by Poole's mother. 'Faith', wrote Thelwell, 'we are a most philosophical party'.²

Their alarming activities of walking, writing and socializing night and day resulted in a spy being sent from the Home Office who found ‘those Rascalls from Alfoxden’ to be a ‘Sett of violent Democrats’.³ No longer welcome at Alfoxden House, the Wordsworths and Coleridge decided to go to Germany, a plan helped by the sale to Joseph Cottle of their collaborative *Lyrical Ballads*. The process involved the interactions of Dorothy’s observations, largely made in her journals, and for years the three initiated, responded to, wrote out, and revised each other’s work: Dorothy’s Alfoxden Journal, 24 March 1798 – ‘The Spring continues to advance very slowly’;⁴ and Coleridge’s ‘Christabel’ – ‘And the Spring comes slowly up this way’ (line 22). Dorothy’s *Grasmere Journals*, 15 April 1802 – ‘I never saw daffodils so beautiful they grew among the mossy stones about & about them, some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness & the rest tossed & reeled & danced & seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the Lake, they looked so gay ever glancing ever changing’ (*DWJ* 85); and William’s ‘I wandered lonely as a Cloud’ – ‘I wandered lonely as a Cloud / That floats on high o’er Vales and Hills, / When all at once I saw a crowd / A host of dancing Daffodils; / Along the Lake, beneath the trees, / Ten thousand dancing in the breeze’ (*PTV* 207–8; lines 1–6).

After returning to England the Wordsworths settled in Grasmere in December of 1799. As they moved from Dove Cottage to Allan Bank to the empty Parsonage House of Grasmere church and finally in 1813 three miles away to Rydal Mount, their circle underwent both exhilarating expansion and devastating loss. In an entry to her *Grasmere Journals* of 4 May 1802, Dorothy describes kissing the initials carved on ‘Sara’s Crag’, the so-called ‘Rock of Names’ located half-way between Grasmere and Keswick (*DWJ* 95). The initials were those of the close members of the circle: W. W. M. H. D. W. S. T. C. J. W. S. H. – William Wordsworth, his wife-to-be Mary Hutchinson, his sister Dorothy, his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, his brother John, and his future sister-in-law Sara Hutchinson, the woman of Coleridge’s passion, his Asra.⁵

William’s marriage to Mary Hutchinson changed relationships. The *Grasmere Journals* can be read as Dorothy’s narrative of William’s taking a wife, as a record of her hopes and fears about what this action will mean for the group. The marriage occurred in October 1802; William, Dorothy and Mary returned to Dove Cottage. The final journal entries of January 1803 detail Mary reading Chaucer aloud to Dorothy, William ‘working at his poem to C.’, Dorothy’s resolution that she will ‘take a nice Calais Book & will for the future write regularly’ (*DWJ* 137). Supper was tapioca for her, an

egg for Mary, and some cold mutton for William. The week was 'intensely cold', but 'Wm had a fancy for some ginger-bread', so Dorothy and Mary walked out to buy ingredients. The next day they baked (*DWJ* 137).

Between 1803 and 1810 William and Mary had five children. In February 1805 they suffered the trauma of John Wordsworth's death in a shipwreck. William wrote to Beaumont of their 'miserable affliction': 'I can say nothing higher of my ever dear Brother than that he was worthy of his Sister who is now weeping beside me, and of the friendship of Coleridge' (*EY* 541). In a letter to Richard he mourned the breaking down of the group. 'I am sometimes half superstitious, and think that as the number of us is now broken some more of the set will be following him' (*EY* 571).

The circle expanded beyond the immediate family. Thomas De Quincey, having written his first letter of passionate admiration to William in 1803, worked up the courage to introduce himself at Dove Cottage four years later. His prolific writings, especially *Recollections of the Lake Poets* (which includes *Early Memorials of Grasmere*), detail the life and work of the circle. Introducing the opium-eater he wrote: 'Amongst these attractions that drew me so strongly to the Lakes, there had also by that time arisen in this lovely region the deep deep magnet (as to me *only* in all this world it then was) of William Wordsworth.'⁶

De Quincey moved in with the Wordsworths at the end of 1808. In addition to the adults and children of the Wordsworth family, the household at Allan Bank included Coleridge, dictating portions of his periodical essays *The Friend* to Sara Hutchinson, and De Quincey assisting William with the *Convention of Cintra*, his political tract expressing the outrage of many at the British government's failure to take advantage of their military success against the French. Dorothy wrote to Catherine Clarkson of managing 'the *Cook* (as I have rather aristocratically called her)', a housemaid who was 'muddling', a cow who resided two fields away from the house, and two pigs (*MY* 1: 282). De Quincey took over Dove Cottage from 1809 to 1821 and again from 1825 to 1829. Dorothy oversaw the renovations he required.

In 1812 two of the children died. Catherine – De Quincey's particular favourite – was 3 years old at the time of her death; Thomas was 6 when he passed away. De Quincey wrote a passionate tribute that also suggests the personal and professional tensions among members of the circle. De Quincey's dependencies on drugs and alcohol, like Coleridge's addictions, led to devastating conflicts. Coleridge rages in his notebooks that all the women, including Sara Hutchinson, desired and loved William and recorded a fantasy of the two as lovers. 'Oh agony! O the vision of that

Saturday Morning of the Bed / – O cruel! Is he not beloved, adored by two – & two such Beings – and must I not be beloved *near* him except as a Satellite? – But O mercy mercy! Is he not better, greater, greater, more *manly*, & altogether more attractive to any the purest Woman?⁷ In 1808, Coleridge convinced Longman to publish William's *The White Doe of Rylstone*, but had enough misgivings about the poem to rewrite the last lines of the third canto. He did not tell William, who meanwhile withdrew the poem from publication without telling Coleridge, who withdrew from life at Allan Bank and went back to Keswick. Dorothy mourned their loss: 'We have no hope of him – none that he will ever do anything more than he has already done' (*MY* I: 399). Determining to rescue Coleridge, Basil Montagu insisted that he come to live with his family to be cured and cared for. William foresaw an unhappy outcome and described details of Coleridge's addictive behaviour to Montagu, who in fact could not deal with Coleridge as a house guest and repeated Wordsworth's assessment to him. By 1812, Coleridge wrote, 'I passed thro' Grasmere; but did not call on Wordsworth' (*CL* III: 376).

For the rest of their lives, their passionate relationship swung from estrangement to reconciliation, from adoration to disgust. Coleridge's incisive criticism of *The Excursion* called forth an exchange between William and himself that ended with a discussion in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) of the 'characteristic defects' and 'beauties' of William's poetry. In 1828, Coleridge, Wordsworth and his daughter Dora travelled together to Belgium. De Quincey exposed Coleridge for plagiarizing from the Germans in *Biographia Literaria*. 'I was *not* the friend of Coleridge,' he wrote in 1840; 'not in any sense; nor at any time; owed him no services of friendship; nor was under any one obligation towards him but that of veracity in my facts and justice in my deductions.'⁸

In 1808, however, the group responded to events involving George and Sarah Green in a way that demonstrated the creative energies of the community and their work in sustaining the environment that empowered them. Perishing in a snowstorm, the Greens left behind eight children, the eldest a girl of 11 and the youngest a still-nursing infant. Organized largely by Dorothy and Mary, the parish of Grasmere dealt with the sorrowful event. In *Recollections of the Lake Poets*, published in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1839, De Quincey remembers: 'Soon after my return to Oxford [in 1807], I received a letter from Miss Wordsworth, asking for any subscriptions I might succeed in obtaining, amongst my college friends in aid of the funds then raising in behalf of an orphan family.' His essay continues with his version of the story and includes the first publication of

William's poem about the tragedy – 'Who weeps for strangers? Many wept / For George and Sarah Green'.⁹

What De Quincey called 'Miss Wordsworth's simple but fervid memoir', *A Narrative Concerning George and Sarah Green of the Parish of Grasmere*, provides both a literary and a sociological response as it describes a method of community care organized around the life of the local parish. The villagers participated in searching for the bodies, in making donations from many pounds to a single shilling to support the children, in assuring that the orphans were given proper homes. By 1834 the Poor Law Amendment Bill replaced this system with what Dr James Kay, one of its proponents, termed 'workhouse humiliations'.

The breakdown of this circle of care came in the context of dislocations caused by changes in England's agricultural economy. Laws of enclosure, technological innovations and the imperatives of an industrializing culture all contributed to the destruction of the rural life that the Wordsworth circle sustained and that sustained them. Most farms were small, and plots owned by the same family were usually not contiguous. By dividing up a community's common land and redistributing ownership of pieces of land, Enclosure Acts created large plots that could be farmed more efficiently with new inventions such as the seed-planting drill and new processes such as the four-field crop rotation system. The enclosing of the new holdings by surrounding them with costly fences, meant that the poor could no longer glean, or gather, what was left behind after the harvest. Subsistence farmers had used the common land, which no longer existed, as a source of firewood and as a place to graze animals. They simply could not support themselves and their families.

And so, people migrated to centres of industrialization where their labour was necessary. In a Grasmere journal entry of 19 May 1800, Dorothy records an exchange with a neighbour who 'observed that in a short time there would be only two ranks of people, the very rich & the very poor, for those who have small estates says he are forced to sell, & all the land goes into one hand' (DWJ 3).

As their daily life contended with the implications of these changes, the Wordsworths and their circle participated in discussions occurring in a number of venues. *Lyrical Ballads*, as the Preface states, provided one response to the ruinous 'encreasing accumulation of men in cities' (Prose 1: 128). Presenting the grandeur of the opium-eater's dreams in 'Suspiria De Profundis', De Quincey set out an antidote to 'the gathering agitation of our present English life'.¹⁰ Wanderers, beggars and vagrants populated the Lake District and the works of its writers. The topic of

turning grasslands into tillage generated essay after essay. Numerous pamphlets, such as 'Political Enquiry in the Consequences of Enclosing Waste Lands and the High Cost of Butcher's Meat', appeared. 'Cursory Remarks on Inclosures – Shewing the pernicious and destructive consequences of inclosing common fields, &c. By A country Farmer' took up the concerns which members of the Wordsworth circle engaged.¹¹

The move to Rydal Mount in May 1813 brought grander furnishings that included both a 'Turkey' and a 'Brussels' carpet, closer association with the gentry of Rydal and Ambleside, and numerous visitors who moved in and out of the now multi-generation family circle. Young writers such as Felicia Hemans, Maria Jane Jewsbury and Matthew Arnold sought out the Wordsworth group. As confidante, advisor and amanuensis, Isabella Fenwick became the scribe for perhaps the most illuminating notes to William's work and helped the Wordsworths through Dora's marriage and early death.

The circle continued to have an ongoing involvement in rural life, in the Lake District and beyond. Published in 1814, *The Excursion* included examples of 'How Wordsworth invented picnicking and saved British Culture'.¹² In the company of Mary, their son Jonny, and Sara Hutchinson, William returned to the Scotland he first toured with Coleridge and Dorothy; the group met James Hogg, the 'Ettrick Shephard', with whom they visited the 'Braes of Yarrow'. In 1820, Dorothy, William and Mary, accompanied by Mary's cousin Thomas Monkhouse and his new wife, revisited the scenes of tours of 1790 and 1802, going to Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and France. Henry Crabb Robinson joined them in Lucerne. As a community of writers, the group produced four different accounts of the trip.

The poet and man about town Samuel Rogers, whose *Table-Talk* described his interactions with William, Dorothy and Coleridge in their first Scottish tour of 1803, was a continuing presence. In 1820 he tried to arrange for the publication of Dorothy's *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*. Rogers also recalled a more successful intervention made 'while walking with Lord Lonsdale'. 'I wish you could do something for poor Wordsworth', he remarks, since he is 'in such straitened circumstances, that he and his family deny themselves animal food several times a week'. Lord Lonsdale was, Rogers says, 'the more inclined to assist Wordsworth, because the Wordsworth family had been hardly used by the preceding Lord Lonsdale; and he eventually proved one of his kindest friends'.¹³

In 1817, William dined as one of a circle of 'immortals' gathered, Benjamin Haydon later recalled in his *Autobiography*, 'in my painting-room with Jerusalem towering up behind us'. The poet of the Lake District kept his

city friends and regularly visited them in London. Haydon, to accommodate John Keats's desire to know Wordsworth, made up 'a party to dinner of Charles Lamb, Wordsworth, Keats and Monkhouse, his friend ... On December 28th the immortal dinner came off'. The description concludes with a statement of loss that echoes William's note to his 1835 'Extempore Effusion Upon the Death of James Hogg' in which he lists the deaths from 1832 to 1835 of Walter Scott, Coleridge, Charles Lamb, George Crabbe and Felicia Hemans (*LP* 469). Haydon writes: 'Wordsworth and I are the only two now living (1841) of that glorious party.'¹⁴

Dora died in 1847, 'and now', William grieved to Isabella Fenwick, 'the blank is terrible' (*LY*: iv, 860). Walking with Mary on a cold March day, William contracted pleurisy; he slowly weakened and died on 23 April 1850. Dorothy, who survived in an incapacitated state, died in 1855. Mary, William and Dorothy lie together in Grasmere churchyard. For sure, their circle's legacy is a literary one. It is also a continuing one of Lake District and general environmental preservation that allows walking, talking, picknicking, writing among the 'beautiful and permanent forms of nature'.

Notes

1. Ernest de Selincourt, *Dorothy Wordsworth: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 59.
2. Margaret E. Poole Sanford, *Thomas Poole and his Friends*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1888), 1: 233.
3. A. J. Eagleston, 'Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Spy', in E. Blunden and E. L. Griggs, eds., *Coleridge Studies by Several Hands on the Hundredth Anniversary of His Death* (London: Constable, 1934), 71–88.
4. Mary Moorman, ed., *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, 1971), II.
5. In the journal, a sheet of blotting paper that appears opposite the date of 15 May 1802 lists corresponding names and variations: 'ST Coleridge, Dorothy Wordsworth, William Wordsworth, Mary Hutchinson, Sara Hutchinson, William, Coleridge, Mary, Dorothy, Sara, 16th May 1802 John Wordsworth' (*DWJ* 100). The rock was mostly destroyed during the construction of a new twentieth-century road; a few fragments remain.
6. Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, vol. II, ed. Grevel Lindop (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), 146–7.
7. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. II, 1804–1808, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 3148 (see also 2975, 2998, 3146).
8. Quoted in Grevel Lindop, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (London: J. M. Dent, 1981), 317.

9. Thomas De Quincey, 'Recollections of Grasmere', in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, vol. II, ed. Julian North (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), 143, 151.
10. Thomas De Quincey, 'Suspiria De Profundis', in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, vol. V, ed. Frederick Burwick (London: Chatto & Pickering, 2003), 130.
11. This pamphlet is reprinted in the *Longman Cultural Edition of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Susan M. Levin (London: Pearson, 2009), 324–37.
12. Andrew Hubbell, 'How Wordsworth Invented Picnicking and Saved British Culture', *Romanticism* 12 (1) (2006), 44–51.
13. *Recollections of the Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers*, ed. Alexander Dyce (New York: Appleton, 1856), 206–7.
14. *The Autobiography and Journals of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. M. Elwin (London: Macdonald Illustrated Classics, 1950), 316–19.

CHAPTER 3

Dorothy Wordsworth

Judith W. Page

It would be a mistake to consider William Wordsworth's life and career without recognizing the influence of his sister Dorothy. Assessments of Dorothy's role in William's poetic enterprise have changed over the years. Those familiar with the Wordsworths during their lives understood Dorothy's centrality. Coleridge, for example, enviously noted William's dependence on adoring women¹ and Henry Crabb Robinson expressed an implicit resistance to the poet's reliance on female support when travelling with the poet in Italy in 1837.² But these early views simplify and obscure the genuine complexity of the poet's relationship with this brilliant sister. It will be useful to analyze more fully the ways that Dorothy Wordsworth helped to shape William Wordsworth's life and career while at the same time defining herself in creative and intellectual terms. Dorothy's life writing (letters, domestic journals, travel journals from tours of Scotland and the Continent) and poetry attest to the value that she placed on her own work; but she did not publish widely or conventionally in her lifetime and her letters reveal her ambivalence in entering the world of nineteenth-century publishing, a milieu that she knew well from observing and participating in William's long career.

In the early twentieth century, with a resurgence of interest in Wordsworth's biography and textual practice, editors and critics remained respectful of Wordsworth and his relationships with all of the women in his life. By contrast, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, feminist readings have tended to see Dorothy as a victim of William's sublime egotism, the collateral damage of the great male poet's march to conquer the world of imagination. In this view, Dorothy wrote her evocative journals and letters to fuel William's imagination – and William mined this treasure trove, repackaging many of Dorothy's ideas and images as his own. A more nuanced feminist approach, however, acknowledges that Dorothy wrote the Grasmere journal not only 'because I will not quarrel with myself' but also 'because I shall give Wm Pleasure by it', a statement that underlines not

only the self-fashioning element of Dorothy's journal writing, but also the selflessness of serving her brother's genius (*DWJ* 1). This passage highlights their symbiotic relationship, in that Dorothy asserts herself at the same time that she serves the brother who depends on her for inspiration.

Following the first wave of writing about Dorothy in the early 1980s, critics rejected the notion of Dorothy as supplicant or victim and instead emphasized her talents and power as a relational thinker whose letters and journals present an 'ethics of care', a way of understanding and valuing the world in feminine terms. Other critics have seen Dorothy and William Wordsworth in partnership and collaboration with each other, in their intertwined domestic and poetic lives, particularly during the Grasmere years. Much of this criticism focuses on the Grasmere journal as the foundational text for understanding Dorothy's relationship to William and the importance of domesticity and domestic happiness to their lives together and to Wordsworth's poetry.

After years of separation in childhood following the death of their mother in 1778 (and then their father in 1783), William and Dorothy Wordsworth were reunited in 1787 and set up a life together a few years later, first living in the West Country, then in Germany, and finally settling in Grasmere in December 1799. The Grasmere journal documents their life from May 1800 till William's marriage in October 1802 to Mary Hutchinson, the marriage plot serving as a kind of narrative arc for the journal.³ The journal is Dorothy's record of setting up her own home and finding her way as a writer – two complementary activities for her. Gardening, for instance, was not just a hobby for Dorothy, but a passionate form of expression, a way to mediate between the wild and the cultivated forms of nature; a way to bring nature into the cultivated world of home. In the journal she presents herself as head gardener and home-maker. As she writes about these activities, she elevates them and sees herself as the chief creator of domestic life. William helps her in the garden, but he is not its creator. He is her assistant, much as she assists him in writing out his poetry in fair copies. William celebrates Dorothy's 'wild eyes' in 'Tintern Abbey' (line 120), but in the journal we see him through these wild eyes – or at least through Dorothy's constant observation.

The Grasmere journal gives us a window into William's life and work, but a view that is controlled by Dorothy and often complicates or contradicts the self-presentation of the poet in the poems and prefaces. For instance, Wordsworth writes about the poet's 'spontaneous overflow' (*Prose* 1: 126) in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, and yet his poetic composition (often painful and strenuous) is anything but fluid. In 1800, Dorothy describes the composition of 'Michael' as a Herculean effort of attempting

to overcome the difficulty of composing the poem but also of composing *himself*. Over and over again, Dorothy provides the context for understanding William's poetic production. Anca Vlasopolos argues persuasively that in the Grasmere journal Dorothy Wordsworth actually 'transforms William into a feminized presence' by repeatedly calling attention to his body; she 'demystifies poetic composition' and 'offers a masterly critique of male Romantic, especially Wordsworthian, figurations of poetic identity at the very time when Wordsworth himself was still in the process of articulating the identity that we now regard as fixed'.⁴ In this reading, Wordsworth is closer to the poet of domesticity praised by Felicia Hemans and the Victorians than to the sublimely egotistical figure described in Keats's letters. In the Grasmere journal Dorothy Wordsworth uses her textual power to domesticate and embody the visionary poet, and she also records a crucial period in the life and work of her partnership with William.

The most private entries of the Grasmere journal have provided many of the intimate views of daily life that we have of the Wordsworths during those years. We also understand in the Grasmere journal what it meant for Dorothy and William finally to make a home after a decade of wandering. Grasmere forms the centre of their universe, as becomes evident in Dorothy's loving and vivid descriptions of the natural world: 'Grasmere was very solemn in the last glimpse of twilight it calls home the heart to quietness' (*DWJ* 2), she writes, while in the early poem 'Grasmere – A Fragment', she states: 'That Cottage with its clustering trees / Summons my heart; it settles there'.⁵ Dorothy's writings on the cottage at Town End (later known as Dove Cottage, as seen in [Figure 1](#)), where they settled, and on the environs of Grasmere illuminate William's poetic attempts to commemorate their homecoming. We see this theme of homecoming in the opening of *The Prelude*, where the poet muses at the beginning of Book I, 'Underneath what grove / Shall I take up my home' (1805 *Prelude* Book I, lines 12–13). Homecoming, of course, is also central to the somewhat vexed domestic celebration of *Home at Grasmere*, where the narrator's reference to the two Swans who have disappeared from the lake highlights the fragility of the domestic life that he and Dorothy (named 'Emma' in the poem) have formed in Grasmere: 'Shall we behold them yet another year / Surviving, they for us and we for them, / And neither pair be broken?' (*HG* 58; lines 348–50).

As it turns out, the Grasmere journal is not just a record of Grasmere, but also marks the journey that Dorothy and William took to Calais during the Peace of Amiens in 1802. During this trip, Wordsworth saw his French lover Annette Vallon and their daughter Caroline for the first time in ten years – and then he distanced himself from them so that he could return and marry



Figure 1. Amos Green, 'Town End' (c. 1806)

Mary in October. Dorothy's journal entries complement the sonnets that Wordsworth wrote during the trip or right after. The sonnets, such as 'It is a beautiful Evening, calm and free', reveal a poet struggling with his personal and political choices over the last ten years, struggling with the consequences of revolutionary passion. Although this sonnet ostensibly represents religious veneration of nature, it also reveals a speaker who distances himself from his subject, the 'dear Girl' (line 9) who walks with him on the beach and 'appear'st untouch'd by solemn thought' (*PTV* 151; lines 9–10). We might think, from reading this sonnet, that Caroline was rather dull, but in her journal entry Dorothy presents an animated and responsive child who could be a version of the young Dorothy herself: 'It was also beautiful on the calm hot night to see the little Boats row out of harbour with wings of fire & the sail boats with the fiery track which they cut as they went along & which closed up after them with a hundred thousand sparkles balls shootings, & streams of glowworm light. Caroline was delighted' (*DWJ* 125). Certainly Caroline's Wordsworthian delight at the fiery scene, so vividly described by Dorothy, revises the image of her we have in the poem. Such delight and liveliness would be harder for a father to abandon. Dorothy's brief journal entry explicates and uncovers Wordsworth's ambivalence and his need to subdue Caroline's spirit so that he can move on with his life.

As in the Grasmere journal, Dorothy's records of her travels with William often fill in the gaps and provide the material contexts of the poetry – they tell us what the travellers saw and how they responded, and often in the later travel journals they give us Dorothy's independent perspective. Susan Levin, for instance, writes of the way that Dorothy's entry on the Calais fish-women from her *Journal of a Tour on the Continent* (1820)⁶ finds a liveliness and interest in them, whereas Wordsworth's poem 'Fish-women – On Landing at Calais' expresses horror at their ugliness – 'He simply does not consider what Dorothy perceives'.⁷ In this same journal, Dorothy records another telling instance when the travellers visit the ruins of Fort Fuentes on Lake Como in Italy. Fort Fuentes had been built by the Spanish early in the seventeenth century but destroyed by explosions in the recent Napoleonic Wars. Dorothy finds the whole scene dominated by a 'melancholy sublimity' and she describes descending from the high ruins of the fort:

In our descent we found a fair white cherub uninjured by the explosion which had driven it a great way down the hill. It lay bedded like an Infant in its cradle among low green bushes. W. said to us 'Could we but carry this pretty Image to our moss summer house at Rydal Mount!' yet it seemed as if it would have been a pity that any one should remove it from its couch in the wilderness, which may be its own for hundreds of years.⁸

The cherub (from the ruins of the chapel) is 'bedded like an Infant in its cradle', an oddly domestic image in this scarred and wild setting: hence, the oxymoronic description of a 'couch in the wilderness'. In fact, we learn that the cherub has landed in the wilderness by 'war's sulphurous blast' (line 1) in William's poem 'Fort Fuentes', commemorating the event (*SSIP* 377–8). Not a typical tourist (as William seems to be in the way that Dorothy reports his comment in the journal), Dorothy resists carrying the cherub home to the summer house at Rydal Mount (their comfortable home since 1813) as a souvenir – she does not want to disturb it or shatter the delicate balance that has protected it in the aftermath of destruction. She asserts her own voice and values, coyly quoting and then dismissing William. In his poem, also, Wordsworth does not see the cherub as a domestic image, but as a metonym for 'the whirlwind of human destruction' that is covered by the 'silence of Nature' (lines 19, 18), universalizing Dorothy's specific and moving image and transforming it into another variation of the ruined cottage. As is often the case in the relationship between Dorothy's journal and her brother's poem, William moves from the particular in order to evoke a more broadly philosophical perspective.

This entry from the *Journal of a Tour on the Continent* as well as Dorothy's other journals and travel writings provide a contrast to William's commitment to the idea of publication and posterity, and to the Romantic notion of the poet as original genius. Dorothy and the other women in the Wordsworth circle who wrote, including Mary and daughter Dora, had more in common with the pre-professional literary environment of earlier centuries that depended on the circulation and transmission of manuscripts – what Harold Love has termed 'scribal publication'.⁹ Margaret Ezell's description of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practice applies pretty well to Dorothy's writing: 'Manuscript circulation is social and non-competitive in nature; works circulated in manuscript invited additions and corrections, with no need for the author to establish ownership or copyright.'¹⁰ I would add, however, that Dorothy did in fact care deeply about contributions to the scribal publication of the family and tried to keep her voice separate from others. Although she cared about her writing, she rejected the vagaries of the publishing and reviewing world that she knew well from William, and took great care with the actual materials of writing themselves. Responding to suggestions that she publish her travel writing, Dorothy writes to Crabb Robinson in 1824 that 'my object is not to make a book, but to leave my niece a neatly-penned memorial of those few interesting months of our lives'.¹¹ Rejecting the marketplace of the professional writer, Dorothy instead wants to pass on to Dora a memorial gift that commemorates the communal experience of the tour rather than her personal genius as a writer. The material form of the gift – a neatly penned volume in her own hand – distinguishes her vision of writing from that of William, whose goal is print publication, even if he maintains a fiction of narrative immediacy and spontaneity (as in 'Michael', where the narrator addresses his readers as 'a few natural hearts' (line 36) who will appreciate the poem).¹²

Much of Dorothy Wordsworth's writing has now been published, and we regularly teach her in university courses on Romanticism.¹³ We can read the Grasmere journal in several editions, as well as the records of her travels and of her poetry, but we tend to focus on the earlier, creative period before Dorothy's decline in 1829. In her later years, following her physical and mental collapse, she writes less and less. To reveal Dorothy's story, we must depend mostly on the comments of others, with the exception of a few later poems that give us insight into her life. Scholars have presented different theories surrounding Dorothy's illness, but most agree that it has much to do with her life of serving the needs of others and sublimating her own desires. Perhaps suffering from dementia, Dorothy Wordsworth in later

years seems to be the antithesis of her earlier self. If the Dorothy of the journals never sits still – she is always gardening, cleaning, baking, writing, walking or travelling – the Dorothy of the later years never moves. She sits in place, expecting to be served and cared for, and is often demanding and petulant with her care-givers – not the young Dorothy of Carol Ann Duffy's recent poem who is a 'fierce maid', a 'noticer' and 'gatherer'.¹⁴ But there are scattered glimmers of awareness and memory.

Perhaps one of the most moving records of her life in decline is the poem 'Thoughts on my sick-bed' (1832), in which Dorothy tries to excavate and recover her 'hidden life' (line 5) with the return of the spring. An offering of 'first flowers' from friends kindles her memory and transports her in her imagination to an outdoor world and into the past beyond the sick bed: 'It bore me to the Terrace walk / I trod the Hills again; –' (lines 43–4) and 'No prisoner in this lonely room / I *saw* the green Banks of the Wye' (lines 45–6). The final image of the Wye, of course, also carries Dorothy's speaker back to William's 'Tintern Abbey', a poem that put so much faith in Dorothy's imagination and vitality, captured in the image of her 'wild eyes' (line 120). Although we have to acknowledge the irony of this earlier view of Dorothy in the light of her later state, her poem actually *does* attest to the power of memory: Dorothy, even in her ruined condition, has not forgotten her brother's exhortation to remember 'that on the banks of this delightful stream / We stood together' after 'many wanderings' ('Tintern Abbey', lines 151–2, 157). Like Grasmere itself, the Wye Valley landscape also calls home the heart to quietness.

Despite its emotional power and its connection to the Wordsworths' former lives, this and other poems by Dorothy Wordsworth have been criticized on formal grounds. In 1832, Dora Wordsworth wrote to her fiancé Edward Quillinan that 'you must excuse limping measure. Aunt cannot write regular metre'.¹⁵ While it is true that Dorothy's poetry is sometimes uneven, I would argue that her greatest contribution comes in her prose works. In this context, unevenness as a metrical poet may not be the case of stifled 'poetic identity'. After all, she herself recognized that the beauty of nature 'made me more than half a poet' (*DWJ* 81) in her Grasmere journal. The poetic quality of Dorothy's prose – from the Grasmere journal through her travel writing – might even be seen as proof of William's claim that there is no essential difference between the language of poetry and of prose. For William, in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, the charm of meter is super-added to the power of language (*Prose* 1: 137), but Dorothy perhaps achieves her greatest moments without that charm. In her vivid prose writing, Dorothy indeed proves herself to be a poet in her own right and on her own terms – she

does not quarrel with herself. As we have seen, she also provides an unequalled resource for engaging with William's life and for appreciating the 'remoter charm' ('Tintern Abbey', line 82) of his poetry.

Notes

1. In 1803, for instance, Coleridge charges that Wordsworth was 'hypercondriacal' from 'living wholly among Devotees – having every the [*sic*] minutest Thing, almost his Eating and Drinking done for him by his Sister, or his Wife' (*CL* 11: 1013).
2. Robinson complains that he 'was forced to resist his [Wordsworth's] too large demands on my good nature'. See *The Diary of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Derek Hudson (Oxford University Press, 1967), 172.
3. Susan M. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, rev. edn (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 21.
4. Anca Vlasopolos, 'Texted Selves: Dorothy and William Wordsworth in the Grasmere Journals', *alb: Auto/Biography Studies* 14 (summer 1999), 128, 130, 126.
5. My source for Dorothy's poetry is Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, here 167–70, lines 12–13.
6. *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 11: 1–336.
7. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, 87.
8. De Selincourt, ed., *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 11: 245.
9. Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
10. Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 38.
11. Quoted in De Selincourt, Preface to *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 1: xvii.
12. That said, excerpts of Dorothy's work did find their way into print in the context of William's poetry and even into Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* (1851).
13. The poetry appears in Levin's *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism* and the journals are available in De Selincourt and other editions, although there are some gaps – passages that have been omitted. The recent web resource published by Adam Matthew Digital, Romanticism: Life, Literature and Landscape (www.amdigital.co.uk/) presents a wealth of manuscript material, including that of Dorothy Wordsworth.
14. The poem is 'Dorothy Wordsworth is Dead', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5639 (29 April 2011), 14. I am indebted to Nicola Healey for calling attention to this poem in her recent *Dorothy Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge: The Poetics of Relationship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
15. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, 199.

*Composition and revision**Sally Bushell*

Wordsworth is the poet of endless return. He constantly revisits his own past self, thematically and textually, and builds a lifelong relationship with a body of work that functions as a form of self-extension: as long as the poet is alive, any text is potentially subject to change. For the poet himself, then, acts of composition and revision are given high status and potentially constitute a form of creativity.

At the same time, the poet's self-conscious interest in his own practices has been replicated through the editing of his work. While the Victorians, led by Matthew Arnold, primarily concerned themselves with how to select most effectively from the great mass of Wordsworth's *published* works, editors of the multiple volumes of the Cornell series from the 1970s onwards have moved in the opposite direction, presenting multiple draft versions of texts and unpublished works. As a result, the question of how far knowledge about composition and revision can be detached from the 'final form' of a text or from critical analysis of a published work has far higher prominence for *this* writer than for many others.

What does 'composition' mean for Wordsworth? The term is used frequently by Dorothy Wordsworth in her journal. For example in an entry for 12 October 1800 she writes: 'Sate in the house writing in the morning while Wm went into the Wood to compose. Wrote to John in the morning – copied poems for the LB . . . William composing in the Evening' (DWJ 26). 'Composing' seems to refer loosely to an *intention* or *desire* to write (which may or may not be successful) and is frequently associated with writing outdoors. It is often used to describe Wordsworth's private, unobserved practice; when Dorothy is present and witnessing the process, she tends to use the term 'writing' instead.

In *Wordsworth Writing* (2007), Andrew Bennett looks closely at Dorothy's account of Wordsworthian composition and notes that it 'suggests that the process of composition is made up of two separate parts, in which walking/composing is followed by writing'.¹ Bennett's focus is on

undoing the ‘compositional myth’ of spontaneous outdoor writing for Wordsworth, but his attempt to break down the account of compositional process is helpful here. The journal provides us with uniquely detailed accounts of Wordsworth’s daily practices so that, if we look across a number of entries in relation to the problematic writing of *The Pedlar* in 1801–2, a clear sense of different activities emerges:

22 December 1801: We walked home almost without speaking – Wm composed a few lines of the Pedlar. (*DWJ* 50)

26 January 1802: Wm wrote out part of his poem & endeavoured to alter it, & so made himself ill. I copied out the rest for him. We went late to bed. (*DWJ* 58)

30 January: William worked at the Pedlar all the morning, he kept the dinner waiting till 4 o clock . . . (*DWJ* 60)

2 February: William wished to break off composition, & was unable, & so did himself harm . . . After dinner Wm worked at The Pedlar. (*DWJ* 62)

10 February: While I was writing out the Poem as we hope for a final writing, a letter was brought me . . . After Molly went we read the first part of the poem & were delighted with it – but Wm afterwards got to some ugly places & went to bed tired out. (*DWJ* 65)

12 February: I recopied the Pedlar, but poor William all the time at work. (*DWJ* 66)

12 February: I almost finished writing The Pedlar, but poor William wore himself & me out with Labour. We had an affecting conversation. Went to bed at 12 o clock. (*DWJ* 67)

What emerges – even from this brief snapshot – is a highly integrated account of composition and revision. Terms are used fairly systematically for different stages of creative activity, in the following order: ‘composing’ → ‘writing’ → ‘working’ → ‘altering’ → ‘copying’. ‘Composing’ and ‘writing’ have already been discussed (and as Bennett notes, there is a degree of slippage between them) while ‘work’ strongly suggests a combination of creative and revisionary activities through writing at home. As the entries make clear, related activities by both participants occur alongside active composition so that reading and rereading or copying become integrated into creativity. Dorothy makes active contributions. In the entry for 10 February, for example, she uses ‘writing’ to describe her work on Wordsworth’s draft in terms of a shared outcome. This is presumably ‘copying’ but – since it occurs while the work is in the process of being

composed – it has an active status. Of most interest, however, is the fact that, whilst Dorothy frequently uses the term ‘compose’ (with all its implications of organic and spontaneous creativity) she *never* uses the term ‘revision’. Instead, she describes Wordsworth as ‘altering’ a piece. This is potentially quite significant. To ‘alter’ something is to change or modify it, and subtly suggests an activity of almost equal creative status to original composition, rather than the clearly subsidiary act of ‘revision’. The journal evidences a shared domestic process and potentially a far less hierarchical one than later editors and critics might assume.

* * *

If we turn from domestic production in the early nineteenth century back to editorial presentation of Wordsworth’s poetry in the twentieth, Stephen Gill reminds us that ‘some of his finest verse at the centre of the currently discussed canon is, in some sense, a creation of modern scholarship’.² The ambition to present multiple versions of unpublished texts was initiated by Ernest de Selincourt’s 1926 parallel-text edition of *The Prelude* of 1805 and 1850 that also included considerable material about the poem’s composition under headings such as: ‘Origin, Growth and Structure’, ‘Preparation for Writing’ and ‘Chronology of the Composition’.³ De Selincourt even proposed ‘The ideal text’ which ‘the lover of Wordsworth may construct for himself from the material here presented to him, [and which] would follow no single manuscript’.⁴ At a remarkably early historical point, then, his editors drew attention to the significance of composition and revision for Wordsworth.

In the second half of the twentieth century others took this principle and pushed it to its logical conclusion (and, arguably, beyond). In *The Music of Humanity* (1969), Jonathan Wordsworth effectively ‘unedited’ *The Ruined Cottage* and *The Pedlar* by separating them from the first book of *The Excursion*. This was followed by the Norton edition of *The Prelude* (1979) as ‘the first edition of *The Prelude* to offer Wordsworth’s greatest poem in three separate forms’ and, finally by the multiple volumes of the Cornell Series for Wordsworth (1975–2007).⁵ In the words of the general editor, Stephen Parrish, the series had two aims: ‘to bring the early Wordsworth into view . . . presenting as “reading texts” wherever possible, the earliest finished versions of the poems, not the latest revised versions . . . The second aim of the series is to provide, for the first time, a complete and accurate record of variant readings.’⁶

On the one hand, access to full transcription and comprehensive facsimile reproduction of the poems is hugely enabling. On the other,

with a poet like Wordsworth, it raises the question of where one draws the line. Stephen Gill has raised concerns over how far one can go in giving independent status to texts that were not initially intended as texts: 'By what criteria does one judge that an early version is "complete" and thus worthy of being printed as a "Reading Text"?' He also gives an extremely clear-sighted piece of editorial advice: 'It is one thing for scholars to discover a lost poem by a major writer, which is greeted with pleasure as a supplement to the existing canon, but quite another for scholars to reclaim works which the poet did not publish on such a scale that the existing canon is completely transformed.'⁷ In relation to unpublished materials of composition, is the editor's role recuperative, reconstructive or creative?

The Wordsworthian text that most clearly raises such questions is the 'Five Book *Prelude*' (an intermediate state of the poem that existed briefly in January–February 1804). In an influential article, Jonathan Wordsworth described this version as 'completed, or very nearly so' but acknowledged that 'The poem does not survive as a whole in fair copy and cannot be printed, as can 1799 and 1805'.⁸ Following this, Parrish cited this stage of *The Prelude* as a case where the Cornell editors 'held back', while Robin Jarvis questioned Jonathan Wordsworth's account of it as a unified piece and warned that 'we must not be tempted into hypothesising a distinctive and identifiably finished five-Book *Prelude*'.⁹

However, in 1997 Duncan Wu *did* publish *The Five-Book 'Prelude'*.¹⁰ After engaging with previous arguments *against* creating such a text, and acknowledging the problem of near completion, he asks, 'what is to prevent the editor from attempting to re-construct the probable, or possible, contents of the work, on the basis of a study of intentions?', before giving his final rationale:

The justification for reconstructing it and analysing it is simple: for six weeks in early 1804, the poet conceived of it as representing *The Prelude* in its ultimate form. That is to say, its structure and contents had an imaginative reality for him during that time. For that reason alone, it is vital to our understanding of the poem's evolution. A text, imperfect as it must be, is badly needed.¹¹

Here, Wu moves well beyond the principles of Jonathan Wordsworth, Parrish and Gill. His radical position allows for the reconstruction of 'possible' contents of a work based upon the poet's assumed intentions at a point in history. This ultimately raises the possibility of presenting *The Prelude* in all of its *seventeen* versions as identified by Jonathan Wordsworth

in 'Revision as Making'.¹² Would even the most ardent Wordsworthian want that?

* * *

I want to conclude by analyzing a short poem that illustrates the usefulness of the Cornell edition and the potential to interpret the material it provides in critical ways. I also want to return to Dorothy's use of the term 'altering' rather than 'revision' to suggest that any distinction between 'composition' and 'revision' for Wordsworth might not be entirely clear-cut.

'Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquillity and Decay, A Sketch' was first published in *Lyrical Ballads* 1798:

The little hedge-row birds,
That peck along the road, regard him not.
He travels on, and in his face, his step,
His gait, is one expression; every limb,
His look and bending figure, all bespeak
A man who does not move with pain, but moves
With thought – He is insensibly subdued
To settled quiet: he is one by whom
All effort seems forgotten, one to whom
Long patience has such mild composure given,
That patience now doth seem a thing, of which
He hath no need. He is by nature led
To peace so perfect, that the young behold
With envy, what the old man hardly feels.
– I asked him whither he was bound, and what
The object of his journey; he replied
'Sir! I am going many miles to take
'A last leave of my son, a mariner,
'Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
'And there is dying in an hospital'.

(LB 110)

If the poem is remarkable for its unremarkableness, it is also one for which revisionary acts prove significant at every level.¹³ Its core characteristic of understatement in fact applies to its entire textual history, since the piece emerges out of the longer 'Description of a Beggar'.¹⁴ A note in the Cornell edition informs us that 'After WW wrote *Description of a Beggar* on 3r of MS. 13M, he began a process of revision that eventually produced a new poem, *Old Man travelling*, from overflow lines; it is difficult, though, to pinpoint the moment when the revision began to be thought of as a new poem' (LB 487). The entire workings for 'Old Man Travelling' occur on two facing pages of DC MS 13 (Figure 3) which can best be summarised by a spatial diagram shown in Figure 2.

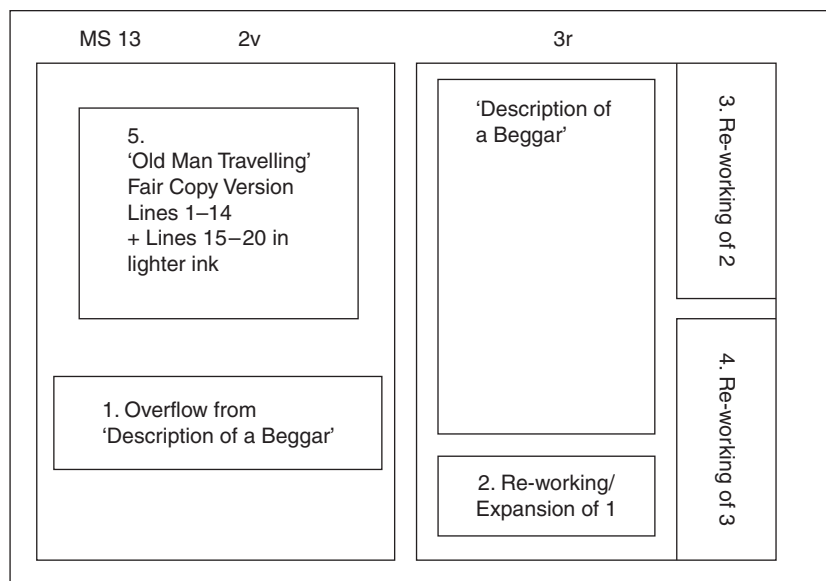


Figure 2. Diagram of manuscript pages from 'Old Man Travelling' (DC MS 13, 2v and 3r)

Initially, Wordsworth was working on 'Description of a Beggar' in the centre of 3r but then broke off to draft a more extended description on the page opposite (2v). This led him to revise and expand in three separate places at the bottom and then on the right-hand margin of the original page (turning the notebook sideways) and finally to write it up as a distinct piece in the top half of 2v when he also added an 'ending'.¹⁵ Arguably, only at this point does 'Old Man Travelling' become a separate poem, a fact confirmed by the addition of a title, squashed into the left-hand margin of 2v (although this may have been added before the ending). These two manuscript pages clearly reveal a practice that might be called 'revisionary composition' in which the new poem emerges materially around the prior text. The term 'overflow', originally used by Wordsworth in his Fenwick Note for the poem ('If I recollect right these verses were an overflowing from the old Cumberland Beggar' (*LB* 356)), is key here. The poem is written *out of* and *through* the act of revising another piece and the borderlines between 'original composition' and 'revision' are so fine that they cannot be clearly distinguished.

Useful as such background is, how can it bear critically upon a reading of the poem? We need to return to the published text. As critics such as Mary Jacobus, Heather Glen and William Galperin have noted, the power of 'Old

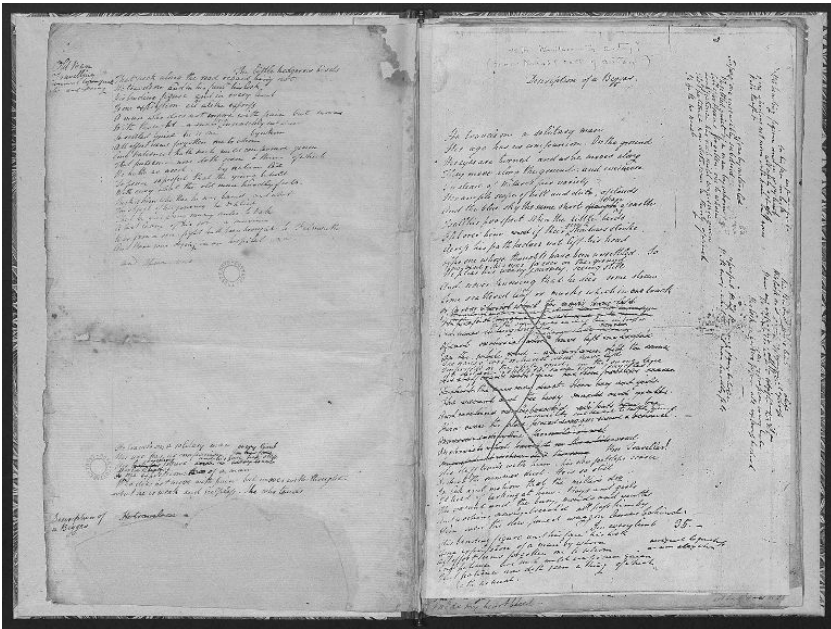


Figure 3. Manuscript pages from 'Description of a Beggar' (DC MS 13, 2v and 3r)

Man Travelling' as first published comes from a discrepancy between the external reading of the figure by the poet-narrator and the actuality of the man's situation. In different ways all three critics look at a disjunction between the first fourteen lines of description by poet-narrator and the final six in which the old man speaks. Jacobus states that 'it is incongruous, [therefore,] that . . . he should emerge from his animal tranquillity to tell a human story', while Heather Glen, in a socio-historical reading, focuses on the last six lines as disruptive for both reader and poet in terms of social sympathy: 'Instead of offering a single, authoritative analysis, the poem simply juxtaposes two divergent and ultimately antithetical points of view'.¹⁶ Finally, Galperin, exploring the power of the overlooked, comments 'But if the ordinary is ultimately *anywhere* in the poem it is located and characteristically *missing* in the space between the two linguistic moments'.¹⁷

The descriptive section (lines 1–14) simultaneously draws attention to the disconnectedness of the individual from ordinary human concerns and seeks to naturalize him as a result. The very first line marginalizes the Old Man: 'The little hedge-row birds, / That peck along the road, regard him not'. He is the passive object rather than active subject of the sentence and

the subjects (themselves insignificant) also overlook him (an inattention that naturalizes him since he *should* be perceived as a threat, but is not). At the same time, the man is able to *be* assimilated, to become part of the landscape, because he himself has so little interest in what is around him: 'seeing still / And never knowing that he sees' (*LB* 3r, 483). As Jacobus notes, this powerful description of dissociation between the external senses and the capacity, or willingness, of the mind to understand, finds its origins in the 'parent' poem of 'Description of a Beggar':

On the ground
His eyes are turned and as he moves along
They move along the ground . . . (*LB* 3r, 483)

The core description of his state in 'Old Man Travelling', 'insensibly subdued / To settled quiet' (*LB* 3r, 487), is also originally found as a revision between rejected lines for 'Description of a Beggar'. The old man is one *to whom* things happen, himself dispossessed of agency. Even the text that depicts his core character locates its origins elsewhere.

In the light of the first fourteen lines of description, the bald factual statement of the final lines *could* be read as a further expression of the man's inability to feel, even in the face of tragedy. But equally, of course, they bear an alternate reading with the potential to dramatically undercut the previous account:

– I asked him whither he was bound, and what
The object of his journey; he replied
'Sir! I am going many miles to take
A last leave of my son, a mariner,
Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
And there is dying in an hospital'. (*LB* 110)

In the light of *this*, the poem is not a merely passive 'sketch', but the tragedy of an ordinary man, presented in terms so understated as to encourage the reader almost to miss it entirely. The utterance returns us to the entire content of the poem anew and to the reliability, or otherwise, of the naturalized Wordsworthian perspective previously asserted with authority. In its first published form, then, the poem functions in terms of a structure of *internal self-revision* for both poet and reader, compelling a return upon assumptions made earlier.

Three further post-publication revisions are all centred upon this ending. In his first revision for the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth disempowers the old man, presenting his speech now only through paraphrase:

– I asked him whither he was bound, and what
 The object of his journey; he replied
 That he was going many miles to take
 A last leave of his son, a mariner,
 Who from a sea-fight had been brought to Falmouth,
 And there was lying in an hospital.¹⁸

This change significantly reduces any disharmony between the poet-narrator's description and the second voice that may or may not correspond to it. Secondly, Wordsworth alters 'dying' (1798) to 'lying' (1800) – an example of a *single letter revision* that has enormous significance for the overall meaning. If the son is 'lying' in a hospital then there is no need for extreme haste, so that the man's own tale does not conflict with the external description of him.¹⁹ If he is 'dying' in a hospital then there is a terrible poignancy in the contrast between the man's inordinately slow, absorbed progress and what the circumstances require. There is also the strong possibility that his unseeing eyes are so, *not* because of a state of near transcendent oneness with the world, but because he is consumed with anxiety about his son. All of those elements that previously rendered him the perfect Wordsworthian subject are recast and become something terrible in the light of this alternate context.

However, even these changes are not enough for Wordsworth: in 1815 he removed the final six lines of the poem altogether, reducing its status to the unproblematic 'sketch' of the original title. If we return to the manuscript, we are reminded that the final six lines were *not* part of the original process of revisionary composition. Written in a lighter colour ink, they did not emerge out of 'Description of a Beggar' but were added later. Perhaps for Wordsworth, such an addition was felt to be constructive rather than organic.²⁰ Whatever the reason, the surprising result for *this* poem is that he privileges a second-order compositional process of 'overflow' composition that is barely distinct from revision. This is favoured over the more spontaneous addition of an ending that not only enriches the poem's potential meaning by creating tension and conflict within it, but also exemplifies the principles of the Preface as an excellent example of the 'real language of men' (*LB* 74r) directly incorporated into poetry.

'Old Man Travelling' confirms how intertwined the relationship is between composition and revision for Wordsworth but, more than that, it illustrates the value of interpreting revision and self-revision as a meaning vitally alive within the text at every level. Interpreting this short poem in all its states reveals that the literary force of the poem and its emotional charge are directly connected to its underlying compositional history. Compositional criticism allows us to interpret fully the many layers of

meaning held within the poem in all its states. In Wordsworth's case, the poet's own predispositions, the nature of his writing process, the wealth of surviving draft material and the editorial labour that has made such material accessible all mean that his work is unusually receptive to such an approach which should (arguably) be far more normative than is currently the case.

Notes

1. Andrew Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23.
2. Stephen Gill, 'Wordsworth's Poems: The Question of Text', in *Romantic Revisions*, ed. Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56.
3. Ernest de Selincourt, *The Prelude or Growth of A Poet's Mind by William Wordsworth. Edited from the Manuscripts With Introduction, Textual and Critical Notes* (Oxford University Press, 1926).
4. *Ibid.*, L.
5. *William Wordsworth: 'The Prelude' 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), ix.
6. Headnote to *WD* v.
7. Gill, 'Wordsworth's Poems', 59, 58.
8. Jonathan Wordsworth, 'The Five-Book *Prelude* of Early Spring 1804', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 76 (1977), 1–2.
9. Stephen Parrish, 'The Whig Interpretation of Literature', *Text* 4 (1988), 348; Robin Jarvis, 'The Five-Book *Prelude*: A Re-consideration', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 80 (1981), 551.
10. Duncan Wu, ed., *The Five-Book 'Prelude'* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
11. *Ibid.*, 16, 20.
12. Jonathan Wordsworth, 'Revision as Making: *The Prelude* and its Peers', in Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley, eds., *Romantic Revisions* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 19.
13. See William Galperin, 'Wordsworth's Double-Take', *Wordsworth Circle* 41(3) (2010), 124: 'No poem in *Lyrical Ballads* is more indicative of the more-than-common force of the ordinary.'
14. Later published as 'The Old Cumberland Beggar, A Description' in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.
15. This is a point where the limits of the Cornell edition are felt (since it fragments the manuscript page and omits the fair copy). A digital photograph of the facing pages is therefore provided.
16. Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 180; Heather Glen, *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 228–9.
17. Galperin, 'Wordsworth's Double-Take', 124.

18. William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800*, ed. Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2008), lines 15–20, 190.
19. In the earlier version it might be argued that ‘last leave’ strongly implies that the son is going to die, but equally those words might apply to the old man himself.
20. It is also possible that Southey’s close imitation of the lines in ‘Eclogue IV: The Sailor’s Mother’ led to this decision.

CHAPTER 5

Prose

Tim Milnes

Wordsworth's pre-eminence in an age of great poets means that his contribution to Romantic prose is easily overlooked. Indeed, his importance exceeds the range of his own prose writings, which include the landmark poetical theorizing of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, 1802) and the *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810), the political polemics of *The Convention of Cintra* (1809) and the topographical descriptions of *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes* (1835). In the Preface, Wordsworth attempts to usher prose into the domain of the poetic imagination. By blending the language of plain speech with that of localized affections, he bridges the two most influential rhetorical forms of his day: the prosaic republicanism of Thomas Paine and the poetic royalism of Edmund Burke. Wordsworth shared with Coleridge the belief that what blighted modern writing was not the prosaic per se, but the mechanical and the instrumental, qualities that were as likely to be found in 'idle and extravagant stories in verse' as they were in 'frantic novels' (*Prose* 1: 129). Defined epistemologically and in opposition to science, rather than formally and in opposition to prose, poetry could be said to inhabit all language, regardless of form.

And yet, Wordsworth found it difficult to remain neutral about prose. He was keenly aware that it was the medium of the sciences, as well as of newspapers, novels and other forms of mass literature, the latter in particular forming the main conduit for 'the rapid communication of intelligence' that produced a 'savage torpor' in the modern mind (*Prose* 1: 129). He would have recoiled from Hegel's claim that the spirit of the age was destined to pass 'from the poetry of imagination into the prose of thought'.¹ Rather than philosophical synthesis, Wordsworth strove to achieve an interplay of spontaneity and reflection, a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . modified and directed by our thoughts' (*Prose* 1: 127). In practice, however, the professionalism and instrumentality associated with most modern prose composition was at odds with the private, lyrical impulse that lay behind his finest poems. Indeed, as a review of his major prose works reveals, for

Wordsworth writing reflective prose remained entangled with problems of politics, poetics and profit.

* * *

Wordsworth's political prose reveals more starkly than his poetry how his allegiances changed in the decades following the French Revolution. A striking early example of this is his 'Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff' (1793), written after his return from a second sojourn in Paris in the late autumn and early winter of 1792. The Bishop of Llandaff, Richard Watson, had initially supported the revolution, but early in 1793 published an 'Appendix' to a sermon denouncing the execution of Louis XVI. Wordsworth's response, which echoes the language of Paine and Rousseau, reflects his continuing optimism regarding the objectives of the revolution and his dismay at growing anti-Jacobin sentiment in Britain. He accuses Watson of 'joining in the idle cry of modish lamentation' following the regicide and argues that 'Liberty . . . is too often obliged to borrow the very arms of despotism to overthrow him' (*Prose* 1: 32–3). Whatever its faults, Wordsworth maintains, 'a republic legitimately constructed contains less of an oppressive principle than any other form of government' (36).

Even here, however, Wordsworth betrays early signs of uncertainty. His comparison of the liberated masses to an 'animal just released from its stall' suggests an underlying apprehension about the effects of sudden freedom upon the population, despite his expectation that such an animal, having exhausted itself 'in a round of wanton vagaries . . . will soon return to itself and enjoy its freedom in moderate and regular delight' (*Prose* 1: 38). He also concedes that the 'peasant or mechanic' is unfit to be a legislator, but summons the idealized figure of the Swiss herdsman, 'with the staff in one hand and the book in the other' as a symbol of republican citizenship (39). Elsewhere, Wordsworth inveighs against inequality, the 'instability' of monarchy (40) and 'the unnatural monster of primogeniture' (43). His sharpest comments, however, are reserved for the culture of aristocracy, which he identifies as the source of 'the corruption of public manners' (45). At this stage at least, Wordsworth shows no sign of supporting Burke's idea of the nation as a family bound by ties between the living and the dead, dismissing the latter as based on the notion of a 'dead parchment' (48).

With the rise of Napoleon in post-revolutionary France, however, Wordsworth's political rhetoric shifted. Matters came to a head in 1809, when he responded to news of the convention signed between British and French armies in the Iberian Peninsula with the pamphlet *The Convention of Cintra*. In arguing against the peace treaty with the French, Wordsworth

was prepared for accusations of political backsliding, insisting that those who had changed their position on the war with France since the 1790s were 'consistent' in always fighting 'the same enemy opposed to them under a different shape', namely 'selfish tyranny and lawless ambition' (*Prose* I: 226). Nonetheless, the *Convention* strikes a markedly different posture from the 'Letter'. From the outset, Wordsworth's arguments are largely based on affect rather than reason, accusing the British generals of wanting feeling and imagination; for Wordsworth, their strategizing exemplifies the bloodless utilitarianism that blights an age in which 'the splendour of Imagination has been fading' (325). Tellingly, he links this decline to a loss of patriotic rather than fraternal feeling. Echoing Burke's lament for the death of chivalry, he mourns that 'Sensibility . . . has been chased from its ancient range in the wide domain of patriotism and religion' (325).

This is not the only Burkean echo in the *Convention*, which blends the nationalized language of affect with the figure of the sublime in its description of Britain's emotional response to the convention: 'there was an under-expression which was strange, dark, and mysterious . . . the tidings of this event did not spread with the commotion of a storm which sweeps visibly over our heads, but like an earthquake which rocks the ground under our feet' (*Prose* I: 224). This rhetoric of power is both invoked and enacted by Wordsworth's prose, which abounds in images of 'the spacious range of the disinterested imagination' and of 'the solemn fraternity which a great nation composes – gathered together, in a stormy season, under the shade of ancestral feeling' (305). If nothing else, the *Convention* confirms that Wordsworth had come to accept Burke's argument, mocked in the 'Letter', that there is 'a spiritual community binding together the living and the dead' (*Prose* I: 339). This idea of 'the happy and glorious Constitution, in Church and State, which we have inherited from our Ancestors' would later, in his *Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmoreland* (1818), form the basis of his defence of his patron, Lord Lowther (*Prose* III: 160).

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Wordsworth's prose writings on poetics reflect a confluence of aesthetic and political concerns in this period – more specifically, they reveal a tendency to associate questions of feeling, art and political representation. Burke's impassioned style in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) had forged a link between emotive rhetoric and the local attachments of family and nation. In contrast, democrats such Thomas Paine and William Godwin adopted a 'universal' language of plain speaking and common sense. In what became his most influential prose work, the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*

(republished, with significant revisions and an appendix on poetic diction, in 1802), Wordsworth attempted to navigate between these two positions by developing an ideal of poetry as the emotionally expressive depiction of 'incidents and situations from common life . . . in a selection of language really used by men' (*Prose* I: 123). Simple language is suitable for poetry, Wordsworth argues, because in ordinary rural life 'the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature', producing a language that is free from the 'arbitrary and capricious' figures that mar the work of modern poets (125). Wordsworth's truly radical move in the Preface is to exchange a formal definition of poetry for an epistemological one. If poetry is the expression of imagination, not the ornament of reason, then 'there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition' (135). Verse itself becomes, at best, a superadded 'charm' (145) tempering poetic effusion; at worst, it is a worn-out, mechanical token of the original and 'genuine language of passion' (160). Indeed, he notes, 'much confusion has been introduced into criticism by this contradistinction of Poetry and prose, instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science. The only strict antithesis to Prose is Metre' (135). While the scientist 'seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor', the poet 'rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion'. For this reason 'Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge' (141). In this way, Wordsworth's epistemological definition of poetry implies a new, *poetic* concept of truth that could be embodied in either prose or verse: 'truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony' (139).

The poor reception of Wordsworth's 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes* spurred him to assemble a new preface and supplementary essay for his 1815 *Poems*. In both works, the elevation of the poet's status reflects Wordsworth's increasing defensiveness and wariness of his audience. Redefining poetry around a theory of 'poetic' truth, he realized, not only altered the relationship between poetry and prose, it also had the potential to raise the poet from craftsman to visionary. The 1800 Preface had maintained that the poet is simply 'a man speaking to men' who is 'endowed with more lively sensibility' and a greater facility of expression (*Prose* I: 138). In the 1815 Preface, however, the main task of justifying the organization of the poems in the volume according to form, content and above all 'the powers of mind *predominant* in the production of them' involved securing a more privileged space for poetic utterance (*Prose* III: 28). To this end, Wordsworth's new, epistemological poetics demanded a psychology of

poetic power based upon reconfigured faculties of fancy and imagination, the theorization of which positioned Wordsworth between two philosophical traditions. On one hand, he rejected the empirical reduction of fancy and imagination to 'nothing more than a mode of memory' (30), arguing that imagination essentially 'shapes and *creates*' by dissolving and unifying (33). On the other hand, he could not accept Coleridge's distinction (later to form the central argument of *Biographia Literaria*) between an empirical fancy and a transcendental imagination, maintaining that '[t]o aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy' (*Prose* III: 36). The 1815 Preface, then, stands at the border between two conceptions of the poetic imagination: the first empirical, associationist and British; the second idealist, transcendental and German.

Both the 1815 Preface and its companion, the 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' (1815), suggest that the changing literary marketplace encouraged Wordsworth, like other Romantic writers, to fashion himself as a poet who wrote for posterity, for the 'people' past and present, rather than for an uncomprehending contemporary public. In the 'Essay', Wordsworth's arguments resonate once again with Burke's rhetoric of power and tradition. Confronted by readers who did not possess the kind of 'active faculties, capable of answering the demands which an Author of original imagination shall make upon them' (*Prose* III: 66), he argues, the true genius 'will be called upon to clear and often to shape his own road' (80). Accordingly, 'every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed' (80). The test of the author's success in 'establishing that dominion over the spirits of readers' is not public approbation, but the verdict of the *people*, by which Wordsworth means an idealized literary tradition (80). Thus, '[t]owards the Public, the Writer hopes that he feels as much deference as it is entitled to: but to the People, philosophically characterized, and to the embodied spirit of their knowledge . . . faithfully supported by its two wings, the past and the future, his devout respect, his reverence, is due' (84). With this, Wordsworth enshrines Burke's values of tradition and duty to the dead within a system of poetics constructed around a powerful imagination.

* * *

Indeed, the dead continued to haunt Wordsworth's poetry and prose, becoming the focus of the three *Essays upon Epitaphs*. In the first essay (the only one to be published in his lifetime), Wordsworth bases the importance of epitaphs upon the intimations of immortality, 'the consciousness of a principle of immortality in the human soul', without

which 'Man could never have had awakened in him the desire to live in the remembrance of his fellows' (*Prose* 11: 50). Just as defining poetry in the 1800 Preface turned upon a distinction between the spirit of imagination and the formal letter, so the central problem of the epitaph for Wordsworth consists in the relationship between language and infinity, between the contingent, inscribed word and the immortal soul; more obviously than other forms of writing, epitaphs presuppose the very thing that words cannot convey. For Wordsworth, this is not a simple contradiction, since 'both in the natural and the moral world, qualities pass insensibly into their contraries' (53). However, to ensure that the spirit of the author remains the major term in this dialectic, it is essential that an epitaph is genuine, carrying a 'conviction to the heart at once that the Author was a sincere mourner' (66). Mechanical verse is particularly intolerable in an epitaph, which 'forbids more authoritatively than any other species of composition all modes of fiction, except those which the very strength of passion has created' (76). Without the latter, the spirit of the epitaph passes 'insensibly' into mere language, 'a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve' (85).

It could be argued that Wordsworth's concerns with spirit and language arise precisely because of his decision to distinguish poetry from science, not prose: without the poetic spirit, both verse and prose are apt to be reduced to mere commodities. Nonetheless, mass-produced prose was becoming the currency of the early nineteenth-century literary marketplace, and Wordsworth's own financial concerns led him to produce prose descriptions of landscape to accompany the engravings of Joseph Wilkinson in the latter's *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Ambleside* (1810). From this project emerged Wordsworth's longest published prose work, eventually published as *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes*, an aesthetic handbook to the region that included directions and information for the tourist as well as descriptions of natural scenery and of the history of the area, interspersed with passages of verse.

Associated with the *Guide* is an untitled and unpublished fragment (usually referred to as 'The Sublime and the Beautiful'), the significance of which stems from the ways in which Wordsworth extends Burke's theory of the sublime. Although he follows Burke in describing the experience of the sublime as one of imagined (not real) 'humiliation or prostration of the mind before some external agency', Wordsworth adds an alternative possibility, one in which the mind is beckoned 'to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining' (*Prose* 11: 354). Whereas Burke's psychology remained rooted in the largely passive picture of

the mind advanced by eighteenth-century empiricism, Wordsworth advanced an aesthetics that permitted the mind an active role in perception. Indeed, he insists, the 'true province of the philosopher is not to grope about in the external world . . . but to look into his own mind & determine the law by which he is affected' (357). For Wordsworth, then, the sublime experience can involve either resistance to, or participation with an object. Both forms of experience involve a dynamic tension, a sense of 'opposition & yet reconciliation', which he compares to the Falls of the Rhine cascading around the huge rocks at Schaffhausen (357).

Wordsworth knew little if anything of Kant, and yet this conception of sublime experience as uplifting and empowering to the mind edges nearer to that advanced in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790). For Wordsworth, like Kant, the sublime signifies 'the elevation of our being' (*Prose* II: 358) in which the mind experiences its freedom from the determinations of sense and reason. It was this 'elevation' of being that Wordsworth had originally attempted to enshrine in his account of poetry as a means of resisting the encroachment of instrumental reason (and, by extension, the marketplace) into the domain of art and *belles-lettres*. Whatever view is taken of his success in this regard, it is certainly the case that in defining poetry in contradistinction to rational science rather than to prose, Wordsworth introduced to literary theory the idea that any passage of writing in prose could at the same time be profoundly 'poetic'.

Note

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *On Art, Religion, and the History of Philosophy: Introductory Lectures*, ed. J. Glenn Gray and Tom Rockmore (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1970), 126.

PART II

Reception and influence

*The critical reception, 1793–1806**David Higgins*

In an article published in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* in August 1835, Thomas De Quincey suggests that before 1820 periodical writers showed only 'unutterable contempt' for Wordsworth's poetry. Although it is certainly true that the poet generally received a hostile critical reception for publications from *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) to *The Waggoner* (1819), De Quincey is exaggerating here in order to emphasize his own perspicacity in writing 'a letter of fervent admiration' to Wordsworth in 1803.¹ Wordsworth's two early volumes – *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* (both 1793) – received scanty and mixed notices, but *Lyrical Ballads* (1798–1802) was widely reviewed and, in fact, largely well received by the critics. Perhaps as a result, it went through four editions and sold around two thousand copies of each volume: sales that Wordsworth would not match again until the 1830s.² The turning point in his early critical reception seems to have been the review of Robert Southey's *Thalaba* (1801) by Francis Jeffrey, editor of the powerful *Edinburgh Review*, who lambasted the Lake Poets, and particularly Wordsworth, for what Jeffrey considered to be the affected simplicity and vulgarity of their writings. This argument set the tone for Wordsworth's negative critical reception over the subsequent fifteen years, until a new breed of post-Napoleonic periodicals such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *London Magazine* began to champion him.³

It is difficult to find a pattern to the reception of Wordsworth's 1793 publications. For example, *An Evening Walk* received a short but positive notice in the *Critical Review*, which noted the poet's facility for producing 'new and picturesque imagery' of the natural world (CH 20–1). But the following month, *Descriptive Sketches* was criticized in the same journal for its 'ill-chosen' images and 'feeble and insipid' descriptions (21). In contrast, a brief review in the *European Magazine* praised the 'minuteness and accuracy' of *An Evening Walk's* depictions of the landscape (23). The *English Review* suggested that the poem provided 'a soothing pleasure to the fancy',

but noted rather more equivocally of *Descriptive Sketches* that if Wordsworth ‘rises not to a sublimity proportionable to the most magnificent objects of nature, he at least seems to catch from them a degree of poetical enthusiasm’ (27–8). ‘Peregrinator’, in a more extensive response in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, found in *An Evening Walk* ‘a spirit and elegance which prove that the author has viewed nature with the attentive and warm regard of a true poet’ (30). Interestingly, the author claimed to have met Wordsworth while studying at Cambridge, and emphasized the significance of the Lake District to his education and poetry (28). This approach adumbrates later biographical criticism that celebrated Wordsworth as much as a man as for his work, which was an important aspect of the rehabilitation of his reputation by *Blackwood’s* and other periodicals in the late Romantic period.⁴

The most substantial reviews of Wordsworth before *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in the *Analytical Review* (March 1793) and the *Monthly Review* (October 1793), both of which addressed the two volumes together. The *Analytical* was produced by Wordsworth’s publisher, Joseph Johnson, and therefore the article might be read as a periodical ‘puff’ rather than as a review. However, the writer at least attempted to be even-handed, praising the poet’s ‘lively imagination’ and the ‘studied variety of imagery’, but also criticizing the ‘want of a general thread of narrative’ and ‘a certain laboured and artificial cast of expression’ in *Descriptive Sketches* (CH 19). The bulk of the review comprised long extracts from both poems; although this was common practice in reviews of the time, Johnson was clearly using this particular article as a shop window (and the article’s long extract from *Descriptive Sketches* was indeed reprinted in the *Sherborne Advertiser* and the *Weekly Entertainer*). In contrast to the *Analytical*, the article in the *Monthly Review* was mostly negative. It was written by Thomas Holcroft, a dramatist and political reformer who reviewed frequently for the journal. Earlier in the same number he had attacked ‘descriptive poetry’ as a literary form, and so begins the review of *Descriptive Sketches* with ‘More descriptive poetry! . . . Have we not yet enough?’ (24). Holcroft focuses on two passages from the *Sketches* and one from *An Evening Walk*, italicizing what he sees as confusing or contradictory imagery and attempting a *reductio ad absurdum* in his commentary. Although there are some reasonable criticisms – ‘When Life rear’d laughing up her morning sun’ (*An Evening Walk*, line 28) is not an easy line to defend – Holcroft seems more concerned to mock the poetry than to engage with it. He spends much of the review discussing a passage from *Descriptive Sketches* that describes how Nature has the power to heal the ‘wounded heart’ of the traveller (*Descriptive Sketches*, line 14), suggesting

that it is contradictory: ‘He is the happiest of mortals, and plods, is forlorn, and has a wounded heart’ (CH 25). But the passage’s meaning is really quite clear: Nature’s capacity to rejuvenate and transform, to bring joy into the life of the damaged. Whatever one thinks of *Descriptive Sketches*, Holcroft’s perverse response, which even leads him to doubt Wordsworth’s mental capacity, suggests that he is keen to attack descriptive verse in general rather than to attend to the specific qualities of the poet’s writing.

The first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) received ten notices or reviews in British journals, and the second edition four (1800). There were also a number of brief American notices between 1799 and 1810 (CH 146–52); the most significant appeared in the *American Review and Literary Journal* in January 1802. The reviews were almost all positive, with the most negative one (in the *Critical Review* in October 1798) coming from the perhaps surprising source of Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s friend Robert Southey.⁵ Like many of the reviewers, he begins by drawing attention to Wordsworth’s suggestion in the ‘Advertisement’ that the poems are considered to be ‘experiments’ (65). After a deadpan summary of ‘The Idiot Boy’, and some lengthy quotations, Southey notes that ‘[n]o tale less deserved the labour that appears to have been bestowed this’ (66). The accusation that Wordsworth was wasting his poetical genius (which Southey acknowledges) on trivialities would be repeated in many later reviews. However, even Southey praises several poems as evidence of the poet’s ‘superior powers’ (67), particularly ‘Tintern Abbey’. In contrast, Charles Burney, writing in the *Monthly Review*, asserted that the poem was misanthropic, a criticism that would also often be levelled at the later Wordsworth. Burney also suggests that *Lyrical Ballads* is primitive and retrograde in its refusal of the ‘sweet and polished measures’ of eighteenth-century poetry (74); like Southey, he wishes that the author would apply his ‘genius and originality’ to ‘more elevated subjects and in a more cheerful disposition’ (78). Unlike Southey, though, he takes a more positive view of individual poems (commenting on each one in the book), to the extent that he is in danger of contradicting his more general criticisms.

Burney and Southey offered the most equivocal responses to *Lyrical Ballads*: other reviews were more positive. The *Monthly Mirror* compares the volume’s ‘sentiments of feeling and sensibility, expressed without affectation, and in the language of nature’ with the ‘pompous and high-sounding phraseology of the *Della Cruscan* school’ (CH 65). Similarly, the *Analytical Review* endorses Wordsworth’s advertisement to the volume – which is quoted from at length and makes up about half the review – and praises the ‘studied simplicity’ of his verse (68). The reviewer in the *British Critic* (possibly John Stoddart) takes a similar approach, quoting the bulk of

the advertisement, and concluding that 'in general the author [whom Stoddart assumes to be Coleridge] has succeeded in attaining the judicious degree of simplicity, which accommodates itself with ease even to the sublime' (79). However, the *New London Review* saw a mismatch between the advertisement and the poetry. The writer argues that '[t]he language of conversation, and that too of the *lower classes*, can never be considered as the language of *poetry*' and that Wordsworth is confused by the 'the term poetical SIMPLICITY' (71), even though the term does not actually appear in the advertisement. Distinguishing between a gross and inelegant 'simple style' and a facile and elegant 'simplicity' (71), the reviewer suggests that although the bulk of the volume falls into the second category, other parts are inelegant and 'anti-poetical' (73). The relationship between the simple and the simplistic in Wordsworth's poetry has, of course, been a key part of the critical debate ever since.

Only two reviews of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* engaged with Wordsworth's Preface. One was published in the *British Critic* by John Stoddart, who knew Wordsworth and Coleridge, and probably wrote the magazine's generally positive review of the first edition. Stoddart enthusiastically endorses the 'penetrating and judicious' Preface, particularly Wordsworth's claim to be a 'Poet chiefly of low and rustic life' and his valorisation of a purified 'language of rustics' (CH 139–40). Through his focus on simple language and genuine feelings rather than excessive refinement, Wordsworth is a 'public benefactor': '[w]e will not deny that sometimes he goes so far in his pursuit of simplicity, as to become flat or weak; but, in general, he sets an example which the full-dressed poet of affectation might wish, but with [for *wish*] in vain, to follow' (142–3). Once again, the contrast between affectation and simplicity is seen as key: a contrast that does not necessarily register the variety and complexity of *Lyrical Ballads*. Stoddart's review also became Wordsworth's first American review when it was partially reprinted in a Philadelphia journal, *The Portfolio* (138), and may have influenced the only other substantial American review of *Lyrical Ballads*, published in the *American Review and Literary Journal* in January 1802. This review, possibly authored by the novelist Charles Brockden Brown (who edited the magazine), responded more ambivalently to the Preface than Stoddart. Wordsworth's refusal of '*poetic diction*', the writer remarks, prevents his poetry from soaring 'into the sublime regions of fancy', and so his 'laws' are unlikely to be acknowledged by most poetry lovers (149). Nonetheless, *Lyrical Ballads* contains some 'successful experiments' in portraying 'the great and simple affections of our nature' (149).

Despite the generally warm reception of *Lyrical Ballads*, and although some critics saw it as reacting to other trends in late eighteenth-century poetry, it would be fair to say that no reviewer recognized the volume's significance. It may well be that Wordsworth's strongest early opponent, Francis Jeffrey, came closest to understanding the surprise and innovation of his work. Jeffrey was the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, which was to become the most powerful and influential literary journal of the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The first issue, published in October 1802, included a review of Robert Southey's *Thalaba* in which Jeffrey spent the opening pages attacking the Lake Poets, and particularly Wordsworth. Despite his patrician tone and conservative position – 'Poetry has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question' (CH 153) – he also responded carefully and at length to Wordsworth's claims that the volume was designed to reform public taste through its use of ordinary language. An analysis of the review, which was directed as much at Wordsworth's poetic theory as it was at the poems themselves, not only helps us to understand the terms in which Wordsworth was subsequently discussed, but also sheds light on his place within British literary culture during the Romantic period.

The *Edinburgh* is accurately described by Colin Kidd as 'the organ of modern whiggism' whose writers tended 'to be proponents of further Anglicising reforms in Scottish life to bring Scotland within the "action" of the British constitution'.⁶ Although it was generally reformist in outlook – and would sometimes be painted as politically dangerous by conservative rivals such as the *Quarterly Review* – it was also the voice of an Anglo-British Whig elite that was suspicious of localism, eccentricity and radicalism. This partly explains Jeffrey's hostility to the Lake Poets, whom he describes as 'a sect of poets, that has established itself in this country', and as 'dissenters from the established systems in poetry and criticism' (CH 153). The comparison of the poets with religious enthusiasts apart from the cultural mainstream suggests that Jeffrey saw them as dangerous eccentrics, a point emphasized when he claims that they have been corrupted by radical Continental influences (Rousseau, Kotzebue and Schiller). Like other critics, he focuses on the issue of simplicity, arguing that, rather than rejecting 'superfluous ornament', they have rejected 'art altogether' in favour of 'rude and negligent expressions' (156). That he is particularly targeting *Lyrical Ballads* is apparent when he engages at length with Wordsworth's advertisement, described with obvious antagonism as 'a kind of manifesto that preceded one of their most flagrant acts of hostility' (156). He focuses

especially on the idea of writing poetry based on the ‘ordinary language of conversation among the middling and lower orders of the people’ (156; this is a slight misquotation from the advertisement). Jeffrey’s counter-argument is unashamedly elitist: ‘taste and refined sentiment are rarely to be met with among the uncultivated part of mankind’ (157). ‘The poor and vulgar’ may be interesting as poetical representations, but their language is entirely unsuited for a cultivated art: after all, ‘[i]t is absurd to suppose, that an author should make use of the language of the vulgar, to express the sentiments of the refined’ (156).

That Jeffrey saw this argument about literary language as political is apparent when he goes on to accuse the Lake Poets of ‘a splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society’, of indulging the crimes of the poor, and of exhibiting ‘unconquerable antipathy to prisons, gibbets, and houses of correction, as engines of oppression, and atrocious injustice’.⁷ They fail to appreciate the achievements of civilization and their writings attack its rules and structures. An exemplary representative of the Anglo-British elite, Jeffrey accuses the Lake poets of producing verse that does not fit in with the cultural or political norms of modern Britain. His criticisms are an important example of what Robert Crawford has identified as the Scottish Enlightenment investment in a purified English, devoid of Scotticisms and other local variations, as crucial to building a ‘polite’ British identity.⁸ They also remind us that the attack on ‘the distinctive Scottish cultural tradition’⁹ was part of a broader attack on non-elite literature from all four nations that did not exhibit ‘proper’ English. Jeffrey would continue to criticize the ‘Lake School’, and particularly Wordsworth, for over a decade. Although there might have been several factors leading to the almost entirely negative critical reaction to *Poems, in Two Volumes*, a number of critics seem to have followed Jeffrey’s lead in accusing Wordsworth of childishness and vulgarity. However, his review suggests that critical responses to Wordsworthian simplicity could be much more than simply a matter of personal taste.

Notes

1. Thomas De Quincey, ‘Sketches of Life and Manners; from the Autobiography of an English Opium Eater’, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* 2 (August 1835), 543.
2. See W. J. B. Owen, ‘Costs, Sales, and Profits of Longman’s Editions of Wordsworth’, *The Library* 12 (1957), 93–107.
3. Given the space available, this chapter focuses on the public response to Wordsworth in periodical reviews. There are, of course, some significant private responses to Wordsworth’s poetry during the period, mainly to be found in

letters by friends and contemporaries such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, Thomas De Quincey, Robert Southey, John Wilson and Anna Seward. These are usefully brought together by Robert Woof in the first volume of *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*.

4. See David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), chapter 4.
5. Interestingly, Southey would write to John Thelwall in 1803 that he ‘would risk my whole future fame on the assertion that they will one day be regarded as the finest poems in our language’ (*CH* 121).
6. Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c. 1830* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 255.
7. Francis Jeffrey, review of *Thalaba: The Destroyer*, *Edinburgh Review* 1 (1802), 71. This part of the review is not reprinted in *Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*.
8. Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 18.
9. *Ibid.*, 38.

*The critical reception, 1807–1818**Peter Simonsen*

Between 1807 and 1818 Wordsworth received some of his most important and influential criticism, in tandem with which the contours of his poetic identity began fully to emerge. To get a sense of Wordsworth's critical reception, we need to consider not only reviews of his published work (notably by Francis Jeffrey) and the kind of literary criticism that was emerging during the Romantic period (notably by Coleridge), but also personal letters, journals, diaries and other kinds of literary text. In addition, there is Wordsworth's elaborate response to his own reception in his prefaces and essays. From the critical reception of this near decade we will see Wordsworth emerging as the poet with whom most readers today are familiar, one responsible for a body of poetry that is easy to ridicule as simple, naïve, and even 'unliterary', and that is at the same time sublime, inimitable and to be ranked in the canon of English poetry.

Such a ranking was far from a given at the time, of course. In 1807, one of the Romantic period's most influential reviewers, Francis Jeffrey, delivered a devastating review of Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* in the *Edinburgh Review*. Jeffrey had had Wordsworth in his sights since at least 1802, when in a review of Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* he invented the notion of the 'Lake School', a group of poets that were held to behave like a subversive and dissenting 'sect'. But the 1807 *Poems* presented Jeffrey with the first opportunity for a direct confrontation, and he went straight for the jugular: 'If the printing of such trash as this be not felt as an insult on the public taste, we are afraid it cannot be insulted', he declares (*CH* 194). Jeffrey's main problem with Wordsworth (and the other Lake Poets) was that 'They write as they do, upon principle and system', and that as far as both language and subject matter were concerned, 'it evidently costs them much pains to keep *down* to the standard which they have proposed to themselves' (189). According to Jeffrey, only when he 'transgresses' the 'system' that he had outlined in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, can Wordsworth write 'good verses' (199). In *Poems, in Two Volumes*, however, Wordsworth

appears 'like a bad imitator of the worst of his former productions' (201). Jeffrey ends the review hoping that 'the volumes before us may ultimately be of service to the good cause of literature' insofar as they may warn others against following Wordsworth's example: 'Many a generous rebel . . . has been reclaimed to his allegiance by the spectacle of lawless outrage and excess presented in the conduct of the insurgents' (201).

The political rhetoric of rebellion betrays the fact that more than poetic taste and the matter of Wordsworth's departure from Neoclassical *decorum* was at stake in the reception of his poetry by the generally tolerant and reform-minded Jeffrey, to whom these democratic experiments were far too radical in nature. Jeffrey made frequent damning references to Wordsworth, for example when he reviewed George Crabbe's 1807 *Poems* in the *Edinburgh Review* (CH 224–9), but in 1814 he delivered what was to become perhaps the most notorious review from the Romantic period. His review of *The Excursion* in November 1814 opens with the brilliantly damning phrase 'This will never do' (382) – a terse and unequivocal judgment in no need of capitalization or exclamation mark (as Coleridge misquotes the phrase, in *Biographia Literaria* – 'THIS WON'T DO!' (BL II: 115)). Jeffrey goes on to announce that 'The case of Mr Wordsworth . . . is now manifestly hopeless' and that 'we give him up as altogether incurable, and beyond the power of criticism' (383). For Jeffrey, *The Excursion* is best characterized as 'a tissue of moral and devotional ravings' (385). Since Wordsworth has not given up his 'system', Jeffrey gave up on Wordsworth.

Wordsworth did not give up. Indeed, mainly in response to Jeffrey's reviews, he developed the idea that true poets will only be fully recognized after their death, and that rejection by the public was in fact itself a sure sign of genius. The idea of posthumous reception was most fully expressed in another landmark in Wordsworth's critical reception of this period, his own 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' (1815). In this essay, Wordsworth goes to great lengths to provide evidence for the idea that *all* great poets have suffered 'partial notice only, or neglect, perhaps long continued, or attention wholly inadequate to their merits', by contrast with those poets who have been popular in their own day but who have subsequently 'passed away, leaving scarcely a trace behind them' (*Prose* III: 67). While he fails to give consistent empirical evidence for the theory of the necessarily posthumous moment of true recognition, Wordsworth's eagerness to do so is evidence of his obsession with the idea of posthumous reception and the related idea 'that every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed' (III: 80). As this would suggest, to properly understand Wordsworth's

reception we need to consider the ways in which he consistently worked at trying to stage-manage his own contemporary and posthumous image in response to the reception that he actually received.

The idea of the necessarily posthumous critical recognition of genius is one of the most important new ideas in Wordsworth's poetics after his so-called Great Decade, and one which had significant implications for his later poetry. The idea was both confirmed and contradicted by Wordsworth's experiences with actual readers during the years 1807–18. A reader like Jeffrey would obviously confirm it, at least with respect to Wordsworth's neglect, as would Lord Byron in 1818 when, in the unpublished 'Dedication' to *Don Juan*, he speaks of *The Excursion* as 'poetry, at least by his assertion' and continued: 'He that reserves his laurels for posterity / . . . / Has generally no great crop to spare it, he / Being only injured by his own assertion'.¹ On the other hand, the theory may be said to have been disproved by a grocer whom Wordsworth met by chance at Lancaster, as he proudly reports in a letter of 8 April 1808:

At Lancaster I happened to mention Grasmere in hearing of one of the Passengers, who asked me immediately if one Wordsworth did not live there. I answered, 'Yes'. – 'He has written', said he, 'some very beautiful Poems; The Critics do indeed cry out against them, and condemn them as *over simple*, but for my part I read them with great pleasure, they are natural and true'. – This man was also a Grocer. (MY1: 210)

Wordsworth obviously took pleasure in such an authentic moment of reception by one of 'the people' as opposed to 'the public'.²

By contrast with these responses, a reader like Coleridge would neither confirm nor disprove the theory. Coleridge was sceptical of a certain strain towards what he termed the '*matter-of-factness*' in Wordsworth (*BL* 11: 126), yet he was adulatory of another strain, the visionary and imaginative, which he experienced for instance when on consecutive nights his friend read *The Prelude* out loud to him after Coleridge's return from Malta. In January 1807, Coleridge recorded his response in 'To William Wordsworth. Composed on the Night After His Recitation of a Poem on the Growth an Individual Mind', concluding that as the recital ended, he rose and 'found myself in prayer'.³ Coleridge's poem is an important document in Wordsworth's critical reception and is in many ways an example of the reception that the poet seems to have demanded: full immersion in the poet's vision and recognition of his authority and imaginative strength – what Lucy Newlyn describes as a demand for 'unconditional empathy'.⁴

Wordsworth had started to think along the lines of posthumous reception and the need to create the taste by which he will be appreciated in a

long letter to Lady Beaumont of 21 May 1807. Responding to what was felt to be the disastrous reception of his *Poems, in Two Volumes*, and fearing, rightly, that it was only the beginning of a general critical onslaught that would culminate in Jeffrey's review later that year, he wrote to Lady Beaumont:

Trouble not yourself upon their present reception; of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny, to console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier, to teach the young and the gracious of every age, to see, to think and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform long after we . . . are mouldered in our graves. (MY I: 146)

'[N]ever forget', Wordsworth goes on, 'what I believe was once observed to you by Coleridge',

that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen; this, in a certain degree, even to all persons, however wise and pure may be their lives, and however unvitiated their taste; but for those who dip into books in order to give an opinion of them, or talk about them to make up an opinion – for this multitude of unhappy, and misguided, and misguiding beings, an entire regeneration must be produced; and if this be possible, it must be a work *of time*. (MY I: 150)

The letter is evidence both of Wordsworth's acute awareness of a diverse public audience's different kinds of reading strategies and of his belief that the audience was in need of and capable of reform; his awareness, in a word, of what William St Clair has dubbed the Romantic reading nation.⁵ With the rise of print culture and the proliferation of printed material during the eighteenth century, by the time of the Romantic period new formats such as newspapers, periodicals and long prose novels had become widespread, everyday phenomena to accompany new forms of superficial speed-reading that are required to process this excess of information. In his letter to Lady Beaumont, Wordsworth lashes out at the reviewers and other arbiters of taste by claiming that 'These people in the senseless hurry of their idle lives do not *read* books, they merely snatch a glance at them that they may talk about them' (MY I: 150). Wordsworth was one of the first English poets to experience, and to be forced to take into account, two new phenomena as the condition of creative production. On the one hand, rapid and silent reading, and on the other hand an audience of readers used to handling such quantities of printed material that a cursory reading of a work would have to do, after which it might be discarded and never returned to again.

An example of such superficial reading is noted by Wordsworth in the letter to Lady Beaumont when he corrects a reading by her sister, Mrs Fermor. According to Wordsworth, Mrs Fermor had failed to see the point of his sonnet 'With ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh', and her misreading provoked him into a long description of the movements of his own mind as they are 'represented' in the sonnet – culminating in the invitation to the reader to 'rest his mind as mine is resting' (MY 1: 149), in other words, to demonstrate 'unconditional empathy'. Similarly, in a February 1808 letter to Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth responds to a reading of two of his poems by an unnamed friend of Beaumont's. Wordsworth charges this friend with having 'inattentively perused' the poems (MY 1: 194). The friend has for instance mistaken 'a Daisy' for '*the* Daisy, a mighty difference', and has somehow 'seen' the daffodils of 'I wandered lonely as a Cloud' as reflected in water, when they are in fact described as dancing beside the waves of a lake: 'Can expression be more distinct?', asks Wordsworth after quoting the lines in question, and goes on: 'let me ask your Friend how it is possible for flowers to be *reflected* in water where there are *waves*' (MY 1: 194). Wordsworth's poems, he tells Beaumont, 'must be more nearly looked at before they can give rise to any remarks of much value' (MY 1: 195). Wordsworth contrasts this hasty and 'inattentive' reading with another, diametrically opposed response to and valuation of the poem communicated to him in another letter in which 'this identical poem was singled out for fervent approbation': 'What then shall we say? Why let the Poet first consult his own heart as I have done and leave the rest to posterity; to, I hope, an improving posterity . . . In short, in your Friend's Letter, I am condemned for the very thing for which I ought to have been praised; viz., that I have not written down to the level of superficial observers and unthinking minds' (MY 1: 195). In the years between 1807 and 1818, Wordsworth knows that his identity and his public image as poet is being shaped by forces beyond his powers of control, a knowledge that spurs his deep and persistent 'anxiety of audience'.⁶

Coleridge found Jeffrey's review of *The Excursion* 'infamous', and in April 1815 he wrote to Lady Beaumont: 'If ever Guilt lay on a Writer's head, and if malignity, slander, hypocrisy and self-contradicting Baseness can constitute Guilt, I dare openly, and openly (please God!) I will, impeach the Writer of that Article of it' (quoted in CH 381). Coleridge went on to defend Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria*, where he produced the single most influential critical intervention in the reception of Wordsworth's work. If Jeffrey found Wordsworth to be hopeless, Coleridge found that hope for a proper critical recognition of his poems depended on someone saving the poet from himself. Coleridge set out to perform this task by dividing

Wordsworth from himself. In [chapter 22](#) of *Biographia Literaria*, he identified five ‘characteristic defects’ of Wordsworth’s poetry: ‘inconstancy of style’, ‘*matter-of-factness*’, ‘an undue predilection for the *dramatic* form’, ‘intensity of feeling disproportionate to *such* knowledge and value of the objects described’, and ‘*mental bombast*’ (BL 11: 121–42). These defects Coleridge then contrasted with six excellencies. The first five of these are: ‘perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning’, ‘correspondent weight and sanity of the Thoughts and Sentiments’, ‘sinewy strength and originality of single lines and paragraphs’, ‘perfect truth of nature in his images and descriptions as taken immediately from nature’, and ‘a meditative pathos, a union of deep and subtle thought with sensibility; a sympathy with man as man’ (BL 11: 142–50). Coleridge’s premise is that Wordsworth’s experiment has failed, but that most of his work has not suffered from his own theory the way Jeffrey and many reviewers were inclined to think. Putting the defects to one side but silently agreeing with Jeffrey that it is the result of failed experimentation, Coleridge on the other hand pointed to another Wordsworth, the poet of the creative imagination. As Coleridge puts it, describing the sixth excellence (the one that has no correspondent defect):

Last, and pre-eminently, I challenge for this poet the gift of IMAGINATION in the highest and strictest sense of the word . . . [I]n imaginative power, he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespear and Milton; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own. To employ his own words, which are at once an instance and an illustration, he does indeed to all thoughts and to all objects –

add the gleam,
The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration, and the poet’s dream. (BL 11: 151)

Here, the Wordsworth received by his most influential twentieth-century readers from A. C. Bradley through M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Hartman to Kenneth Johnston and Stephen Gill is constructed. This Wordsworth is imaginative, sublime, complex and canonically ranked with Shakespeare and Milton. And he is utterly original – so original that the only way to account for this originality is by reference to Wordsworth’s own poetry (the quotation is from Wordsworth’s ‘Elegiac Stanzas’), and by noting that when it is most original it is deeply self-reflexive, both an instance and an illustration of the work of the imagination.

The Wordsworth that emerges from the critical reception of the period 1807–18 is divided against himself. He is hopeless and unable to make any

sense, says Jeffrey, to whom *The Excursion* consists of ‘long words, long sentences, and unwieldy phrases’ and ‘such a hubbub of strained raptures and fantastical sublimities’ that even ‘the most skilful and attentive student’ often cannot attain ‘a glimpse of the author’s meaning’ while for an ‘ordinary reader’ it is ‘altogether impossible . . . to conjecture what he is about’ (CH 385). While Coleridge might agree with some of this, he would also say that Wordsworth is a poet whose words sometimes have a ‘perfect appropriateness’ to the meaning they convey, and one whose words are, for him, of and about man’s godlike creative imagination. Other readers, however, have followed Wordsworth himself and opposed the act of dividing the work into different parts or categories and insisted that he should be read whole. In the 1807 letter to Lady Beaumont, Wordsworth criticizes Samuel Rogers for having said that it was a pity that “so many trifling things should be admitted to obstruct the view of those that have merit” (MYI: 147). Wordsworth argues that his work is a single, coherent entity and that it is a mistake to single out discrete parts of it for praise or censure without considering the context of the whole of his *oeuvre*. But his critical reception during the period 1807–18 tells us that Wordsworth is complex and self-divided and that to fully understand him we must be open to contradictions – indeed, we must be open to the possibility that this division may be what ultimately defines Wordsworth as the central British Romantic poet, one who captures and holds in precarious suspension many of the internal contradictions of the period.

Notes

1. Lord Byron, ‘Dedication’, *Don Juan*, in *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, 7 vols., ed. Jerome McGann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), v: 5–6 (lines 65–9).
2. On this distinction, see Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 137ff.
3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘To William Wordsworth’, in *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 339–42.
4. Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 103.
5. See William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
6. Andrew Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

*The critical reception, 1819–1850**Richard Cronin*

In 1819 Wordsworth's work had been the object of widespread scorn; by 1850 he had been widely recognized as the great English poet of the age. That at least is the story that, by the end of the period, was rehearsed again and again in the accounts of Wordsworth's career prompted by his death in April 1850 and the publication of *The Prelude* in July. This, for example, is David Masson:

One man of powerful and original nature, or of unusually accurate perceptions, makes his appearance in some central, or, it may be, sequestered spot; he gains admirers, and makes converts; disciples gather round him, or try to form an idea of him from a distance; they, again, in their turn, affect others, till at last, as the gloom of the largest church is slowly changed into brilliance by the successive lighting of all its lamps, so a whole country may, district by district, succumb to the peculiarity of a new influence.¹

It is noteworthy that Masson borrows both the metaphor and the thought from the poet that he is discussing. The ecclesiastical metaphor derives from Wordsworth's suggestion in his Preface to *The Excursion* that his *oeuvre* should be thought of as constituting 'a gothic church' (*Excursion* 38), and the sentiment from Coleridge's remark, publicized by Wordsworth in the 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface', that 'every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed' (*Prose* 111: 80). By 1850 the trajectory of Wordsworth's career was no longer peculiar, it had become representative, and it had done so not by chance but because its representative status had been established by the most influential critic of Wordsworth in the thirty years from 1819 to 1850: Wordsworth himself.

Almost throughout these thirty years Wordsworth continued to publish new poems, but even more of his energies were directed at the successive editions of his collected poems. The two-volume edition of 1815 was followed by the four volumes of 1820, the five volumes of 1827, the four

volumes of 1832, the six volumes of 1836–7, the one-volume edition of 1845, and the final six-volume edition of 1849–50. For almost all of these, the poems were extensively revised, and, although Wordsworth maintained the thematic principle that had governed the arrangement of the poems in 1815, the arrangement itself was repeatedly modified. It was a publishing practice that redirected attention from the poem to the career of the poet, a career constituted not by a sequence of poems in the chronological order of their composition, but by the production of a body of work that in its totality defined a distinctive poetic identity. The volumes of newly published poems underwrote this emphasis. The very final volume, published in 1842, was *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*. The title focuses the reader's attention on the long expanse of time that separates a poem such as *Guilt and Sorrow*, the first version of which had been written in the 1790s, from the poems of recent years also included. It was a title through which Wordsworth asserted that his days as a poet, like his days as a man, had been 'Bound each to each' ('My hearts leaps up' (PTV 206; line 9)). Readers in 1842 could not have known that *Guilt and Sorrow* was a radically revised version of the poem as it had first been written, but they might have guessed as much. The successive editions of the collected poems had acquainted readers with Wordsworth's habits of self-revision. In his review of the volume, John Kemble noted that younger readers often seemed astonished by the hostility with which the 'polished critics' of a former generation had received the work of 'a poet whom all now admire', and explained that the poems read by the younger readers were very different from the poems to which their predecessors had objected so strongly:

Who remembers now that the blind boy, who sails so poetically in his turtle-shell, made his first expedition in

'A household tub like one of those
Which women use to wash their clothes?'

Who again recollects that 'We are seven' began

'A simple child, dear brother Jim' – ?²

In the collected editions of the poems, as in *The Prelude*, identity is presented as at once continuous and ever-changing. The present self is the product of the past, and yet the past is subject to a constant process of revision as it is remembered in the present. As John Anster pointed out in an 1835 review of *Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems*,

The readers of his new volume will scarcely be able to enjoy the poem now for the first time published, without having first fixed in their memory the former poems – the first ['Yarrow Unvisited'] written two-and-thirty years

ago, eleven years before the second poem ['Yarrow Visited'], which was written in 1814, and twenty-eight years before the third, which was written in 1830.³

Anster goes on to print all three poems in full. As Kemble reports in the *British and Foreign Review*, Wordsworth 'has come more and more to insist on regarding [his poetic works] as a *whole*' (2), and he was able to impose his preference on his critics. John Anster remarks that the 'taste of many has been formed by the poems themselves' (681–2), and one way in which the poems formed their readers' taste was by instructing them that the value of the poem was not located in the poem itself so much as in the place of the poem within the poet's whole career.

In fact, it is striking how during the years from 1819 to 1850, as Wordsworth's reputation became ever more exalted, the poems were less and less attended to. Critics often claim to be liberating the poems from the 'system' or 'theory' that had for so many years hindered their reception.⁴ But the decision to ignore Wordsworth's thoughts on poetic diction gave a licence to disregard the words of the poem. The reception of *Peter Bell* in 1819, its publication anticipated by the appearance of J. H. Reynolds's parody ('the antenatal Peter' as Shelley called it), had been lively. For John Wilson, *Peter Bell* was a poem 'equal to any of the lyrical ballads', a worthy successor to a volume of poems that had decisively changed the character of English poetry.⁵ The old-fashioned *Monthly Review*, by contrast, simply echoed the more belligerent responses to *Lyrical Ballads* and the *Poems* of 1807. *Peter Bell* is an 'infantine' pamphlet that begs the question, 'Can Englishmen write, and Englishmen read, such drivel – such daudling, impotent drivel, – as this!'⁶ Leigh Hunt in *The Examiner* was almost as disapproving. The poem was 'another didactic little horror of Mr. Wordsworth's' in which Peter Bell's reformation is signalled by his achievement of 'a proper united sense of hare-bells and hell-fire'.⁷ But Hunt's objection is to the poem's embrace of a methodistical religion of fear. He continues to think Wordsworth an excellent poet for all his 'half-witted prejudices'. The responses are various but also vigorous. By 1835 even the *Monthly Review* had accepted that Wordsworth surpasses 'all other living poets, for solemn, profound, and simple grandeur', but considered that his achievement seems spiritual rather than literary. He chooses to communicate the 'glimpses of imperishable things' that have been vouchsafed to him in language only because 'he has as yet no purer or more sublimated medium wherewith to communicate his thoughts'.⁸ He writes poems, in other words, only because he has not as yet perfected the art of

telepathy. As John Anster put it, his is 'a sacred name', and any attempt to 'play the formal critic' would amount to an irreverence (680). Only a reluctance to read the poems carefully explains the widespread feeling that the volume of 1835 showed Wordsworth at the height of his powers. According to J. A. Heraud, 'One thing is remarkable in the genius of Wordsworth; it seems subject to no decay': the *Monthly Review* insists, 'There is no falling off here: Wordsworth is as mighty, as noble, as affectionate and minute as ever'.⁹

The common representation of Wordsworth's achievement as spiritual rather than literary tended to elide two rather different notions; that Wordsworth had initiated a new religion, and that his poems lent their support to the established religion of his country. Wordsworth, for David Masson in *North British Review*, displayed 'an ardent attachment to the forms and rules of the Church of England' (496), an attachment most explicitly avowed in the *Ecclesiastical Sketches* of 1822, but it was not his attachment to the church that persuaded Masson to describe him as making converts and gathering round him a group of disciples. He shared a surprisingly common view of Wordsworth's role as messianic. John Wilson recalled a time 'when the name of WILLIAM WORDSWORTH was known but to a few devout worshippers, to whom it was a religion'.¹⁰ It was a useful elision because it enabled critics to allay any suspicion that Wordsworth's Christianity was worryingly unorthodox. In 1821 the *British Critic* had robustly pointed out that the 'Immortality Ode' was heretical: 'if the soul of each individual comes, like an emanation from the bosom of the Creator, "trailing clouds of glory", pure, heavenly, and unspotted, what becomes of original sin, and the fall of man, and, if they are abandoned, where is the atonement – and in one word, (and the consequences cannot be shorter,) where is Christianity?'¹¹ By 1850 Wordsworth's reputation as a religious teacher was so firmly established that such admissions were made with evident embarrassment. In its long and reverential review of *The Prelude*, the *Christian Remembrancer* acknowledged that the poem's 'pantheising language is not safe to imitate', but Wordsworth's proud sense of his own election, although 'not worded surely as a Christian should word it', remains 'not far from a great Christian verity'.¹²

It was not only the reviewer in the *Christian Remembrancer* who was startled by *The Prelude*. The poet, the poem revealed, had not always been a patriot: 'Wordsworth was at one time of his life a vehement democrat, an enthusiastic partizan of revolutionary France against all the rest of the world, England included'.¹³ Neither did it offer much to enhance his reputation as a poet of the domestic affections: 'His courtship and marriage are passed by

in silence'.¹⁴ But still more alarming was a failure to acknowledge the sinfulness of human nature. The *Christian Remembrancer* detected in the volume 'a pervading spirit of satisfaction with self, expressed with a fond tenderness, scarcely in accordance with received usage where *self* is the theme'.¹⁵ F. D. Maurice had once found in Wordsworth salutary proof that a concern for fellow human beings might be untainted by utilitarian habits of thought,¹⁶ but his response to *The Prelude* was oddly muted: the poem was 'the dying utterance of the half century we have passed through, the expression – the English expression at least – of all that self-building process' in which Byron, Goethe and Wordsworth were all engaged, and which recognized God only as an agent 'fitting them to be world-wise, men of genius, artists, saints'. 'For us,' Maurice concludes, 'there must be something else intended.'¹⁷ Wordsworth lived long enough, J. M. Tremenheere remarked in *Fraser's*, 'to witness the complete triumph of his reputation over the petulant criticism by which some of his early productions were assailed'.¹⁸ But the triumph was most complete when the poems themselves were all but ignored. When *The Prelude* was finally published and proved original enough to force itself on the attention, reviewers were at once respectful and disconcerted. But there were three critics in these years who responded more adequately to the challenge of Wordsworth's originality.

Hazlitt had known Wordsworth since 1798, the year of *Lyrical Ballads*, but by the time he wrote his portrait of Wordsworth for *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) the two men were at odds. It was a rupture that sharpened rather than soured Hazlitt's understanding of Wordsworth's achievement. His essay is brief and general, but explains perhaps more persuasively than any subsequent critic has managed, how Wordsworth's was at once the poetry of a man who had 'passed his life in solitary musing' and 'a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age'¹⁹. Hazlitt recognizes that Wordsworth's theory is integral with his practice, which is why the poetry 'partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age'.²⁰ Wordsworth's attack on poetic diction is for Hazlitt the aesthetic counterpart of the attack on artificial social distinctions that was the great achievement of the American and French revolutions. His essay remains the most vigorous and most succinct statement of the revolution that Wordsworth effected in the development of English poetry.

Although he was at a far remove from Hazlitt in politics (he was an eccentric Tory), De Quincey agreed that Wordsworth's poetic achievement was closely associated with the Revolution, and, like Hazlitt's, his criticism, the best of it published in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, is sharpened by a conflict between reverence for the poetry and an antagonism towards the

man, amounting in De Quincey's case to 'a rising emotion of hostility . . . too nearly akin to vindictive hatred'.²¹ But it is quite unlike Hazlitt's account in its gossipy, egotistical manner. In 1845 De Quincey contended that Wordsworth would do well to excise from *The Excursion* its first and most admired book. Margaret's case is unworthy of the response Wordsworth invites because a simple application to the War Office, had either Margaret or the Pedlar thought to make one, would have at once placed Margaret in communication with her truant husband.²² De Quincey's objection only seems footling. It sharply interrogates the insistence, first announced in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), that 'the feeling' developed in a poem should give 'importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling' (*Prose* 1: 128). De Quincey's 'Lake Reminiscences' of 1839 seem still more extravagant exercises in indecorum. De Quincey intrudes into Wordsworth's domestic privacy in a manner that, as he must have known it would, enraged the poet, pausing to comment on such things as the poet's legs – 'not that they were bad in any way which *would* force itself upon your notice' – and the 'narrowness' and 'droop' of his shoulders, while continuing to reprehend the 'gossiping taste' that 'could seek for such information'.²³ In the second of his three amusing, garrulous papers De Quincey recalls how Wordsworth had explained that it is at the moment when vigilance is relaxed that an impressive object may be 'carried to the heart with a power not known under other circumstances'. De Quincey remembers how Wordsworth went on to illustrate the thought from his own 'There was a boy', but his own essay illustrates the thought almost as powerfully. As he finishes the anecdote and quotes the lines in which the scenery is carried 'far' into the boy's heart, he feels once more the force of Wordsworth's preposition: 'This very expression, "far", by which space and its infinities are attributed to the human heart, and to its capacities of re-echoing the sublimities of nature, has always struck me as with a flash of sublime revelation'.²⁴

De Quincey first met Wordsworth in 1807. He was escorting from Bristol, where they had been visiting Coleridge, back to Keswick, Coleridge's wife and his children, amongst them Coleridge's 'beautiful little daughter'. Sara Coleridge is the one critic of the period who responds to Wordsworth's verse as sensitively as De Quincey. Her critical talents are best displayed in private letters and in her editions of her father's work. She had limited access to the periodicals in which Hazlitt and De Quincey published the bulk of their criticism, producing just two papers for the *Quarterly Review*. Her remarks on Wordsworth are buried in footnotes or delivered casually in letters to friends.²⁵ She had no time for Wordsworth's

own arrangements of his poems ('How many lovers of Wordsworth are longing for a regular chronological arrangement of the poems'), one reason for which was her emphatic preference for the earlier work. She suspected that Wordsworth was motivated by the fear of leaving the later poems 'all together, to be disregarded and deserted when the vigorous early ones were come to an end'.²⁶ Unlike most critics of the period, she was fully sensitive to Wordsworth's decline. For Hazlitt, 'Laodamia' (1814) was 'a poem that might be read aloud in Elysium, and the spirits of departed heroes and sages would gather round to listen to it!'²⁷ For Sara Coleridge it is 'as unrefined in tone as it is pompous and inflated in manner', quite unworthy to be placed alongside 'that exquisite little poem, "She was a Phantom of Delight"'.²⁸ She tended to regret Wordsworth's second thoughts, using a footnote in her edition of her father's *Biographia Literaria* to bemoan in 'There was a boy' the substitution of the line 'Of silence such as baffled his best skill' for the original, 'That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill'. The earlier line 'presents the image (if so it may be called,) at once without dividing it, while the spondaic movement of the verse ["deep silence"] corresponds to the sense'.²⁹ Wordsworth was not to find another reader so sensitive to the movement of his lines until the second half of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. David Masson, 'Wordsworth', *North British Review* 13 (August 1850), 474.
2. John Kemble, review of *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*, *British and Foreign Review* 14 (January 1843), 10.
3. John Anster, review of *Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems*, *Dublin University Magazine* 5 (June 1835), 686.
4. For example, T. N. Talfourd complains that critics 'have argued from his theories to his poetry, instead of examining the poetry itself' (*New Monthly Magazine* 14 (November 1820), 499). Compare the *Imperial Magazine* (July 1821), 597, and the *British and Foreign Review* 14 (January 1843), 18.
5. John Wilson, review of *Peter Bell*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 5 (May 1819), 132.
6. Anon., review of *Peter Bell*, *Monthly Review* 89 (August 1819), 421.
7. Leigh Hunt, review of *Peter Bell*, *The Examiner* 592 (2 May 1819), 282–3.
8. *Monthly Review* 2 (August 1835), 612–13.
9. J. A. Heraud, review of *Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems*, *Fraser's Magazine* 11 (June 1835), 706; anon. in *Monthly Review* 2 (August 1835), 612.
10. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 37 (May 1835), 701.
11. Anon., *British Critic* 15 (February 1821), 131.
12. Anon., review of *The Prelude*, *Christian Remembrancer* 20 (October 1850), 358 and 366.

13. Anon., *British Quarterly Review* 24 (November 1850), 570.
14. Anon., *Eclectic Review* 28 (November 1850), 555.
15. Anon., review of *The Prelude, Christian Remembrancer* 20 (October 1850), 372.
16. See F. D. Maurice, *The Athenaeum* 8 (19 February 1828), 113–15.
17. *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, ed. Frederick Maurice, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1881), 11: 59.
18. J. M. Tremeneheere, 'Wordsworth's Posthumous Poem', *Fraser's Magazine* 42 (August 1850), 129.
19. *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent, 1932), x1: 86–95, 89, 86.
20. *Ibid.*, x1: 87.
21. *The Works of Thomas de Quincey*, vol. x1, ed. Grevel Lindop (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), 62.
22. *Ibid.*, xv: 232.
23. *Ibid.*, x1: 55, 62.
24. *Ibid.*, x1: 75.
25. Peter Swaab has recently made them publicly available. See *The Regions of Sara Coleridge's Thought: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Peter Swaab (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
26. *Ibid.*, 99.
27. Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, x1: 90.
28. Swaab, ed., *Regions*, 89–90.
29. *Ibid.*, 60.

CHAPTER 9

English poetry, 1900–1930

Michael O'Neill

In a double sense of the phrase, Wordsworth gets under the skin of poetry in the Modernist period. If he sometimes irks, he also finds his way into the imaginative bloodstream of poems by many writers, including the poet-critic William Empson, who questions the comparative blurring in the phrase 'something far more deeply interfused' from 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' (*LB* 119; line 97) and concludes that 'there is something rather shuffling about this attempt to be uplifting yet also non-denominational'.¹ Empson's 'something', despite its hostile edge, takes its cue from Wordsworth's line in question. His reading of Wordsworth responds to the 'strangeness' and 'paradoxes' which, according to A. C. Bradley's consciousness-changing essay of 1909, must be 'The road into Wordsworth's mind'.²

* * *

The pattern of critique allied with responsiveness is pervasive. Wilfred Owen may ironize the older poet's 'Character of the Happy Warrior' in 'Insensibility': 'Happy are these who lose imagination; / They have enough to carry with ammunition' (lines 19–20), where the rhyme subjects Romantic 'imagination' to searching inspection.³ But Owen relies on Wordsworth for support in 'Strange Meeting': 'when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels, / I would go up and wash them from sweet wells, / Even with truths that lie too deep for taint' (lines 34–6). In alluding to the close of the 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', Owen reminds us how important Wordsworth's ode was for many of the poets under discussion. Harold Bloom refers to 'one of the major strains in British and American poetry, which is the continual revision of Wordsworth's *Intimations* ode', and my discussion of the responses, in particular, of Edward Thomas, Hardy, Yeats and Eliot will emphasize the ode's persistent relevance.⁴ A poem whose trajectory runs from vanished glory to residual strength, from dazzling lament to subdued consolation, provides a paradigm for later

poets' thinking not only about individual development, but also about cultural change and poetic influence. In this instance of revision, Owen raises the stakes (Wordsworth had spoken of 'thoughts' rather than 'truths', 'tears' rather than 'taint') and suggests his speaker's risky idealism; perhaps belief in such untainted 'truths' was among the inadvertent causes of war.

Byron, says W. H. Auden for his part in 'Letter to Lord Byron', supplies agreeably lordly sanction for the view of Wordsworth as a 'most bleak old bore'.⁵ Yet Auden's wording seems to pay involuntary tribute to the poet who is able to hear a 'bleak music' emanating from 'that old stone wall' (1850 *Prelude* Book 12, line 320) in one of the most charged episodes of *The Prelude*, the so-called 'waiting for horses' passage.⁶ Auden may have diagnosed the politically dubious implications of reverence for mountains. His scenarios of deserted, post-industrial landscapes, however, enter into dialogue with the poet whose positive assertions about human bonds with the natural world cover an unwillingness always to trust that nature never will betray the heart that loved her.

* * *

Other poets often respond to Wordsworth under the sign of Auden's trickily complicated understanding, in a journal entry of 1929, of 'Wordsworthian nature-worship' as 'the nostalgia for the womb of Nature which cannot be re-entered by a consciousness increasingly independent but afraid'.⁷ That is, 'nature-worship' is undertaken by a self-aware and anxious 'consciousness'. Wordsworth himself, Auden suggests, is implicitly critical of the Wordsworthian. Edward Thomas's 'Ambition' raises the question of whether early twentieth-century poets offered a critique, a gloss, or an exploration of Wordsworth. The poem, written, until the close, in unemphatic alternate rhymes, both recalls and diverges from Wordsworthian blank verse. It alludes to the Winander Boy episode in *The Prelude* (Book 4), first published as a separate episode in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), but the lines in question turn fraternity with nature into hints of something less amicable: 'a woodpecker / Ridiculed the sadness of an owl's last cry' (lines 8–9).⁸ The poem absorbs technology in the form of the plume of smoke from a train, which is depicted as carrying with it 'a motionless white bower / Of purest cloud' (lines 15–16). The transformation belongs to a conscious fiction of a latter-day spot of time when 'Time / Was powerless' (lines 18–19) and it appeared that 'no mind lived save this 'twixt clouds and rime' (line 21) since 'Omnipotent I was' (line 22). Thomas soon recognizes that 'the end fell like a bell' (line 23), echoing Keats's return to the sole self in 'Ode to a Nightingale'⁹ and that 'The bower was scattered' (line 24).

The effect is intricate and not wholly resolved by Michael Kirkham's view that the lines 'present the Wordsworthian unitary view – mind and object dissolved into each other – as a delusion' and that the pun on 'rime' puts Thomas's '*romantic self*' in its place, by evoking, then deflating, an over-confident trust in poetry's power.¹⁰ For one thing, the poem never fully expels, even as it fails wholly to endorse, that '*romantic*' or Wordsworthian self; for another, the Keatsian echo reminds us that the Romantics often questioned their '*romantic selves*'. The poem may mistrust the Wordsworthian intuition of times when 'The mind is lord and master – outward sense / The obedient servant of her will' (*1850 Prelude* Book 12, lines 222–3), but its unstated and undiscovered '*ambition*' suggests that the Wordsworthian affirmation is a necessary point of departure. Wordsworth conveys the perplexed feelings of a mental power dependent on sense if it is to experience self-validating disorientation and dread. 'Nutting' is possibly the text with which Thomas's poem has closest connections in the older poet's work. It alerts us to the precarious life enjoyed by bowers in Wordsworth's poetry; there, with something close to sexualized violence, the speaker inflicts 'merciless ravage' on the natural scene, destroying his self-created idyll, until 'the green and mossy bower' is among the elements of nature that 'patiently gave up / Their quiet being' (*LB* 220; lines 43–6).

Wordsworth's speaker enacts a revengeful judgment on nature for failing to appease, for all the beauty of its 'quiet being', some energy of restless subjectivity. Such an energy informs poem after poem by Thomas. A case in question is the close of 'Old Man', a poem of unfulfilled quest, one leading towards a childhood that is annulled as it is recalled, and towards an endlessness beyond annulment that is negatively sublime. A post-Wordsworthian investigation into 'remembering' (line 28) takes us into and along an 'avenue', a coming to, that is all cancelled possibility and yet at the same time an opening into what is 'nameless' and 'dark'. This suggests a Wordsworthian illimitability that has been 'Worn new', as Thomas has it in another poem ('Words', line 35):

No garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush
Of Lad's-love, or Old Man, no child beside,
Neither father nor mother, nor any playmate;
Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end.

('Old Man', lines 36–9)

It is part of the darkly trespassing relationship Thomas's poetry has with Wordsworth's that the final phrase echoes the Romantic poet's Miltonic

evocation at the climax of the Simplon Pass episode, where the Alpine scenery seems 'The types and symbols of Eternity, / Of first, and last, and midst, and without end' (*1850 Prelude* Book 6, lines 639–40).

* * *

Dennis Taylor comments that 'What is difficult to determine precisely is how Hardy complements or refutes Wordsworth'.¹¹ The dialectical move that sees later writers as questioning Wordsworthian 'harmony and integration' is likely to overlook the fact that 'discord and shock' are 'already potentially present in much of Wordsworth's poetry'.¹² In his unapologetic 'Apology' at the head of *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), Hardy invokes Wordsworth's 'Intimations' in support of his right to query 'certain venerable cults': 'such disallowance of "obstinate questionings" and "blank misgivings" tends to a paralysed intellectual statement'.¹³ Wordsworth's 'questionings' and 'misgivings' find their way into Hardy's gloomier meliorism, much as the older poet's sinuous blank verse turns into the balladic abruptness of 'During Wind and Rain'. In this poem, spots of time compete with forces intent on erasure, Hardy enacting the process through his rhyming. So, in the last stanza the 'high new house' – metaphorically, of poetry itself – resists time's cruelty, caught in the last line, 'Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs' (lines 22, 28). Wordsworth, the inveterate carver of initials and verses on rocks, knows about writing's desperate hope that it can save something from temporal wreckage, as in his vision of the Arab Dreamer who seeks to save the stone of Euclidean mathematics and the shell of poetry from 'the fleet waters of a drowning world' (*1850 Prelude* Book 5, lines 137), waters that have their own apocalyptic appeal. 'During Wind and Rain' brings out into the open what is guarded in Wordsworth. Nature's destructiveness of human traces is the poem's last word, but it is not quite its final chord because of the rhyme with 'high new house', which reawakens the memory of human value.

Wordsworth's apparent optimism could annoy Hardy. Peter J. Casagrande records that, when reading Walter Raleigh's assertion in *Wordsworth* (1903) that 'Pain and evil, as Wordsworth saw them, did not shake his faith in the laws of happiness', Hardy added the brusque marginal comment, 'Why?'¹⁴ Yet whether Wordsworth himself always believes in the laws of happiness is questionable. Does he when, in 'She dwelt among th'untrodden ways', he writes, 'But she is in her Grave and, oh! / The difference to me' (*LB* 163; lines 11–12)? Hardy recalls that 'difference' at the close of 'The Walk': when alive, Emma 'did not walk with me / Of late' and now she is dead, he is left 'By myself again', asking 'What difference, then?'

He answers, ‘Only that underlying sense / Of the look of a room on returning thence’, the anapaestic last line leaping with a sudden, half-scaled sense of the ‘difference’ made by death. The two poets’ lines and poems refuse a simply linear relationship.

* * *

Ezra Pound recalls staying at Stone Cottage in Canto 83 and Yeats ‘hearing nearly all Wordsworth / for the sake of his conscience but / preferring Ennemoser on witches’.¹⁵ While Yeats may have preferred Joseph Ennemoser’s Romantic-era *History of Magic* (1819), he may have recalled that Wordsworth, too, has moments when he claimed ‘we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul’ (lines 46–7). That moment of near ecstasy from ‘Tintern Abbey’ left its mark on Yeats’s defiant assertion in ‘To Ireland in the Coming Times’ that, by contrast with ‘Davis, Mangan, Ferguson’, ‘My rhymes more than their rhyming tell / Of things discovered in the deep, / Where only body’s laid asleep’ (lines 18, 20–2).¹⁶ Yeats’s apologia reshapes contemplative inwardness into public assertion. Romantic natural supernaturalism turns into the esoteric magic of Irish Literary Revivalism’s self-appointed leader.

Yeats’s relationship with Wordsworth is shot through with often creative tensions and contradictions. He calls him ‘that typical Englishman’ in a passage from ‘A General Introduction for My Work’ (1937) that picks a fight with Wordsworth for publishing a famous sonnet to Toussaint ‘in the year when Emmet conspired and died, and he remembered that rebellion as little as the half-hanging and the pitch cap that preceded it by a half a dozen years’.¹⁷ Wordsworth’s indifference is English insensitivity to the sufferings of the Irish at its worse. Yet Wordsworth is among those writers who gave Yeats his language: ‘everything I love’, he writes in near vicinity, ‘has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate’.¹⁸ Wordsworth has been manoeuvred into a productive, dangerous place, caught in the cross-hairs of a Yeatsian quarrel with the self.

Edward Dowden, professor of English literature at Trinity College Dublin, seemed to Yeats and his father a minor version of the Wordsworth felt to have strangled his gift by empty-witted prosing, the sad figure who serves as tragic exemplum at the close of ‘Anima Hominis’ (1918). There, Yeats imagines the successful poet thinking to himself in the following way: ‘Surely, he may think, now that I have found vision and mask I need not suffer any longer’. He clearly has himself in mind, and carries on in a strain evocative of newly discovered harmony of purpose, while suggesting that such a discovery is finally delusory: ‘in the evening

flight of the rooks he may discover rhythm and pattern like those in sleep and so never awaken out of vision. Then he will remember Wordsworth withering into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted, and climb to some waste room and find, forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust'.¹⁹

Like much of Yeats's finest writing, this passage is able to locate refreshment at the heart of necessary bitter suffering. 'Wordsworth withering into eighty years' may be an example of a dreadful alternative, yet it is written by a poet who has wished in his past to 'wither into the truth' ('The Coming of Wisdom with Time', line 4). Withering may not have helped Wordsworth, but to wither is essential if Yeats is continually to remake the self. Moreover, the prospect of finding sustenance, even if only a bitter crust, that was 'forgotten there by youth', carries ambivalent suggestions: the crust may be bitter because forgotten by youth or it may be bitter and overlooked by youth. Wordsworth is becoming a shadow self for the middle-aged Yeats.

For Yeats, Dowden is an example of bad faith, who 'at last cared but for Wordsworth, the one great poet who, after brief blossom, was cut and sawn into planks of obvious utility'.²⁰ Yet he reads Wordsworth in Dowden's seven-volume 1892 Aldine edition, preceded by a preface and memoir.²¹ The fruits of the encounter with Wordsworth and, perhaps, of Dowden's writing about Wordsworth, begin to show in the poetry. Dowden draws attention to the significance of Wordsworth's ordering of poems in 1815 and after, commenting that 'the order of the poems *within each group* is Wordsworth's order, and it is carefully considered with a view to artistic effect'.²² Yeats would have taken due note of this, given his own increasing obsession with ordering, most evident in *The Tower*. Again, Dowden writes of Wordsworth as a poet who dreaded 'unbridled democracy' and yet felt 'enthusiasm' on occasions when he felt 'the popular cause was the cause of freedom'. Dowden quotes Wordsworth thus: 'I have no respect whatever for the Whigs', he said late in life, and added half in joke and half in earnest, 'but I have a great deal of the Chartist in me'.²³ The pronouncements of Yeats's Whig-hating, wild old wicked man are not far away.

Yeats felt Wordsworth's 'syntax' lacked 'natural momentum' and that the Romantic poet was 'always destroying his poetic experience, which was of course of incomparable value, by his reflective power'.²⁴ But, in doing so, he posits Wordsworth as both anti-self and shadow, the Romantic poet undergoing his own unconscious version of the Yeatsian contest between the primary (or given) and the antithetical (or constructed). The failure of the antithetical often marks poetic success in Yeats, the moment, that is, when the system breaks down and we return to the self unable to breathe the soul's rarefied air. Such a moment occurs at the end of 'Meditations in Time of Civil

War' in a complicated way, where Yeats clings to the 'antithetical' with a 'primary' obstinacy as he asserts 'The abstract joy, / The half-read wisdom of daemonic images, / Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy' (VII: 38–40). 'Shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing Boy' (lines 67–8) in Wordsworth's 'Intimations' ode. Yeats asserts a defiant continuity between 'growing boy and 'ageing man'. His 'abstract joy' is an ironized version of the 'joy' that Wordsworth longs to recapture, while the 'half-read wisdom of daemonic images' holds wry self-mockery and residual self-assertion in uneasy balance. Yeats allows this unsatisfactory wisdom its own gruelling authenticity when set against the wisdom invested by Wordsworth in the child, that 'best Philosopher' (line 110). In 'Among School Children' his visionary apprehension of Maud Gonno – 'She stands before me as a living child' (line 24) – suggests Wordsworth's influence since in the latter's 'Lucy Gray' 'some maintain that to this day / She is a living child' ('Lucy Gray', lines 57–8). Wordsworth strays about Yeats's work in haunting ways.

* * *

For T. S. Eliot, Wordsworth serves, again, as whipping boy and source of deeper inspiration. Eliot hears in Wordsworth's allegedly unhaunted verses a poet who 'went droning on the still sad music of infirmity to the verge of the grave'.²⁵ But Wordsworth is there in *Four Quartets* and earlier, whenever Eliot dwells on the 'moment', that post-Paterian but also post-Wordsworthian phenomenon that arrests us in the rose or hyacinth garden.

In 'Animula', the initial quotation, "Issues from the hand of God, the simple soul", establishes kinship with the 'Intimations' ode, for all its direct allusion to Dante's *Purgatorio*, canto 16.²⁶ The opening lines offer a touchingly down-at-heel version of 'Fallings from us, vanishings; / Blank misgivings of a Creature / Moving about in worlds not realized' (lines 146–8). For those unrealized worlds, Eliot substitutes 'a flat world of changing lights and noise', 'flat' suggesting some other three-dimensional reality while serving as his flattened version of Wordsworth's 'Blank'. And for 'Moving about', Eliot has his child 'Moving between the legs of tables and of chairs', at the mercy of existence and of sensory stimuli, 'Eager to be reassured, taking pleasure / In the fragrant brilliance of the Christmas as tree'. In other Eliot poems such a 'fragrant brilliance' would aspire towards the status of a numinous hint or glimpse; here it has a disconsolate air, since its fleeting shining connects with no suggestion of a 'visionary gleam' (line 56), as the 'Intimations' ode calls it.

As the child 'Confounds the actual and the fanciful', he seems the heir of Wordsworth's 'little Actor' as 'he cons another part' in the ode (line 102). For Eliot, growing up is an education in awareness of spiritual error: 'The heavy

burden of the growing soul / Perplexes and offends more, day by day'. In Eliot the 'growing soul' is its own burden; in 'Intimations' the soul shall have her 'earthly freight' (line 129); the freight weighs on the soul, but though 'Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life' (line 131), 'almost' allows for a saving gap; Eliot suggests that the 'drug of dreams' – arguably, his shorthand for Romanticism – comes into being because of a desire to escape 'the pain of living'. Eliot's chime of 'seems' and 'dreams' replays the key rhyme between 'seem' and 'dream' (lines 2, 4) at the start of the 'Intimations' ode, but gives dream short shrift. For Eliot, living is not lit up by memory, as it is by Wordsworth, who rejoices 'that in our embers / Is something that doth live' (lines 133–4). Rather, life is a question of fear, repression, denial, confirmation of original sin, whereas Wordsworth's ode seems to deny the idea of original sin.

When Eliot reworks his opening line, he offers a starker description of the simple soul that could not be in sharper contrast with the idea of trailing clouds of glory; it is 'Irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame', as though born in essential imperfection. Eliot sees life as coming into being after death; a flurry of rhyme brings the matter to a head in the line, 'Living first in the silence after the viaticum', the viaticum being the last rites administered to the dying. Two modes of vision come into conflict: Eliot's Anglo-Catholic modernism with its intercessions, its suspicion of the inner light; Wordsworth's displaced Protestantism with its valorization of the self. Eliot ends with a fantastical, wry litany of those who did display the awful daring of a moment's surrender; Wordsworth ends on a resolutely individualist note: 'To me the meanest flower . . .' (line 205). Eliot sees the self as isolated, in need of law; only the community of prayer can save us. For Wordsworth, the medium of salvation is his own memory and imagination. For Eliot, Wordsworth might well be 'that one who went his own way'. For both poets, birth is the start of trial: 'Pray for us now and at the hour of our birth', intones the reverend Eliot with possum-like mischief; death is when we begin to live, birth is a process of fearing to live. For Wordsworth, 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting' (line 58). And in ways that tally with other readings offered above, in each poet's end is the other's beginning.

Notes

1. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; London: Penguin with Chatto, 1961), 183.
2. A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (1909; London: Macmillan, 1965), 101.
3. *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. Jon Stallworthy (London: Hogarth Press, 1985): all further references to Owen's poems are from this edition (see 123 and 124 for references to Wordsworth).

4. Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 29.
5. *The English Auden*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1977), 183.
6. *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (1904); new edn., ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford University Press, 1936). Wordsworth is quoted from this edition, which prints the 1850 version of *The Prelude*, the version familiar to the poets discussed in this chapter (the 1805 version was first published in 1926).
7. *English Auden*, 298.
8. Edward Thomas, *The Annotated Collected Poems*, ed. Edna Longley (Tarnet, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2008): all further references to Thomas's poems are from this edition.
9. See *ibid.*, 191.
10. Michael Kirkham, *The Imagination of Edward Thomas* (Cambridge University Press, 1986); quoted in Thomas, *Annotated Collected Poems*, 191.
11. Dennis Taylor, 'Hardy and Wordsworth', *Victorian Poetry* 24 (1986), 443.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *The Poems of Thomas Hardy: A New Selection*, ed. T. R. M. Creighton (London: Macmillan, 1974), 309: all further references to Hardy's poems are from this edition.
14. Peter J. Casagrande, 'Hardy's Wordsworth: A Record and a Commentary', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 20 (1977), 225.
15. Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (London: Faber, 1968).
16. *W. B. Yeats*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Oxford University Press, 1997): all further references to Yeats's poems are from this edition.
17. *Ibid.*, 385.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *W. B. Yeats, Selected Criticism and Prose*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Pan/Macmillan, 1980), 180.
20. *W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies*, ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner's, 1999), 193.
21. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (London: Hart-Davis, 1954), 590.
22. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Edward Dowden, 7 vols. (London: Bell, 1892), 1: ix.
23. *Ibid.*, 1: li.
24. Yeats, *Letters*, 710, 590.
25. T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933; London: Faber, 1964), 69.
26. T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 1969); all further references to Eliot's poems are from this edition.

*Wordsworth now**Maureen N. McLane*

'Read as much of Wordsworth as does not seem unutterably dull', Ezra Pound proclaimed in 'A Retrospect'.¹ Despite Pound's general ambivalence about, if not distaste for, Wordsworth, it might be argued that Wordsworth (and not, say, Whitman, Poe or Baudelaire) is the unacknowledged legislator of the anglophone avant-garde since 1800. Wordsworth famously announced his poems, after all, as 'experiments'. As recent North American writing suggests, Wordsworth has remained a resource for experiment even when – sometimes precisely when – he emerges as a target of avant-garde critique. This chapter hopes to liberate – for poets as well as common readers – Wordsworth from 'Wordsworth'.

It is striking that, however much he has been historicized, psychoanalyzed, deconstructed, queered, eco-criticized, eulogized, interred and revived, Wordsworth in many ways remains 'Wordsworth', the elaborately consolidated figure who emerges in the reviews and poetics (his own and others') of the early nineteenth century – the gigantic yet (or therefore) satirizable figure whom Shelley murders to dissect in numerous poems ('Alastor', 'Sonnet: To Wordsworth' and 'Peter Bell The Third'); whom Thomas Love Peacock gleefully parodies in his send-up of Alice Fell and Harry Gill; whom Byron targets (among others) in his witty sallies in the dedication to *Don Juan*. From his first forays into the public, Wordsworth was reckoned a good poet to read and perhaps an even better poet to read against; he remains peculiarly resonant.

Consider a recent essay by the American poet and critic Tony Hoagland, 'Recognition, Vertigo, and Passionate Worldliness: The Tribes of Contemporary Poetry' (2010):

Here are two well-known descriptions of what a poem is, and does, one by Wordsworth, one by Stevens:

TYPE A: Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.

TYPE B: The poem must resist the intelligence / Almost successfully.²

The Wordsworth–Stevens opposition serves as a heuristic for Hoagland's enquiry into a 'poetry of perspective' (reconstructive, reparative, 'part of the history of rational humanism') versus a 'poetry of derangement', in which a 'poetics of vertigo is employed to represent the modern environment – the maelstrom of information, of public data, of 24/7 overload; the omnipresence of media manipulation'.

Wordsworth here indexes a poetics of 'rational humanism', a fair gloss on Wordsworth's project, which by 1815 had become quite explicitly a project of disciplinary humanization – to 'extend the domain of sensibility for the delight, the honour, and the benefit of human nature' ('Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815', in *Prose* III: 84). Yet Wordsworth, 'poet of perspective', also responded to those stimuli Hoagland sees as fuelling the 'poetics of vertigo' – 'the maelstrom of information, of public data' overwhelming Britain in 1800. Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is in part a sustained diagnosis of, and attack on, the 'savage torpor' (*LB* 746) of contemporary British life, that 'craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies' (*LB* 746). As Nikki Hessell has trenchantly argued, Wordsworth imagined his poetry as 'the opposite of news'; his project arose precisely in dialogue with, and often in resistance to, medial as well as industrial transformations.³ In response, Wordsworth offered not an 'attention-deficit poetry' (to invoke Hoagland's phrase) but an attention-surplus poetry.

In Hoagland's essay, 'Wordsworthian' appears a ready-to-hand adjective: 'None of the poets discussed here is Wordsworthian, recollecting in tranquility, restoring order to the dizzy modern condition. None aims to soothe the self-justifying mind'. Rather than defend Wordsworth against this possible vulgarization, I wish to register the rhetorical and diagnostic efficacy of the 'Wordsworthian' tag (one should note too that Hoagland has a subtle grasp of Wordsworth, which these extracts do not fully represent). If the 'name of the author' reciprocally constitutes 'the work' (as Foucault argues), then part of the work of 'Wordsworth' (from the early nineteenth century up to our own moment) is to mark out this space of a potentially pernicious poetics, a poetics of a self-satisfyingly humane, triumphalist, pacifying and pacified liberalism.

Consider Bob Perelman's 'Fake Dream: The Library' (from *Ten to One*):

January 28: We were going to
have sex in the stacks. We

were in the 800s, standing eagerly
amid the old copies of the

Romantics. Looking at the dark blue
spines of Wordsworth's *Collected*, I thought

how the intensity of his need
to express his unplaced social being

in sentences had produced publicly verifiable
beauty so that his subsequent civic

aspirations seemed to have importance enough
for him to become Poet Laureate

and how his later leaden writing
upheld that intensity and verifiability, only

instead of searching wind and rocks
and retina for the sentences of

his social being, he chirped his
confirmed lofty perch to other social

beings in lengthy claustrophobic hallelujahs for
the present moment. There are devices

to keep it still, long enough,
and he had learned them. Rhyme

was a burden, crime was unambiguously,
explainably wrong, time had snuck around

behind him.⁴

Poetry and critique, poetry as critique: Perelman revives Wordsworth in his full avant-garde and regressive dimensions. This complex critical engagement with Wordsworth (and with other romantics) surfaces elsewhere in Perelman's work, including the poem whose title takes wing from that famous phrase in Wordsworth's 1800 Preface: 'The Real Language of Men'.

Despite its savage critique, Perelman's poem might be seen as Wordsworthian, not (just) anti-Wordsworthian, for part of the surprising pathos and tenderness of Perelman's lines arise from his sympathy with Wordsworth's pressured present and ultimate belatedness: 'claustrophobic hallelujahs for the present moment' fade into the realization that 'time had snuck around/behind him'. And the poem's final swerve into obscene 'magic marker graffiti' in the 'men's room'⁵ rings a wonderful variation on a critical poetics of 'the real language of men'.

Perelman's lines distill aspects of what we might call 'the case of Wordsworth': his supposed false consciousness; the blighted trajectory of his career after the miraculous decade, 1797–1807; the escalating bad faith of his legibility, of his 'intensity and verifiability'. Wordsworth's contemporaries similarly diagnosed him, of course – Keats as the poet of the 'egotistical sublime' and later, with Robert Browning, as a renegade and sell-out, as 'The Lost Leader'. Perelman's meditation stands, then, in a long line of Wordsworthian reckonings; it also chimes with the ideological critique of Romanticism launched by the New Historicist critics of the 1980s. For indeed, if Wordsworth had long served as the Bible of a Vernacular Higher Criticism, it is not surprising that scholarly iconoclasts would begin by shattering the pious aura around Wordsworth – giving us a differently contextualized and conceptualized though still titanically powerful poet.

Jerome J. McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1985) and Marjorie Levinson's landmark studies of Wordsworth⁶ were among the high-water marks of this critical moment. Late twentieth-century poets were similarly thinking with and against Wordsworth, as attested by Charles Bernstein's verse essay 'Artifice of Absorption' (1987):

The
uncritical absorption of a poem of William
Wordsworth, for example, entails an absorption
of Romantic ideology that precludes an historically
informed reading of the poem. In order for a
sociohistorical reading to be possible, absorption
of the poem's own ideological imaginary must be
blocked; the refusal of absorption is a
prerequisite to understanding (in the literal sense
of standing under rather than inside). Indeed,
absorption may be a quality that characterizes
specifically Romantic works.⁷

Bernstein here takes aim at depoliticized aesthetics and un- or a-historical readings of poetry; he characterizes Romantic works – with their absorptive

designs on us, their sublimation of ‘History’ into ‘Nature’, their trumpeting of self-legislating subjectivity – as those most likely to engender such problematic, absorptive responses. Whether Bernstein (or other critics of this version of Romanticism) was correct, I will leave suspended: what is most relevant here is the movement of Bernstein’s reasoning – ‘William / Wordsworth, for example’.

‘Wordsworth’ here, as elsewhere, means ‘[English] Romanticism’, and to some extent – despite the dethroning of the ‘Age of Wordsworth’, the revivification of Scott and Byron studies, the return of the novel to Romanticist scholarship – he still does. Bernstein’s verse essay raises the question: what would a ‘critical absorption’ of Romanticism, of Wordsworth, look like? Some answers appear: Perelman’s and Bernstein’s works are two. For in their deep engagement with poetry and ideology, with the politics of language, the political unconscious of form, the social location of the subject, they are in fact profoundly Wordsworthian. So too one might note that the discursive, analytic language of Perelman’s and Bernstein’s poems is indistinguishable from the language of prose (albeit a sometimes technical prose): a Wordsworthian dictum, here achieved.

I have briefly limned the ongoing ‘case of Wordsworth’ as articulated by poets affiliated with a self-consciously critical poetics (both Bernstein and Perelman were associated with so-called ‘Language Writing’ in the 1980s and 1990s); yet one might consider as well the work of the contemporary playwright Young Jean Lee, whose first play, *The Appeal* (2004) is a bravura homage to and critique of the Wordsworth problematic. Featuring Wordsworth, Coleridge, Dorothy, with a late walk-on by Byron, *The Appeal* is a scabrously witty carnivalesque on Wordsworthian poetics and its lived situation:

WORDSWORTH: What is a poet?

COLERIDGE: You and me are poets, Wordsworth, because we write poetry [.]

WORDSWORTH: That’s a simple answer, Coleridge.

COLERIDGE: What’s the more sophisticated one.

WORDSWORTH: Well, I think a poet is someone who has more sensitivities than other people. (Act 1, Scene 2)

DOROTHY: Hi Coleridge.

COLERIDGE: Hi Dorothy, hi Wordsworth.

WORDSWORTH: Hi Coleridge.

I don’t know what, but I think that nature is making me have a nature inside that writes poetry. Uhh . . . oh, I remember. So I take one look at these refreshing

beets and the good ones start pouring out of me in measured strain and it made me like a holy priest, blessed for the day. And then, uhh . . . everyone will remember it because I wroted it down. And then, uhh . . . oh yeah that thing inside me again, but I don't remember what it did. Uhh . . . oh yeah that's right my voice was saying stuff and then there was an inside voice that was better and it echoed the outside, inferior voice and I liked how it sounds. Listen to my theory. There is an outside one and an inside one, and they match.⁸ (Act 1, Scene 3)

These hilariously dopey yet precise exchanges show a profound grasp of Wordsworthian poetics – the ‘more than usual organic sensibility’ of the poet here announced in the slack, stuttery, often ungrammatical idiot-savant vernacular of the early twenty-first century. The logic of Wordsworthian voice, memory, transcription, recollection, all get their due and comeuppance.

Also registered here is another aspect of Wordsworth's legacy: his collaborative and sometimes expropriative energies. Where Wordsworth is, Coleridge will be as well, and also, of course, Dorothy, that perennial ‘second self.’ ‘Wordsworth’ names that whole set of relations, not just *Lyrical Ballads*, *The Prelude*, etc. *The Appeal* is in part an excavation of, and meditation on, the supposedly repressed contents of ‘Wordsworth’: as when Lee's stage directions have Wordsworth, Coleridge and Dorothy masturbating furiously to the music of Matmos.

Lee's project relentlessly explores the status of common life and the vernacular. In one scene, Dorothy and Byron are drinking, and she asks him to recite one of his poems:

BYRON: Uh, sure.
Ching Chong Chinaman
Chinkety-Ching
Wing Wong Wang Wung
Bing Bang Bing . . .⁹

This foray into zany racist quatrains is not just a delirious slap in the face of public taste or a satire on decorum and verisimilitude; it raises as well the question of linguistic register, social location and what Coleridge called ‘ventriloquism’.

The problematics of Wordsworthian ‘ventriloquism’ continue to haunt a poetry of potentially ‘common life’ (*LB* 743), a poetry written out of ‘a selection of the real language of men’ (*LB* 741).¹⁰ This is necessarily so. (‘The common’ and ‘the real’ are agonistically produced, not given, though in some eras ‘the common’ can feel like, might appear as, a received communal inheritance.) Recall Coleridge's extended meditation

on Wordsworth in chapters 14 and 17 of *Biographia Literaria*: one problem with Wordsworth's commitment to the language of 'low and rustic life' (LB 743) was that, once it was sifted through the sieve of Wordsworthian consciousness, there was no longer any rustic specificity to that language. (Another problem for Coleridge was the nature of rustic consciousness, which he felt was obviously underdeveloped compared to Wordsworth's: thus he indicted Wordsworth's poetics here more on cognitive and conceptual rather than linguistic grounds.) When Wordsworth did simulate notionally 'rustic' speech in *Lyrical Ballads* and elsewhere, Coleridge – like many readers since – found the results intermittently forced, offensive or ludicrous.

This is not the place to defend Wordsworth from (neo-)Coleridgean detractors: certainly his speaking in the voice of, say, a dying Native American woman, an idiot boy, a mad mother, a garrulous retired sailor, a moralizing shepherd and so on, can seem a kind of slumming. This reader continues to find these poems and other ventriloquial moments powerful albeit vexed acts of imagination, intriguing experiments in the dramatic monologue inflected by republican, humanist commitment. Rather than bury or praise Wordsworth – since he is sure to continue to elicit both responses – it seems more productive to consider him as a crucial node in a longer arc of modern poetic engagement: from Thomas Gray's condescending yet attentive salute to 'mute inglorious Miltons' in his 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (1751) through Wordsworth's experiments in ventriloquism (including auto-ventriloquism) to Walt Whitman's explicitly democratic reparative poetics: 'Through me many long dumb voices' (*Leaves of Grass*, part 24). Further poets in this line – committed to democratic-humanist experiment in the socio-political location of voice – might include William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks. More recently, the linguistically and intellectually surcharged work of Cathy Park Hong, Thomas Sayers Ellis, Juliana Spahr, Joshua Clover and Terrance Hayes explores the fortunes of the contending real languages of men and women in a globalized moment. These last are not poets typically considered Wordsworthian: they could be.

Late twentieth-century battles over 'who speaks?' have only sharpened our sense of the problem of expropriation-in-lyric, of ventriloquism as dodgy appropriation: the charge against Wordsworth might be posed as this – he was engaging in a kind of rustic minstrelsy. So too, the ceaselessly productive and educative encounters in Wordsworth's work with pedlars and vagrants and shepherds on 'the public way' might be seen to promote a pernicious, ideologically charged vision of unequal exchange: Nigel Leask

among others has vividly documented the linguistic complexities of Wordsworth's negotiation of social distinction. The 'real language of men' is an abstraction produced under the sign of social distinction and unevenly distributed cultural capital: Wordsworth's standard and standardizing poetic English was precisely not the real language of the dialect of the Lake District, nor the real language of (say) Robert Burns's poetry, which toggled brilliantly between literary Scots and a standard literary English. Wordsworth channelled the legacy of 'peasant poetry' in ways distinct from, and often regressive when compared to, Burns. Yet one might still see Wordsworth's salute to 'low and rustic life' as an index of poetry's reckoning with an emergent, potentially democratic aesthetic.

Wordsworth was of course strongly committed to some versions of hierarchy and mediation. Yet his extended meditations on the 'purpose' of his poetry, his commitment to a poetry of 'common life' and to 'the real language of men' (albeit a selection of it) chime with broader democratic, vernacularizing impulses in the period: they also establish the field on which poetry is still written and debated. Wordsworth famously eschewed poetic diction: in his Preface he criticized Thomas Gray and praised the simplicity of old ballads, 'The Babes in the Wood' in particular. Yet Wordsworth's project was – as John Guillory has brilliantly suggested – a complex transformation of Gray's own: to refunction the vernacular for poetry, to preserve the specificity of poetry over and against ascendant prose genres, and to preserve and remodel the institution and cultural capital of poetry against and in light of 'Science', 'philosophy', political economy and other new discourses.¹¹

That Wordsworth can still serve as a manual for contemporary experimental poetics is attested in, for example, Lisa Robertson's book *The Weather* (2001), for which 'Wordsworth's *Prelude* served as a guidebook for the rustic'.¹² In her alternation of sections in a prose medium and those in free-verse lyric lineation (all subsumable under the category 'poetry'), Robertson continues the Wordsworthian enquiry: 'What is poetry?' Here – as in Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*, William Carlos Williams's *Spring & All*, Mark Strand's and Charles Simic's prose poems – poetry might well appear in prose garb.

Robertson undertakes a kind of *Prelude* for the twenty-first century, when the 'lesson of / the weather' has become an increasingly fearsome thing, when 'the Climate of History' – to invoke Dipesh Chakrabarty – forces us to reckon with a longer, complex environmental situation, in which the era of 'Man', the so-called 'Anthropocene', threatens to extinguish itself on a pyre of its own making.¹³ The poetry of 'common life' Wordsworth espoused will now reckon with the total threat to the commons and to the ecological web

underlying and sustaining human-all-too-human life. 'It is too late to be simple' (76), indeed: yet it is also too late to be merely complex.

Robertson gives the famous Wordsworthian definition of the poet as 'a man speaking to men' a pointedly gendered, critical twist: 'a lady speaking to humans from the motion of her own mind is always multiple' (and note how this phrase recalls Wordsworth's taxonomizing of his poems under 'moods of [his] own mind'). *The Weather* explores and sustains several aspects of Wordsworthian mood and modality, not least in its emphasis on friendship, sociability and sociality (the *Prelude* was known in the Wordsworth household as the 'Poem to Coleridge'): 'It is weather, and it is for friendship', she writes, and concludes one section, 'This one's now for Judy' (50). Alive to discourse on the weather (via BBC weather reports and shipping news), preoccupied with cloud study (via Luke Howard, early nineteenth-century taxonomist of clouds, and John Constable, painter thereof), Robertson's tropologies torque Wordsworth's own. Wind and cloud and flower become always already and simultaneously natural, social and discursive zones, fields for ranging in and through, rather than discrete phenomena for contemplation, reification or metaphorization. One finds here a sustaining and a transforming of a Wordsworthian deictic of pointed presence, 'But there's a Tree, of many one' (from the 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', line 51) becoming another kind of phenomenological co-presence in Robertson:

Slowly and patiently the tree
Crumbles open. The park is present
With us, point like. (62)

Instead of Wordsworth's provisionally focalized subject, we encounter Robertson's dispersed evocations:

Where can a lady reside? Next the earth and almost out of reach. Almost always electrified. To surfaces of discontinuity. In light clothes and coloured shows. By the little flower called the pansy. (59)

Robertson's 'little flower called the pansy' can't but channel Wordsworth's 'Pansy at my feet' from the 'Immortality Ode' (line 54): both pansies sponsor poetic thought (*pensée*), register poetic and political mood, and speak to the condition of what Pablo Neruda called 'Residence on Earth' (*Residencia en La Tierra*). The pansy at my feet / doth the same tale repeat: Where can a lady reside? By and with Wordsworth's pansy, in its full discontinuous complexities.

Wordsworth is, then, undead; he continues to establish one essential horizon for *poiesis* in a variety of Englishes; he is in fact, *pace* Pound, not

even dull – or perhaps we might say that his supposed dullness is a route to new desires and unforeseen experiments. Wordsworth's renovation of the commonplace, and the common place, finds new destinations in North American poetries – as in Robertson's 'Give me hackneyed words because / they are good' (14). And if we are more prepared to hear Wordsworth in such poets as (say) Robert Frost, or Elizabeth Bishop, or Seamus Heaney, or Derek Walcott, or Alice Oswald, we should also be prepared to hear the intimations of Wordsworth's 'philosophic song' (to invoke Simon Jarvis) in a range of other poetries, less obviously 'Wordsworthian' in their surfaces yet just as 'Wordsworthian' in their intensities and commitments. Wordsworth, then, is 'something evermore about to be': or, now.

Notes

1. Ezra Pound, 'A Retrospect' (1918), www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237886 (accessed 4.1.2014).
2. Tony Hoagland, 'Recognition, Vertigo, and Passionate Worldliness', *Poetry* (September 1, 2010), www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/239968 (accessed 3 November 2014).
3. Nikki Hessell, 'The Opposite of News: Rethinking the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* and the Mass Media', *Studies in Romanticism* 45 (3) (2006), 331–55.
4. Bob Perelman, *Ten to One: Selected Poems* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), xiv–xv.
5. *Ibid.*, xv.
6. Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem* (University of Chicago Press, 1978) and *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).
7. Charles Bernstein, 'Artifice of Absorption', in *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 21.
8. Young Jean Lee, *The Appeal, in Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven and Other Plays* (New York: Theater Communications Group, 2009), 109–10, 105–43.
9. *Ibid.*, 130 (Act I, Scene 4).
10. See Maureen N. McLane, 'Do Rustics Think?', in *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population and the Discourse of the Species* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 43–83.
11. See John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85–133.
12. Lisa Robertson, *The Weather* (British Columbia: New Star, 2001), 80: further references are cited in the text.
13. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry* 35 (winter 2009), 197–222.

PART III

Literary traditions

*Eighteenth-century poetry**Kevis Goodman*

Several pages into the 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' (1815), Wordsworth pauses to offer 'a hasty retrospect of the poetical literature of this Country for the greater part of the last two centuries' (*Prose* III: 67). The ostensible point of this interpolated history is to prove the essay's thesis that great poetic talents never receive due recognition during an author's lifetime, whereas poets who achieve or aspire to fame in the eyes of their contemporaries are unlikely to compose great or enduring work. The brilliance of the first, the 'select spirits', will shine on for posterity, Wordsworth argues; other lesser spirits, having 'blazed into popularity', leave 'scarcely a trace behind them' (67). It was undoubtedly a comforting argument, intended to account for the 'unremitting hostility' (80) that had met the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* seventeen years earlier, as well as the criticism of *The Excursion* in 1814. The resulting retrospect is not exactly a hasty one. Taking up over one half of the 'Essay, Supplementary', it constitutes Wordsworth's participation in one of the period's major new historiographical genres, the literary history, whose object was the formation of a canon of modern vernacular classics. This project had recently been pioneered by two monumental works of literary history: Thomas Warton's *The History of English Poetry*, published in three volumes from 1774 to 1781, and Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, which appeared in ten volumes between 1779 and 1781. Like Warton and Johnson, Wordsworth is interested in establishing a tradition of English poetry; unlike them, he also wants to inscribe himself into it – as the prospect of his own retrospect.

Combing through the previous centuries of 'poetical literature', Wordsworth singles out the elect and the reprobate of his literary history. The 'select Spirits' include Shakespeare, whose genius as a poet survived, Wordsworth argues, even though the dramatist in him 'stooped to accommodate himself to the People' (*Prose* III: 67–8), and Milton, whose *Paradise Lost* addressed 'Fit audience . . . though few' and failed to sell well to readers

during his lifetime (70). Also praised are James Thomson, for *The Seasons* (discussed below), and Thomas Percy, the collector (and, in spots, author) of the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), for following ‘his genius into the regions of true simplicity and genuine pathos’ (75). Chief among the demoted are Pope, who, Wordsworth writes, should have ‘confided more in his native genius’ but instead, ‘seduced by over-love of immediate popularity . . . bewitched the nation by his melody, and dazzled it by his polished style’, and Dryden, as occasionally ‘vague, bombastic, and senseless’ (72–3). Toward the end of the list, the minor poets ‘Roscommon, and Stepney, and Phillips, and Walsh, and Smith, and Duke, and King, and Spratt – Halifax, Granville, Sheffield, Congreve, Broome, and other reputed Magnates’ are introduced briefly as evidence of the folly of Samuel Johnson who, by including them in his *Lives*, gave them this undeserved reputation, and, furthermore, to prove ‘what a small quantity of brain is necessary to procure a considerable stock of admiration, provided the aspirant will accommodate himself to the likings and fashions of his day’ (79).¹

With that last flourish, Wordsworth sets up his conclusion: in contrast to those who ‘accommodate’ public taste, ‘every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed’ (*Prose* III: 80). Yet who, we might ask, created the taste by which William Wordsworth enjoys?

* * *

With the essay’s depreciation of Pope and ‘polished style’ (*Prose* III: 72), its appreciation of what Wordsworth frequently called ‘our elder writers’ (by which he generally meant poets before the Restoration), and its sustained celebration of pathos and sublimity, Wordsworth stepped into a debate whose terms had been well defined for him by eighteenth-century criticism. One side received especially polemical articulation in the *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* by Joseph Warton (Thomas’s brother and collaborator), first published in 1756. This exercise in sustained damnation-with-faint-praise argued that Pope was not ‘at the head of his profession’ because the species of poetry he pursued – moral or satiric verse characterized by ‘wit’ and ‘sense’ – is ‘not the most excellent one of the art’.² ‘*Good sense and judgment* were his characteristic excellences, rather than *fancy and invention*’, Warton argues, and since Pope’s ‘imagination was not his predominant talent’, he ‘became one of the most correct, even, and exact poets that ever wrote, polishing his pieces with a care and assiduity’. In the process, ‘whatever poetic enthusiasm he actually possessed, he withheld and stifled’.³ ‘He is the great Poet of Reason, the *First* of Ethical authors in verse’, and

this, for Warton, provides 'the surest road to an extensive reputation', since it lies 'more level to the general capacities of men, than the higher flights of more genuine poetry'.⁴ Warton was all about higher flights: 'The Sublime and the Pathetic are the two chief nerves of all genuine poesy', he declared, drawing – as would Wordsworth's 'Essay, Supplementary' after him – on John Dennis's 1701 *Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, and asking (but it is not really a question): 'What is there transcendently Sublime or Pathetic in Pope?'⁵

Irked by Warton's *Essay*, Samuel Johnson rose to Pope's defence in his *Life of Pope*, which answered Warton's rhetorical question with one of its own: 'If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?'⁶ Although Johnson does not exempt Pope from critical comments – none of the eminences in the *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* escapes unscathed – he maintained that Pope's 'good sense' was not inimical to his 'genius'.⁷ More importantly for Johnson, Pope had continued the improvement and cultivation of the English language whose first stirrings Johnson detects in Waller and Denham but whose firmer establishment he attributes to Dryden, credited with 'the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre, the refinement of our language, and much of the correctness of our sentiments'.⁸ In this defence of refinement, carried out across the *Lives*, Johnson's target was not only Joseph Warton's *Essay* but also Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*, a more recent rival text, for Warton's *History* maintained that 'original genius, and . . . native thought were intimidated by metaphysical sentiments of perfection and refinement' – and, in short, that enlightenment was inimical to 'Romantic' poetry.⁹ It was no accident that Warton's *History* started at the close of the eleventh century and stopped short at the commencement of the eighteenth, while, with the exception of Milton, Johnson's *Lives* consisted entirely of Restoration and eighteenth-century poets, thereby picking up almost exactly where Warton left off. Unlike the Wartons, Johnson tends to be suspicious of sublimity. Either it falls short of its mark and devolves into bathos, as in his cutting description of Thomas Gray's 'cumbrous splendor' – Gray 'has a kind of strutting dignity, and is tall by walking on tiptoe' – or it succeeds but for that reason proves dangerous, as in Johnson's uneasy account of Milton: 'the appearances of nature and the occurrences of life did not satiate his appetite of greatness' and 'reality was a scene too narrow for his mind'.¹⁰

At stake in these debates, as James Chandler and others have argued, was the felt pressure to define not only the nation's literary canon but also that entity which the canon was supposed to display: the nation's characteristic *genius* – recall that 'native genius' that Wordsworth accuses Pope of

ignoring.¹¹ The mid-century progress pieces, which precede but anticipate the Warton position – most notably Thomas Gray’s ‘The Progress of Poesy’ and William Collins’s ‘Ode on the Poetical Character’ – pursue the same end, although with more thwarted urgency, tracing (Gray) or taking for granted (Collins) the westward migration of the abstract figure of Poetry from Greece and Rome to England. In both cases, however, progress turns into impasse, as Gray and Collins confront the question of whose *body* that abstraction was to inhabit after it lodged in Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. ‘Oh! Lyre divine’, Gray’s poem beseeches, ‘what daring Spirit / Wakes thee now?’ Similarly, Collins’s first-person speaker pursues Milton with ‘trembling feet’ only to find ‘o’returned th’inspiring Bowers / Or curtain’d close such Scene from ev’ry future View’.¹² Percy’s *Reliques* were also addressing this collective vocational crisis; for Percy, as for Thomas Warton, the way forward involved looking back, returning for inspiration not to the Mediterranean classics but to a ‘Northern’ tradition of balladry and oral verse.

This, then, is the debate that Wordsworth enters in the ‘Essay Supplementary’, weighing in on the side of the Wartons and against Samuel Johnson, and in support of imagination, pathos and sublimity over polish, sense and reason. Johnson, depicted ‘mid the little senate to which he gave laws’ is subjected to Wordsworth’s strongest satire (*Prose* 111: 75). Given the polarized or Manichean terms of the opposition, it is striking that there was one exception, a poet upon whom *all* are agreed: James Thomson, author of the extraordinarily popular loco-descriptive poem, *The Seasons* (1730). Warton praises Thomson for ‘paint[ing] from nature itself, and his own observations’, unlike those poets who (like Pope, unsurprisingly) ‘copied only from each other’.¹³ Johnson chimes in by praising Thomson for looking ‘on Nature and on Life, with the eye which Nature bestows only on a poet’.¹⁴ Having celebrated Thomson’s eye, both critics fault his diction, which Warton calls ‘harsh and inharmonious’ and Johnson damns as ‘in the highest degree florid and luxurious’, ‘sometimes . . . filling the ear more than the mind’.¹⁵ Wordsworth’s ‘Essay, Supplementary’ gives Thomson a prominent place in its retrospect, identifying the publication of *The Seasons* as the most important literary event in the period between *Paradise Lost* and the publication of Johnson’s *Lives*, where the retrospect suddenly stops short. (This abrupt, early terminus, almost three and a half decades before the ‘Essay, Supplementary’, could not have been arbitrary and certainly was convenient. By concluding his retrospect in 1781, Wordsworth can omit William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785), *the* poet and poem most responsible for identifying poetry with the language of conversation – a decade before Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s verse of the

1790s.) Calling *The Seasons* a 'work of inspiration' (72), Wordsworth explains that until Thomson the poetry of that period 'does not contain a single new image of external nature; and scarcely presents a familiar one from which it can be inferred that the eye of the Poet had been steadily fixed upon his object' (73). Thomson, Wordsworth continues, worked to reverse this situation by teaching 'the art of seeing', or at least 'further[ing] the proficiency of his pupils'. Yet – and the qualification is predictable in the wake of Warton and Johnson – 'notwithstanding his high powers, he writes a vicious style; and his false ornaments are exactly of that kind which would be most likely to strike the undiscerning' (74).

This account may add little to the judgment of his predecessors, but the phrasing helps to focus the central problem that Thomson's example of descriptive poetry left to all of his readers, however much they otherwise disagreed. Wordsworth recognizes that poetic seeing is an '*art*' and not a transcription of reality; elsewhere, responding to George Crabbe, he protests at the reduction of verse to 'mere matters of fact; with which the Muses have just as much to do as they have with a Collection of medical reports, or of Law Cases'.¹⁶ At the same time, it is the degree and kind of artifice in Thomson's diction that he objects to: its 'false ornaments'. Yet eye and ear cannot be separated, for the 'eye of the Poet' and the objects it 'fixes' can only emerge in the verbal matter of style: 'Remember', the 'Essay, Supplementary' exhorts, 'that the medium through which, in poetry, the heart is to be affected, is language; a thing subject to endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations' (*Prose* III: 82). Some ornament, some artifice, is needed, it seems, but how much, and what sort – and how does the poet curb those 'endless fluctuations and arbitrary associations' that inhere in language? The question is everywhere pressing for Wordsworth, whose description of his project in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* anticipated the terms of his discussion of Thomson in 1815: 'I have at all times endeavored to look steadily at my subject, consequently I hope it will be found that there is in these Poems little falsehood of description' (*Prose* I: 132). It is precisely here, in the question of managing the 'medium' of language, that Wordsworth draws nearer to his antagonist, joining Johnson in a common project: identifying what Johnson had called 'the genius of our tongue'. I explore two of their most famous prefaces on this question, before returning, in conclusion, to Thomson and the 'art of seeing' in verse.

* * *

'The genius of our tongue' appears in Johnson's Preface to *A Dictionary of the English Language*, the massive lexicographical undertaking that drew

Johnson into a quest for ‘a settled test of purity’ and for the “wells of English undefiled”, free of the ‘spots of barbarity impressed so deep in the English language that criticism can never wash them away’.¹⁷ Impurities have many sources or wells of their own for Johnson. Often marks of social, regional or national difference, they include the residues of orality evident in dialect and inconsistent orthography; words that have entered English from foreign languages; ‘encroachments’ made hourly by ‘the tropes of poetry’ which ‘deflect’ words from their original sense; and especially the diction ‘of the laborious and mercantile part of the people’.¹⁸ This last ‘spot’ Johnson calls ‘fugitive cant’ – ‘casual and mutable . . . terms formed for some temporary or local convenience’, which ‘cannot be regarded as any part of the durable materials of a language’. There is an elegiac quality to Johnson’s pursuit of purity and permanence since, as he recognizes, ‘while our language is yet living . . . words are hourly shifting their relations’, and no dictionary can ‘embalm’ them.¹⁹ An immutable language is, after all, a dead language. Or, since a durable and pure language must be ‘very little modified by customs of particular places’ – as he explains in his Preface to *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, where one sees the intimate connections between Johnson’s lexicography and his poetics – it would end up being a language so disembodied as to be ‘nobody’s’ (no single body’s) language.²⁰

A considerable gulf would seem to separate Johnson’s writings on language and poetry from Wordsworth’s, and that difference, which Wordsworth worked to enforce, has long governed our practices of periodization and curricular decisions. Johnson’s *Life of Dryden*, after all, argues for a distinct ‘poetical diction’ and for the difference between the language of poetry and prose,²¹ while Wordsworth famously insists, from the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* onwards, that ‘the language of a large portion of every good poem . . . must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose’ (*Prose* 1: 133). Johnson wants to ban from poetry and prose alike the speech of ‘the laborious and mercantile part of the people’ in order to fix (in both senses – to secure and to correct) the English language. Wordsworth turns to the manners and language of ‘low and rustic life’ for the very things Johnson finds missing and indeed impossible there: ‘durable’ and ‘permanent forms’ (124).

Yet Wordsworth’s bid to adopt the language of low and rustic life carries with it a well-known parenthesis: that language is ‘adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust)’ (*Prose* 1: 124). *Purity* again: with that keyword of eighteenth-century discussions of poetic diction, Wordsworth seems to

cleave to a version of Johnson's ideal; and his 'real language of men' does not look so different from the 'conversation above grossness and below refinement' that Johnson celebrated in his Preface to *Shakespeare*. Certainly he practices acts of 'selection' – the word recurs throughout the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* – no less than Johnson's lexicography and poetics. This parenthesis has won Wordsworth considerable criticism from his own time to ours, and has been read as hesitancy about offending his reading audience or, less charitably, as hypocrisy, a failure of practice to live up to preaching, and as a falsification of his subject matter. Yet here the contrast with Johnson is illuminating, for Wordsworth's contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads* do not purify *context*: they determinedly render the historical particularities, the details of class and condition that have no place in Johnson's 'general nature', shorn of 'adventitious particularities'.²² Their characters have bodies, often prominently so (one thinks of Simon Lee's thick swollen ankles and thin dry legs), and they come shot through with shards of history: the old man of 'Old Man Travelling' going to Falmouth to take a last leave of his mariner son dying in a hospital; the garrulous retired sea-captain of 'The Thorn', who has returned home from overseas but not to his native town; the eponymous speaker of 'The Female Vagrant', whose family has lost their cottage as a consequence of enclosure; the shepherd mourning the last of his flock; and so on. The challenge for readers has been the mismatch between their bodies and voices: the 'very language of men', spoken by his rustics, vagrants and other figures at the margins of existence, sounds very like the language of William Wordsworth.

This disjunction is not, or not necessarily, an inconsistency or failure of commitment on the poet's part; that it has seemed so may be a misunderstanding encouraged by Wordsworth's own term, 'adopted'. In the *Lyrical Ballads* and later poems, such as 'Resolution and Independence', Wordsworth does not *adopt* the language of the men and women that he encounters and represents – rather, he mediates and remediates their speech.²³ He *mediates* it by interposing his variously obtuse or uncomprehending first-person speakers and listeners, so that others' words are always overheard, always to some degree 'far-off', like the song in the 'Solitary Reaper'. He *remediates* it as he renders oral speech in print, for only that way can the 'very language of men' become 'the language of prose' (written discourse, by definition). These two processes are different but occur simultaneously; they are also both entirely self-conscious. Both acknowledge that the educated, economically sufficient poet does not belong to the low or rustic lives he mingles with. It may be, moreover, to Wordsworth's credit that he does not pretend to; he treats with considerable irony moments in which his first

person speakers assert, or rather impose, their sympathies with others. The figure of the poet remains, as David Simpson has put it, 'wanting to belong but never quite belonging', as Wordsworth 'implacably refute[s] any image of harmony and any prospect of exact description of judgment'.²⁴ The poet, as the 1800 Preface famously described him, is a 'man speaking to men' but not necessarily *with* them, and the critical difference is something known to Wordsworth, not just his later readers.

The knowledge of the difference between the poem's purifying medium and the truly 'real language of men' was, perhaps, something Wordsworth learned from his reading of eighteenth-century poetry and poetics. This point is at least suggested by the other most sustained reference to James Thomson, beyond the 'Essay, Supplementary' of 1815. This allusion occurs in Book 8 of *The Prelude*, whose title not accidentally also begins with the word 'Retrospect' ('Retrospect. Love of Nature leading to Love of Mankind'). In this book-length hiatus between the confusion of London (Book 7) and turmoil of the French Revolution (Book 9), *The Prelude* revisits the poet's childhood games (Books 1 and 2) and stages a distant encounter with an abstracted figure of a Lake District shepherd:

When I have angled up the lonely brooks
 Mine eyes have glanced upon him, few steps off,
 In size a Giant, stalking through fog,
 His Sheep like Greenland Bears: at other times,
 When round some shady promontory turning,
 His Form hath flash'd upon me, glorified
 By the deep radiance of the setting sun.

(1805 *Prelude* Book 8, lines 398–405)

'[B]lessed be the God / Of Nature and of Man that this was so, / That Men did at the first present themselves / Before my untaught eyes thus purified', the poet exclaims several lines later (lines 436–9), with rather discomfiting piety, apparently to reinforce the argument asserted in the title of Book 8. *Purity again*. Yet this is a cannier moment than may first appear, because the fog, which so enlarges and romances the shepherd, is from Thomson's *The Seasons*. There, in 'Autumn': 'Indistinct on Earth, / Seen thro' the turbid Air, beyond the Life, / Objects appear; and wilder'd, o'er the Waste / The shepherd stalks gigantic'.²⁵ In other words, if the child first looked at men through what he recalls as nature's purifying forms and substances, the adult poet now looks at them through the dense 'medium' of Thomson's verse. The difference – and therefore the fact that there can be nothing entirely natural about purity – is one lesson that James Thomson's 'art of seeing' taught his most 'proficient' of pupils.

Notes

1. Wordsworth knows and mentions – but strategically downplays – the fact that Johnson had little role in the selection of authors included in the *Lives of the Poets*. Decisions about inclusions in and exclusions from these volumes were based on copyright law and made by the group of London booksellers who commissioned Johnson to write prefaces to their editions of each poet's work. Thus, in a way that Wordsworth does not acknowledge, the formation of a canon of important English authors was intertwined with the history of copyright in Britain, including the competition between the London booksellers and the Edinburgh bookseller they viewed as a usurper of their property. For an account of these skirmishes, see the editor's introduction to Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on their Works Poets*, 4 vols., ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), especially I: 1–14.
2. J. Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope, in Two Volumes*, 4th edn., corrected (London, 1782), I: iv.
3. *Ibid.*, I: 477–8.
4. *Ibid.*, II: 479.
5. *Ibid.*, I: x.
6. Johnson, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, IV: 79–80.
7. *Ibid.*, IV: 62.
8. *Ibid.*, II: 155.
9. T. Warton, *The History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century*, 4 vols. (London, 1774), II: 463.
10. Johnson, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, IV: 182–3; I: 287.
11. James Chandler, 'The Pope Controversy: Romantic Poetics and the English Canon', *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1984), 481–509. It is crucial to realize that during the eighteenth century the word 'genius' was undergoing a semantic transformation from its older and original sense, which referred to the guardian spirit of a place (*genius loci*), to a newer now familiar one, indicating an individual's extraordinary ability or creative inspiration.
12. Gray, 'The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode' (lines 112–13), and Collins, 'Ode on the Poetical Character' (lines 75–6), in Roger Lonsdale, ed., *Gray and Collins: Poetical Works* (Oxford University Press, 1989).
13. Warton, *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, I: 42.
14. Johnson, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, IV: 103.
15. Warton, *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, II: 43; Johnson, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, IV: 104.
16. Arthur Pollard, ed., *Crabbe: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 290.
17. Johnson, Preface to *A Dictionary of the English Language, 1755*, in Johnson on the *English Language*, ed. Gwin J. Kolb and Robert DeMaria, vol. XVIII of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 74, 95, 76.

18. *Ibid.*, 107, 103.
19. *Ibid.*, 89, 105.
20. Johnson, Preface to *Shakespeare, 1765*, in *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo, vol. VII of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 69. This point is explored and developed by Janet Sorensen in *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 93–9.
21. Johnson, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, II: 124.
22. Johnson, Preface to *Shakespeare*, 65, 70.
23. On mediation and remediation (the representation of one medium within another) in *Lyrical Ballads*, see Celeste Langan and Maureen N. McLane, 'The Medium of Romantic Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, ed. James Chandler and Maureen N. McLane (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 239–62, esp. 245–6.
24. David Simpson, *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25.
25. Thomson, 'Autumn' (lines 734–7), in *The Seasons and The Castle of Indolence* ed. James Sambrook (Oxford University Press, 1991).

*The ballad tradition**Daniel Cook*

No poet in the eighteenth century was unaffected by balladry. As a city dweller he or she would have listened to salacious broadsides chanted through the streets or else offered for sale on stalls or in stationers' shops. Country folk could not help but hear stories resound through their local inns and taverns. And all writers, at least since the appearance in 1765 of Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, along with Thomas Evans's *Old Ballads* (1777–84), Joseph Ritson's *Ancient Songs* (1790) and the like, would have been familiar with published collections of ballads and songs. The works included in such collections catered to a wide range of interests: love and war, nuns and demons, mad mothers and outlaws, the natural and the supernatural. Indeed, as Robert Mayo has suggested, by 1798 'almost anything might be called a "ballad"'.¹ Generically, the ballad was often grouped with lyrical poetry, pastoral, romance, and even the epic. Dismissive commentators nevertheless associated it with the folk, the non-literary. Such a distinction between the elite (poetry) and the popular (the ballad) remains with us. An avid reader of the expanded 1794 edition of Percy's collection in particular, Wordsworth himself admits, in a defiant tone, 'I do not think that there is an able writer in verse of the present day who would not be proud to acknowledge his obligations to the *Reliques*': 'for myself, he confesses, 'I am happy in this occasion to make a public avowal of my own'.²

Scholars and poets alike routinely commented on the 'simplicity' of the early ballads and songs. In the introduction to *Scottish Tragic Ballads* (1781), John Pinkerton, for one, revels in the seeming artlessness of the ancient balladeers and minstrels who were unencumbered by learning and the mercantile pressures of a literary marketplace. As Percy writes in the Preface to his collection, many pieces therein have 'a pleasing simplicity, and many artless graces, which in the opinion of no mean critics have been thought to compensate for the want of higher beauties'.³ In *The Spectator*, Joseph Addison hailed the 'majestic simplicity' of the well-worn favourite 'Chevy

Chase', and used it as a salient example in his larger argument that verse might succeed, indeed best succeeds, with a clarity of style and thought.⁴ Aaron Hill followed suit in *The Plain-Dealer*, calling the poem 'a plain and noble Masterpiece of the *natural* Way of Writing, without Turns, Points, Conceits, Flights, Raptures, or Affectations of what Kind soever'.⁵ 'It shakes the Heart by the mere Effect of its own Strength and Passionateness', he continues, 'unassisted by those flaming Ornaments, which as often *dazzle*, as *display*, in Poetry'. Addison, one must note, also criticized certain familiar ballads precisely on the same grounds for which he praised them. In one of the most popular traditional numbers in the eighteenth century, 'The Two Children in the Wood', Addison detected a 'despicable Simplicity' and such a 'Poorness of Expression' that 'quoting any part of it would look like a Design of turning it into Ridicule'.⁶ Samuel Johnson firmed up this line of thought in his influential *Life of Addison* much later, in 1781. Despite approving of the pleasing lack of 'bombast or affectation' in 'Chevy Chase', Johnson couldn't excuse what he felt was its 'chill and lifeless imbecility'.⁷ Ironically, it must be said, such so-called lifeless works inspired a steady stream of sprightly parodies in the second half of the eighteenth century and beyond, such as Johnson's witty lampoon of the basic ballad measure of alternating iambic tetrameter (four-beat) and trimeter (three-beat) lines in a quatrain rhyming a-b-c-b:

I put my hat upon my head,
And walk'd into the Strand,
And there I met another man
Whose hat was in his hand.

Wordsworth quoted the lampoon in the Preface to the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* in a bold attempt to offset the lingering distaste for balladic simplicity. He juxtaposes Johnson's ditty with one of what he calls 'the most justly admired stanzas' of 'The Babes in the Wood' (i.e. 'The Two Children in the Wood' or 'Children in the Wood'):

These pretty Babes with hand in hand
Went wandering up and down;
But never more they saw the Man
Approaching from the Town. (LB 758)

In each case, the stanza follows a straightforward metrical pattern but, to Wordsworth's mind, Johnson's lines alone merit contempt as they express triviality and, worse still, they have nothing to 'excite thought or feeling in the Reader'. Simplicity demands seriousness. Ballads carry the spirit of the people; spoofs demean it.

When Wordsworth and Coleridge began work on their joint poetry collection, the *Lyrical Ballads*, then, they had to navigate around entrenched debates about the literary value of ballads and popular poetry. Although it met a handful of harsh reviews, when the first version of the collection appeared in 1798 some commentators expressly praised the ways in which the authors brought the art of balladry up to date while retaining its folksy vigour. In particular, the *Monthly Review* noted that ‘The style and versification are those of our ancient ditties; but much polished, and more constantly excellent’.⁸ When we talk of Wordsworth’s engagement with the ballad tradition, to put it another way, we ought to bear in mind that it is the modern, imitative strain with which he is working. Certainly his familiarity with many of the well-known tales owes much to the modern antiques found in Percy’s *Reliques* and other collections. The bouncy rhythm of Percy’s take on ‘The Babes in the Wood’ (‘These pretty Babes with hand in hand / Went wandering up and down’) reverberates throughout Wordsworth’s ‘Lucy Gray’:

The storm came on before its time,
She wander’d up and down
And many a hill did Lucy climb
But never reach’d the Town. (LB 171; lines 29–32)

Nevertheless, it would be oversimplifying matters, I think, to endorse Charles Wharton Stork’s long-standing claim that ‘the ballads Wordsworth preferred were tame and dilute eighteenth-century versions’.⁹ As G. Malcolm Laws Jr rightly argues, ‘it is not always easy to distinguish between literary ballads and ballads composed for folk assimilation or for the broadside press’ largely because ‘all ballad composition is imitative in that it is based on conventional patterns’.¹⁰ Clearly, though, authors and commentators alike would have read Wordsworth’s pieces within the purview of modern balladry. Indeed, another important influence on Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott, later called the literary ballad of the period ‘a new species of poetry’ in his retrospective ‘Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad’, which appeared in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1830). By labelling his works *lyrical* ballads, and referring to them as *experiments*, no doubt Wordsworth had a similar sense of artistic amelioration in mind.

Only a dozen of the twenty-three poems included in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* can be clearly designated as ballads: eleven by Wordsworth and one by Coleridge. Only five of the Wordsworth poems printed therein follow one of the most common ballad forms (a-b-a-b): ‘Lines Written at a small distance from my House’, ‘Anecdote for Fathers’, ‘Lines Written in Early

Spring' and the paired 'Expostulation and Reply' and 'The Tables Turned'. We might also include 'We Are Seven', which largely follows the same pattern save for the final stanza, and 'The Convict', which has a much looser metre. The more critically acclaimed pieces instead take a more sophisticated measure, as in the case of 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', which, Wordsworth himself notes, is composed 'in a more impressive metre than is usual in Ballads' (*LB* 757). With the expanded 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* we can add to the list major works such as 'Hart-Leap Well', 'Strange Fits of Passion', 'Lucy Gray', 'The Fountain' and 'A Poet's Epitaph', along with some more minor pieces. Many of the remaining entries in the *Lyrical Ballads* employ a doubled or otherwise expanded version of the standard ballad quatrain. 'Rob Roy's Grave', an 1807 work, is a rare example of a relatively long composition in the four-by-four stanza common to old ballads; however, at 120 lines, it is barely a fifth of the length of Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Evidently Wordsworth favoured the rhythmic possibilities made available when varying the lyrical strand of balladry in a relatively small space. His early writing in particular experiments with such notable models as Thomas Chatterton's pseudo-ancient poems published under the pseudonym Thomas Rowley, a putative fifteenth-century priest. Chatterton's *oeuvre* crackles with violence and vituperation, whether in a Saxon battle or a modern-day food fight in the city. But since the early 1780s his magnum opus, the 1,365-line verse drama *Ælla*, has often been abridged to one of its minstrel's songs:

O! synge untoe mie roundelaie,
 O! droppe the brynie teare wythe mee,
 Daunce ne moe atte hallie daie,
 Lycke a reynynge ryver bee;
 Mie love ys dedde,
 Gon to hys death-bedde,
 Al under the wyllowe tree.¹¹

Here Chatterton mimics Thomas Tickell's 1725 piece 'Lucy and Colin' – which Percy reprints in the third volume of *Reliques* – and encrusts it with elaborate mock-medievalisms. In one of his juvenile pieces, 'Dirge. – Sung by a Minstrel', Wordsworth flits between Tickell's sentimental sing-songing ('One mould with her, beneath one sod, / For ever now remains') and Chatterton's affected minstrelsy in an unsatisfying mishmash of metrical patterns and modern and ancient diction:

List! – the bell-Sprite stuns my ears
 Slowly calling for a maid

List! – each worm with trembling hears
And stops for joy his dreadful trade.

For nine times the death-bell's Sprite
Sullen for the Virgin cried
And they say at dead of night
Before its time the taper died.

Mie love is dedde
Gone to her death-bedde
Al under the w[yllowe] tree.

(EPF 566)

The experimentation continued throughout his career. Wordsworth certainly made notes from *A Collection of Old Ballads* (1723–5) and seems to have worked through the set when composing 'The White Doe of Rylstone' in 1807 through to publication in 1815.¹² The poem, Wordsworth claims, was also strongly influenced by 'The Rising of the North', a notable historical thriller, in Percy's collection. In an entry in his commonplace book, moreover, Wordsworth copied out some stanzas of an antique ballad found in David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs* (1769) that recounts the gruesome tale of an abandoned mother and a murdered infant, a common literary theme in Britain and Germany alike:

She has houked a grave ayont the sun,
O and alas-a-day, O and alas-a-day
And there she has buried the sweet babe in.
Ten thousand times good-night and be wi' thee.¹³

One ballad that survives among Wordsworth's early manuscripts, written apparently at the age of 17, recounts in mournful quatrains the broken-hearted death of Mary of Esthwaite:

And soon these eyes shall cease to weep
And cease to sob my breath
Feel – what can warm this clay cold hand
– Her hand was cold as Death.

To warm her hand a glove they brought,
The glove her Murtherer gave;
She sigh'd – (her mother shriek'd) the sigh
That sent her to her grave. –

('And will you leave me thus alone' (EPF 386; lines 49–56))

This early foray into the blood-curdling tale notwithstanding, Wordsworth largely disregarded what were in fact two major strands of the ballad tradition: the macabre and the supernatural. As he declares in the second part of 'Hart-Leap Well',

The moving accident is not my trade,
 To curl the blood I have no ready arts;
 'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,
 To pipe a simple song to thinking hearts.

(LB 136; lines 97–100)

Such a claim marks a decisive departure from his main source of ballads and songs, Percy's *Reliques*, which drips with the blood and guts of war, and follows the travails of ghosts, demons and other dastardly creatures. Many of Wordsworth's ballads actually have more in common with early eighteenth-century works like 'Lucy and Colin', in which Tickell ably rationalizes the otherworldly elements of the popular and much imitated 'William and Margaret' (i.e. 'Fair Margaret and Sweet William'). Wordsworth's foray into ballad writing nevertheless coincided with a new craze for Gothicism in the second half of the century.

The most prominent proponent of the Gothic ballad was undoubtedly Gottfried August Bürger. His modern updates of 'The Child of Elle', 'The Friar of Orders Gray', 'Sweet William's Ghost', a Scottish favourite, and other tales taken from Percy's *Reliques* mesmerised scores of readers when they appeared in translation in the 1790s. Half-a-dozen English versions of 'Lenore' came in 1796 alone, including a notable one by the Poet Laureate Henry James Pye, and others by Walter Scott, W. R. Spencer and J. T. Stanley. In 1796 a new journal, the *Monthly Magazine*, published the most popular take on the tale, a lively and sentimental piece by William Taylor of Norwich. Even Wordsworth preferred it, so he claimed, to the original German.¹⁴ Indeed, much debate concerns whether Wordsworth considered Bürger an important influence on his balladry or whether he actively rejected him. Perhaps it is most helpful to think of Wordsworth's engagement with German Gothicism as a process mediated through the English sentimentalism then in vogue. Certainly, in late 1798 Wordsworth expressed strong dissatisfaction with Bürger's style: 'I do not perceive the presence of character in his personages. I see everywhere the character of Bürger himself'. He continues: 'It seems to me, that in poems descriptive of human nature, however short they may be, character is absolutely necessary, &c.: incidents are among the lowest allurements of poetry' (EY 234). Wordsworth nevertheless admired Bürger's 'manner of relating' and found it 'almost always spirited and lively, and stamped and peculiarized with genius' (234). But he tellingly summed up Bürger as merely 'the poet of the animal spirits'. 'I love his "*Tra ra la*" dearly', he concedes, 'but less of the horn and more of the lute – and far, far more of the pencil' (EY 235). Spencer, as a translator of 'Lenore', made similar criticisms of Bürger's use of words merely for sound, most garishly the 'trap, trap, trap' of

the horses' hooves.¹⁵ By 1815, when he wrote 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface', Wordsworth had all but given up on Bürger, favouring instead the songs of Percy, Burns and Cowper.

But what of the earlier influence of Bürger on the *Lyrical Ballads* at the turn of the century? Three Bürger poems in particular have been routinely grouped with Wordsworth's works. 'Des Pfarrers Tochter von Taubenhain', a breathless tale of seduction followed by infanticide and retribution, was translated loosely into English as 'The Lass of Fair Wone' by Taylor in 1796 and Charlotte Dacre in 1805; it has been frequently compared with Wordsworth's ballad spoof 'The Idiot Boy'. Bürger's 'Lenore', in which a ghostly lover returns from the dead to carry his betrothed back to the tomb, is most often discussed alongside 'The Thorn', along with 'Ellen Irwin', 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', 'Hart-Leap Well' and countless others. A final Bürger piece, 'Der wilde Jäger', tells the story of a callous huntsman who faces eternal punishment. Walter Scott's famous 1796 retelling, 'The Chase', together with Bürger's original, has been read with 'Hart-Leap Well' most readily. Arguably the clearest reminiscences of 'Lenore' occur in 'The Idiot Boy' and of 'The Lass of Fair Wone' in 'The Thorn', even if, as Albert B. Friedman says, Wordsworth's pieces can scarcely be called 'horror ballads'.¹⁶ 'The Lass of Fair Wone' is far more explicit in its treatment of infanticide than Wordsworth could ever be:

Forth from her hair a silver pin
With hasty hand she drew,
And prest against its tender heart,
And the sweet babe she slew.¹⁷

Wordsworth's blustering narrator in 'The Thorn' instead speaks over the mother's silence in terms that, inadvertently or otherwise, only further emphasize her possible guilt: 'kill a new-born infant thus! / I do not think she could' (*LB* 84; lines 223–4). Whereas Wordsworth largely shied away from the gorier aspect of Anglo-German balladry, in 'The Idiot Boy' he toyed with the comic potential of sentimental Gothicism. As Stephen Parrish puts it, the poem burlesques 'the macabre, terrifying, midnight ride of Bürger's ghostly lovers' in the blundering ride of Wordsworth's idiot who clings 'happily' to his pony, pursued by his anxious mother'.¹⁸ One might wonder, in passing, if Bürger's demonic horseman is not itself a parody of the unfeasibly chivalrous heroes of the ballad tradition. Certainly the opening stanza of 'The Idiot Boy', as Mary Jacobus observes, 'teasingly echoes the exclamatory refrains of Taylor's *Monthly Magazine* translation' – 'The moon is bryghte, and blue the nyghte' – in its economical use of

description common to ballads: ‘Tis eight o’clock, – a clear March night, / The moon is up – the sky is blue’.¹⁹ In some other works in which Wordsworth mimics Bürger’s characteristically abrupt beginnings and endings we see different, non-comic effects: the simple repetition in the first line of ‘Goody Blake and Harry Gill’ creates from the start a bold tone of despair (‘Oh! what’s the matter? what’s the matter?’ (*LB* 59; line 1)), while the stark opening of ‘The Thorn’ puts strong visual emphasis on the poem’s subject in the manner of Blake (‘There is a thorn; it looks so old’ (line 1)). Incidentally, the metre of ‘The Thorn’ follows Bürger’s rapid speed, perhaps as part of an elaborate parody, or merely in keeping with generic expectations. In either case, Wordsworth’s superior artistry becomes apparent when he creates out of the Bürger measure a more flexible line, as in ‘Hart-Leap Well’, which uses the standard English five-beat pentameter. Walter Scott’s translation (‘The Chase’) from ‘Der wilde Jäger’ provides a ready contrast: ‘Earl Walter winds his bugle horn; / To horse, to horse, halloo, halloo!’ Wordsworth’s slower metre, along with the varying clause lengths, opens up sufficient space for thoughtfulness amid the unfolding story:

‘Another Horse’. – That shout the Vassal heard,
And saddled his best steed, a comely Grey:
Sir Walter mounted him; he was the third
Which he had mounted on that glorious day. (*LB*, 133; lines 5–8)

To be sure, even if they had their roots in oral poetry, Wordsworth’s works live on the page in flagrant disregard of the communal objectivity of ballad-makers. ‘Simon Lee, The Old Huntsman’ begins innocently enough as a popular yarn, as Maureen N. McLane has neatly observed, before the author alerts us to the dubiousness of verbal transmission: ‘He says he is three score and ten, / But others say he’s eighty’ (*LB* 65; lines 7–8).²⁰ The narrator, too, freely breaks out to address ‘My gentle reader’, a member of the literate classes, and coerces him into finishing the plot at his own leisure – ‘Perhaps a tale you’ll make it’ (lines 69, 80). In ‘Hart-Leap Well’ the storyteller declines to tell a story even as he does so: ‘I will not stop to tell how far he fled, / Nor will I mention by what death he died’ (lines 30–1). The narrative voice throughout the collection is at once sophisticated and naïve, informed and unaware. Wordsworth certainly distanced himself from the speaker of ‘The Thorn’, perhaps to signal that we ought to read the poem as a comment on the ineptitude of modern storytellers or, more charitably, the difficulties endemic to storytelling. The main speaker in the poem, he makes clear in the ‘Advertisement’ to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, is

‘not . . . the author’s own person: the character of the loquacious narrator will sufficiently shew itself in the course of the story’ (*LB* 739). The notional, if not the nominal, subject is Martha Ray, a troubled, inarticulate young woman who may or may not have killed her infant born out of wedlock. We hear snippets of her life story from the perspective of an outsider, an old mariner passing through the village. The chatty old mariner, one might say, gets in the way of the tale he wants to tell. He even invites the reader to help him out: ‘Perhaps when you are at the place / You something of her tale may trace’ (lines 109–10). Specificity clashes with vagueness here: even when visiting the spot itself the reader will, at best, only trace a part, something, of Martha’s story. Ballads keep local and national traditions alive but, when transferred to the page, the tale is also being lost.

Along with his peers, chiefly Coleridge and Southey, Wordsworth was a keen student of the ballad revival. So pervasive became the rage for balladry in the periodical press, along with scores of collections of old songs, that critics continue to debate whether Wordsworth augured a new style of poetry or merely popularized it. Jacobus, on the one side, hails the *Lyrical Ballads* as a highly original collection in its innovative approach to different genres. Robert Mayo, on the other, painstakingly traces themes and motifs common to both Wordsworth and contemporary magazines.²¹ Either way, it is clear that Wordsworth was thoroughly grounded in the songs and popular poetry that resounded across the British Isles, particularly the modern versions penned or polished by Percy, Scott and other literary antiquarians. The ballad tradition thrives on imitation, and, above all else, experimentation. With such pieces as ‘The Seven Sisters’, ‘The Horn of Egremont Castle’, and ‘The Force of Prayer’, Wordsworth demonstrated that he could write neo-medieval verse brimming with stock ballad devices, and he did flirt with the prevailing taste for Gothic tales, but it is his thoughtful songs on plebeian themes, on childhood and old age, for which he is justly celebrated.

Notes

1. Robert Mayo, ‘The Contemporaneity of the *Lyrical Ballads*’, *PMLA* 69 (1954), 507.
2. ‘Essay, Supplementary to the Preface’ (1815) (*Prose* III: 78).
3. Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 3 vols. (London: J. Dodsley, 1765), I: x.
4. *The Spectator*, no. 74 (25 May 1711), 62.
5. *The Plain-Dealer*, no. 36 (24 July 1724).
6. *The Spectator*, no. 85 (7 June 1711), 200. See also John Dennis, ‘Of Simplicity in Poetical Compositions’ (1721).

7. Samuel Johnson, *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*, 10 vols. (London: J. Nichols, 1779), v: 154.
8. *Monthly Review* 29 (June 1799), 202–10.
9. Charles Wharton Stork, 'The Influence of the Popular Ballad on Wordsworth and Coleridge', *PMLA* 29 (3) (1914), 304.
10. G. Malcolm Laws Jr, *The British Literary Ballad: A Study in Poetic Imitation* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 4.
11. *The Complete Works of Thomas Chatterton*, ed. Donald S. Taylor in association with Benjamin B. Hoover, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1: 210.
12. See Albert B. Friedman, *The Ballad Revival: Studies in the Influence of Popular on Sophisticated Poetry* (University of Chicago Press, 1961), 154.
13. See Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 37–8.
14. See Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 222.
15. Preface to *Leonora* (London: T. Bensley, 1796).
16. Friedman, *Ballad Revival*, 288.
17. *Monthly Magazine* 1 (April 1796), 224.
18. Stephen Maxfield Parrish, *The Art of the Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 88.
19. Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment*, 250–61 (250).
20. Maureen N. McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 226.
21. For an overview of the originality debate, see John E. Jordan, *Why the Lyrical Ballads? The Background, Writing, and Character of Wordsworth's 1798 Lyrical Ballads* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 128–54.

The pastoral-georgic tradition

David Fairer

We are dealing here not with a single tradition, but with two generic strands of contrasting character, different in subject and distinct in principle. Each had ancient Greek roots, and in both traditions it was the model of Virgil that was directly influential for succeeding poets. In his early *Eclogues* and later *Georgics* the Roman poet reached back to the two founding texts: Theocritus' *Idylls* (third century BC) with their scenarios of rustic innocence, and the old didactic poem *Works and Days* (eighth century BC) of Hesiod, a survival manual for an Age of Iron in which Nature is niggardly and changeable. The two genres continued to develop separately and in many ways can be seen as opposing each other, with pastoral exploiting leisured ease (*otium*) while georgic emphasizes work (*labor*) and matters of immediate practical concern (*negotium*). If pastoral takes its more timeless character from an Arcadian setting in which the pressures of real life are held at bay (Pope writes that 'pastoral is an image of what they call the Golden age'),¹ georgic confronts a natural world that challenges human skill and is subject to the pressures of time and decay. Where pastoral is drawn towards simplicity, georgic engages with a varied and complex scene. Pastoral finds its home ground in poise and potential harmony, but georgic is forever on the move, responding to local conditions, shifts in the weather, and difficulties and predations of various kinds: it is a world in process whose rewards are hard won. Critics who use the term 'poet of Nature' about Wordsworth seem to have little sense of his indebtedness to the eighteenth-century tradition of georgic poetry, in which this primal element of recalcitrance – Nature's tendency to pull against human life – provides a resistant energy to drive effort and ingenuity – mental as much as physical. Wordsworth's encounters with the natural world are full of this tension, when pastoral and georgic features work uneasily together.

Wordsworth knew Virgil's *Georgics* intimately. In his youth he did verse translations from them, and Bruce Graver has shown how they fed into his mature poetry.² But whereas Graver dismisses the eighteenth-century georgic poem, Wordsworth himself did not: he admired Dyer's *The Fleece*, for

example, and celebrated the poet's 'skilful genius' in a sonnet.³ Wordsworth's handling of georgic elements is indebted to this later tradition as well as to Virgil, and the Cumbrian fells offered him rich materials. They were the scenes of his childhood, and from December 1799 the landscape became his permanent home. From experience he knew that the life of the local hill farmer was no Arcadian idyll: sheep became ill, walls needed repair, and poverty and harsh weather took their toll. But he never would attempt a georgic poem about the real working life of his locality. Instead, as soon as he settled with Dorothy in Dove Cottage he turned his mind to pastoral, using the subtitle for five of the poems written in the months after his arrival,⁴ and in *Home at Grasmere*, the ambitious autobiographical poem he was beginning at this time, Wordsworth appears conscious of unresolved tensions in his newly claimed pastoral world as he wonders about his own future in terms of literary genre:

Is there not
 An art, a music, and a stream of words
 That shall be life, the acknowledged voice of life?
 Shall speak of what is done among the fields,
 Done truly there, or felt, of solid good
 And real evil, yet be sweet withal,
 More grateful, more harmonious than the breath,
 The idle breath of sweetest pipe attuned
 To pastoral fancies? (*Home at Grasmere*, MS B, lines 620–8 (HG 76))

The answer to Wordsworth's question ought to be 'Yes there is – the art of *georgic*.' After all, that genre is concerned with 'what is done among the fields', as distinct from sweet 'pastoral fancies'. But we realize that the poet wants to have it both ways: something real and solid, true to the life of the countryside, but simultaneously 'sweet' and 'grateful' (in the sense of *pleasing*), surpassing Arcadian harmonies. We can hear an awkward shift in that single pentameter, 'And real evil, yet be sweet withal', re-emphasized by the next line: 'more grateful, more harmonious'. The poet seems to be building a bridge from a challenging 'voice of life' to the soft music of pastoral, and in doing so he is stepping across from *evil* to *sweetness*.

This is a difficult move, but it is one that georgic is equipped to make. After all, Virgil's poem ends with the honey-bees, tokens of a sweetness to come, who emerge miraculously from the putrefying flesh of the dead oxen.⁵ Georgic has the capacity to look through dissolution and loss to see renewal and fruition, and to locate something 'grateful' not in the sweet sounds of pastoral but in the hard labour of the fields – 'grateful toil', as John Dyer calls it in *The Fleece* (1757), his poem about the woollen industry.⁶ The georgic

context adds the sense of 'grateful' as *rewarding, bringing its returns*. Georgic language, as part of its mixed character, can turn what is resistant, or even alien, to fruitful use: 'An alien mixture meliorates the breed', says James Grainger in *The Sugar-Cane* (1764), his georgic of West Indian sugar production.⁷ The genre's aesthetic of variety is summed up in the vital skill of engrafting and manuring by which fresh life is generated out of pain and decay. In *Cyder* (1708), John Philips describes how engrafting on to a base crabstock produces the best cider-apples, whose juice 'a grateful Mixture forms / Of tart and sweet'.⁸ The flavour of georgic is complex rather than ingratiating; it challenges and rewards rather than seduces.

Viewed in georgic terms, then, Wordsworth's desire to value his new working landscape as a place 'of solid good / And real evil', and at the same time to make it 'a dwelling-place / For all sweet sounds and harmonies', to quote his earlier words in 'Tintern Abbey' (*LB* 120; lines 142–3), is not self-evidently a forlorn one, although it points to an unsettling question at the heart of his poem of settlement. Now he is 'Home at Grasmere', what kind of life will he make for himself and Dorothy? An Arcadian *pastoral*? Or a *georgic* of challenge and toil? And might it be possible to combine the two? Can life be simultaneously difficult and harmonized, both work and rest? This ambivalence is certainly within the capacity of georgic. The critical question is whether it is equally in the remit of pastoral, or whether, by acknowledging georgic struggle, pastoral becomes something else, loses its distinctive innocence once it ventures East of Eden, into georgic's domain.

A text that raises these issues in a playful way is 'Inscription for the House (an Outhouse) on the Island at Grasmere', a poem written in the early months of 1800, whose awkward title, with its parenthesis ('an Outhouse'), immediately contributes a georgic note to a text that situates itself between work and relaxation, the *real life of the fields* and *pastoral harmonies*. The poet's island retreat, which will become an Arcadian nook, is in fact an unprepossessing place:

It is a homely pile, yet to these walls
 The heifer comes in the snow-storm, and here
 The new-dropp'd lamb finds shelter from the wind.
 And hither does one Poet sometimes row . . .
 With plenteous store of heath and wither'd fern,
 A lading which he with his sickle cuts
 Among the mountains . . .

(*LB* 182; lines 13–20)

This is clearly a georgic scenario, with threatening weather, sheltering animals and the speaker's own rural labour – what a working poet this one seems to be! But at once, out of these materials, he turns his surroundings into a scene of

pastoral *otium*, a leisured relaxation made more delightful by the contrasting georgic presence, which is now a picturesque backdrop:

. . . beneath this roof
 He makes his summer couch, and here at noon
 Spreads out his limbs, while, yet unshorn, the sheep
 Panting beneath the burthen of their wool
 Lie round him, even as if they were a part
 Of his own household . . .

(lines 20–5)

The sheep are trapped in their heavy woollen coats in the oppressive heat. They are clearly ready for shearing, but the farmer is elsewhere. As is the mind of the visionary poet who, 'from his bed / . . . looks toward the lake / And to the stirring breezes' (lines 25–7). The verse suddenly relaxes into full Arcadian sweetness, taking the text into the hallowed imaginative world of the Romantic poet: nor 'does he want / Creations lovely as the work of sleep, / Fair sights, and visions of romantic joy' (lines 27–9). His warrant for this role seems to be his ability to transcend the solid and real (hence Wordsworth's term 'romantic'). The reader immediately wonders if this awkward juxtaposition of georgic and pastoral is meant to strike a satiric note. It is certainly reminiscent of Thomas Gray's 'Ode on the Spring' with its picture of the amused, self-conscious poet 'at ease reclin'd in rustic state',⁹ a phrase that characterizes Wordsworth's equivalent perfectly. The uncomfortable panting sheep turn his pastoral scene into one of potential georgic neglect. Perhaps visionary joy comes at a price?

Wordsworthian pastorals prompt questions of this kind. Generically they remain committed to the core qualities of pastoral writing: a simple dignity, a common language, honest, direct feeling, and an acknowledgement of timeless truths. But at the same time they allow georgic demands to be felt: changes of weather, economic pressures, physical toil, above all the duty of husbandry, in which human resourcefulness is at a premium. There is an ingrained durability evident, a sense of being tested through time. In characters like the shepherd Michael, the leech-gatherer and the old Cumberland beggar, Wordsworth subjects pastoral simplicity to georgic pressures; and there is something heroic about the way such men figure repetition as survival. Each has his personal subsistence economy, with pastoral having to find its own answer to georgic demands, without the latter's capacity to adapt and reach a wider outlook. In Wordsworth it can sometimes feel as if pastoral and georgic are being superimposed so that neither can set its own terms and find its own way. Perhaps tragedy comes out of this mutual frustration.

Pastoral and georgic do offer a tempting binary, with one set of values placed in opposition to the other, and judgment being made between them; but the result can be over-neat. In his fine reading of 'Michael, A Pastoral Poem' (to give its full title), Bruce Graver argues that the poem 'dramatize[s] the tensions between pastoral *otium* (ease) and georgic *labor*', with Michael, 'a thoroughly georgic shepherd', dedicating himself to heroic labour, set against his son Luke's youthful *otium*, an innocent playfulness denied by the 'joyless education' his father has imposed on him.¹⁰ In Graver's reading, this tension works itself out in Luke's dissolute career and his father's frustrated hopes, which find their emblem in the fragments of the sheepfold, a georgic project left forever incomplete. '[Michael] fails', Graver concludes, 'and his failure raises questions about *the limitations of georgic values*' (my italics).¹¹ It is a powerful reading, but this rather schematic judgment underplays the poem's generic ambivalence, the way labour in the end ceases to be directed and purposeful (key values of georgic), but peters out into pastoral symbolism, turning from a disciplined task into a forlorn gesture ('many and many a day he thither went, / And never lifted up a single stone' (LB 268; lines 474–5)). It is less a failure of georgic values than a failure to sustain them. At the tragic close of the poem it is pastoral that supplies the irony: 'Happy old man! So these lands will still be yours, and large enough for you, though bare stones cover all'.¹² The adaptable georgic tends either to evade tragedy or subsume it within wider considerations so that the experience is broadened beyond the personal. The genre is invested in resourceful continuities. From a georgic perspective, the final purchase of Michael's estate by 'a Stranger' might open up fresh possibilities, even a flourishing future for another family.

Pastoral is placed under interpretive pressure when it is brought up against the tough, practical questions that georgic raises. An uncomfortable irony of 'Michael' is that at the poem's emotional climax there is a double slackening:

and now
 Sometimes when he could find a leisure hour
 He to that valley took his way, and there
 Wrought at the sheep-fold. Meantime, Luke began
 To slacken in his duty . . . (lines 448–52)

From a georgic perspective, Wordsworth's 'meantime' signals not a contrast but a parallel: necessary labour is certainly not for one's 'leisure hour', and Wordsworth registers the simultaneous desultoriness of father and son.

Wordsworth appears sometimes to be deliberately superimposing the landscapes of pastoral and georgic, as if allowing experience to shadow innocence

while we read. In 'The Pet-Lamb. A Pastoral', we look over a hedge to view 'a snow-white mountain Lamb with a Maiden at its side' (*LB* 222; line 4), and at once we hesitate: do we see it with a pastoral eye, or does a georgic image flicker before us, of the lamb vulnerable, covered in snow, needing the active care of the shepherd? And as the disingenuous poem continues we become increasingly aware of the harsher challenge of georgic Nature that the scene is shutting out (the poet is here conjecturing the girl's thoughts):

Alas the mountain tops that look so green and fair!
I've heard of fearful winds and darkness that come there,
The little brooks, that seem all pastime and all play,
When they are angry, roar like lions for their prey. (53–6)

Inhabiting the girl's consciousness, Wordsworth's speaker gives her an apprehension of a dis-tempered earth of storm and flood, a scene characteristic of the 'iron Times' of James Thomson's restless seasons, when 'all is off the Poise'.¹³ But the man continues to imagine the girl's voice insisting that the challenge of Nature can be held at bay. It is, after all, a pastoral world:

Here thou need'st not dread the raven in the sky,
He will not come to thee, our cottage is hard by,
Night and day thou art safe as living thing can be,
Be happy then, and rest, what is't that aileth thee? (57–60)

What ails thee?, the girl persists in asking her tethered lamb; but the projected voice continues to shut out the real world of the fields in which sheep sicken and die. The pastoral picture threatens at any moment to darken into a georgic one. The lamb, unquiet and disquieted, refuses to be absorbed into pastoral *otium*: 'It will not, will not rest!' (49) the ballad voice echoes.

Wordsworth's 'pastoral' flaunts its unsullied simplicity to a knowing degree, inviting us to suppress our expectations about *what is done among the fields, / Done truly there*. The text silently distances itself from georgic, but in a way that brings an unsettling georgic consciousness into being, haunting the scene much as we readers do as we watch and overhear it. The poem seems to demand the ghostly presence of georgic to help define its pastoral contours, the points at which it might lose its precarious innocence. Wordsworth understands what pastoral holds at bay: work, time, change, illness, death, decay, storm, suffering, war – that world of *negotium* and *labor* from which georgic draws its materials.

Wordsworth is not always so subtle. His uneasiness about pastoral inactivity turns into explicit disapproval in 'Gipsies' (1807), where a little 'knot' of travellers sitting round their fire becomes an emblem of unresponsiveness and torpor (*PTV* 211–12; lines 1–2). It is the poet himself who

figures as the 'Traveller under open sky' (line 10), while the gipsies remain in their leisured circle just as he had left them twelve hours earlier. In the interim the poet has witnessed so much 'of change and cheer' (line 11), but now seems to be back where he started. Nothing has developed, nothing been done. He is evidently longing to see the gipsies at work and on the move; but they simply sit there, to his indignant disapproval: 'oh better wrong and strife / Better vain deeds or evil than such life!' (lines 21–2). No doubt tired of travelling, the gipsies are enjoying a pastoral interlude, but the poet insists on unsettling their genre, invoking what can only be described as the georgic *negotium* of the heavenly bodies: 'The stars have tasks – but these have none' (line 24).

There is a similar poetic admonition in 'The Idle Shepherd-Boys', another of the early Grasmere pastorals, where the two young lads play their pipes, trim their hats, and then race each other across the fields, blissfully unaware that a lost lamb needs their help. In the end the creature is rescued by the poet himself, who returns it to the boys with a final didactic gesture that allows a georgic thought to criticize the hitherto innocent scene: 'And gently did the Bard / Those idle Shepherd-boys upbraid, / And bade them better mind their trade' (*LB* 176; lines 97–9). The final word is a distinctly georgic intervention, which serves to 'upbraid' not only the boys but pastoral itself. The text appears slightly embarrassed by its genre, and as in those other poems, georgic seems to function as pastoral's uneasy conscience. Are these free spirits really qualified for exercising the georgic care (*cura*) that shepherding in the fells of Cumbria demands? And will they stay in their delightful valley?

To find their *trade* in Wordsworth's pastoral world, men have to leave it; and in doing so they are exiled to the place where georgic ventures with confidence and gusto: the land of trade and travel. In entering that alien space, Leonard in 'The Brothers', Luke in 'Michael', and Robert in *The Ruined Cottage* imprint themselves on those texts by their haunting absence, or in the case of Leonard, by his temporary ghostlike return. In exchange for their withdrawal, they purify by their own dis-integration, the text that expels them. And they allow it a tragic stature – a mode that georgic, with its sheer resourcefulness, its ability to subsume alien materials and adapt to alteration, can never achieve (although the genre can incorporate tragedy within its broader concerns). Georgic tends not to dwell. It values the local *terroir*, but it reaches out from there to the wide world and its opportunities. Eighteenth-century georgic poems tend to begin locally but end expansively: local streams become shipping lanes and trade routes. There is no return 'home'. Leonard, Luke and Robert, those young adventurers of Wordsworthian pastoral,

cannot be integrated, and they are let go; but their extended spaces of possibility hover just beyond these texts, helping to shape them. The final tragic harmonies of their poems sound more powerfully as a result, and become the sweeter for having raised the possibilities of georgic.

Notes

1. Alexander Pope, 'A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry' prefixed to his 'Pastorals' in *Works* (1717), in *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope: The Earlier Works, 1711–1720*, ed. Norman Ault (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), 298.
2. See Bruce E. Graver, 'Wordsworth's Georgic Beginnings', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33 (2) (summer 1991), 137–59.
3. *Ibid.*, 121–2; Wordsworth, 'To the Poet, Dyer' (*SP* 96). See Wordsworth to Lady Beaumont, 20 November 1811 (*MY* 11: 521–2).
4. These are 'The Brothers', 'The Oak and the Broom', 'The Idle Shepherd-Boys', 'The Pet-Lamb', and 'Michael', all written for the enlarged second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (2 vols., 1800).
5. Virgil, *Georgics*, IV: 554–8.
6. *The Fleece*, 3: 22, in John Dyer, *The Fleece. A Poem in Four Books*, ed. John Goodridge and Juan Christian Pellicer (Cheltenham: Cyder Press, 2007), 55.
7. *The Sugar-Cane*, 1: 459, in John Gilmore, *The Poetics of Empire: A Study of James Grainger's The Sugar-Cane* (1764) (London: Athlone Press, 2000), 103.
8. *Cyder*, 1: 292–3, in John Philips, *Cyder. A Poem in Two Books*, ed. John Goodridge and Juan Christian Pellicer (Cheltenham: Cyder Press, 2001), 10.
9. 'Ode on the Spring', line 17, in *The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray*, ed. H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 3.
10. Bruce E. Graver, 'Wordsworth's Georgic Pastoral: *Otium* and *Labor* in "Michael"', *European Romantic Review* 1 (2) (winter 1991), 119, 128.
11. *Ibid.*, 119.
12. Virgil, *Eclagues, Georgics, Aeneid 1–6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 28–9 (*Eclague* 1, lines 46–8).
13. *Spring*, lines 274, 278, in James Thomson, *The Seasons*, ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 16.

The popular tradition

Ann Wierda Rowland

'Away, then, with the senseless iteration of the word, *popular*, applied to new works in poetry, as if there were no test of excellence in this first of the fine arts but that all men should run after its productions, as if urged by an appetite, or constrained by a spell!' (*Prose* III: 83). These words, which appear towards the end of the 1815 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface', express Wordsworth's long-standing ambivalence about the role of the 'popular' in the production and reception of his poetry.¹ In particular, they echo the 1800 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, where Wordsworth also characterizes the popular as an unthinking and indiscriminate appetite: a 'craving for extraordinary incident' and a 'degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation' (*LB* 746, 747). In this earlier Preface, Wordsworth famously rails against the 'frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse' that feed the public's unwholesome and degraded appetite for sensation and excitement (747). His poems, in contrast, will not only be significantly different from the literature 'upon which general approbation is at present bestowed'; they will also be an attempt, albeit a 'feeble effort', to 'counteract' and reform popular taste (742, 747).

The prefaces to the *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as the poems themselves, contain Wordsworth's most sustained and explicit engagement with the 'popular' and 'popular tradition'. When we examine the larger project of the *Lyrical Ballads*, however, we discover that this outrageous appetite for 'gross and violent stimulants' (*LB* 746) is only one aspect of a rather more complex figuration of the 'popular'. For it is here that Wordsworth also famously announces that the 'principal object' of his poetry is 'to chuse incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them . . . in a selection of language really used by men' (743).² Wordsworth's turn to the 'real language of men' is, of course, not to the language of *all* men, but to those of 'low and rustic life' whose passions are 'incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature' and who 'convey their feelings

and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions' (741, 743–4). We must certainly understand this turn to the 'real language' of rural 'men' as popular in its aims and ethos, even if Wordsworth announces his adoption of such language as a rejection of the 'popular Poetry of the day' (746). How do we resolve this seeming contradiction in Wordsworth's understanding of the popular?

One way to organize the contradictory impulses in Wordsworth's figuration of the popular is along country and city lines. Wordsworth idealizes rustic life because 'in that situation our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated' (*LB* 743). In contrast, he views the 'encreasing accumulation of men in cities' where 'the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident' as a cause of degradation and cultural decline (746). But the rural–urban divide that runs through Wordsworth's cultural theory is a fault-line that troubles the status of the popular in Romantic culture more generally. Having both the sense of 'intended for or suited to the understanding or taste of ordinary people' and of 'liked or admired by many people' (*OED* 'popular', adj., 4a, 7a), the word 'popular' carries cultural contradictions within it that reverberate today. In Karen Swann's words, 'we continue to construct "the popular" both as a lost authentic culture and as an inauthentic and alienated mass culture symptomatic of cultural decline'.³

If the 'popular' in the Romantic period refers to both the authentic and the inauthentic, both to what is lost and what is rife, then our task is not to resolve the contradictions in Wordsworth's understanding of the popular, but instead to trace how he navigates this equivocal cultural field. We can follow his path through this rather tricky terrain along other lines of demarcation, those distinguishing the past from the present. For Wordsworth, the idealization of a rural people also entailed the valorization of a primitive past, another key Romantic strategy for engaging with popular tradition. In his assumption that 'rustic man' and 'primitive man' are comparable figures, as well as in the general primitivism of his poetic project at the turn of the nineteenth century – a primitivism evident in the poems written for the *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as in his early writings on childhood that eventually became part of *The Prelude* – Wordsworth draws on Enlightenment notions of history, language and literary culture, notions which provided him with models for finding value in popular literature.

His debts to Enlightenment enquiry are nowhere more apparent than in his insistence on *feeling* as the basis of his poem in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth insists that in his poems, 'the feeling therein developed gives

importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling' (*LB* 746). Where the popular poetry of the day is characterized by extravagant and extraordinary *incident*, Wordsworth's poetry will arise out of, take its value from, represent and hope to inspire *feeling*. We should not forget his famous definition of poetry: 'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. The feeling of Wordsworth's poetry will be 'powerful', but it will neither be provoked nor tainted by 'gross and violent stimulants' (756, 746). Rejecting the sensationalism of contemporary popular literature, Wordsworth nevertheless emphasizes strong feeling as the proper basis of poetry. While critics often point to these words as offering a radically new definition of poetry for the modern, nineteenth-century world, in fact, this conception of poetry comes straight out of the naturalist histories of language that emerged over the eighteenth century in Enlightenment discourse on the origins of language.

In particular, Wordsworth draws on Hugh Blair's definition of poetry as 'the language of passion, or of enlivened imagination' as well as Blair's theory – itself drawn from the theories of Thomas Blackwell, Adam Smith and Jean-Jacques Rousseau – that primitive men produced a more vigorous poetry because of their strong feelings and uninhibited imaginations: 'Their passions have nothing to restrain them: their imagination has nothing to check it. They display themselves to one another without disguise; and converse and act in the uncovered simplicity of nature. As their feelings are strong, so their language, of itself assumes a poetical turn.'⁴ Here is the model for Wordsworth's rustic man and the rustic's 'plainer and more emphatic language' (*LB* 743). Indeed, we must understand Wordsworth's turn to a poetry of feeling as an element of the primitivism that he learned from Enlightenment cultural theory and a crucial tactic for negotiating the terrain of popular literary tradition, one that enabled him simultaneously to condemn the sensationalism of contemporary 'popular poetry' and adopt the values associated with primitive 'popular tradition'.

Significantly, Blair's account of the passionate, poetic language of primitive man occurs in his 'Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian', a highly influential defence of James Macpherson's Ossianic poems which fuelled the Romantic period's fascination with primitive poetry. Interest in the primitive past, as well as in primitive poetry, is, in fact, central to Enlightenment and Romantic conceptions of popular literature, as the supposedly ancient ballads and literary relics recovered, collected and published in antiquarian collections in these years were typically described and discussed as 'popular poetry'. Indeed, antiquarian literary collections played perhaps the most influential role in shaping, framing and inventing a

popular tradition that the Romantics understood as a native, vernacular literature. While an 'antiquarian of popular culture' may today seem oxymoronic, in the Romantic period, literary antiquarians were widely engaged in defining and defending the popular. Close attention to the popular antiquarianism of the period gives us insight into how Wordsworth, and Romantic literary culture more generally, accommodated both the sensationalism and the triviality of popular literature within an emerging national, vernacular literary tradition.

The popular ballads, tales, rhymes and chants collected by antiquarians in this period are usually presented as 'trifles', as insignificant, frivolous or childish literary objects of little intrinsic value. Introducing his collection, *Popular Rhymes, Fireside Stories, and Amusements of Scotland*, Robert Chambers echoes Scott and cautions his reader 'not to expect here anything profound, or sublime, or elegant, or affecting'. The reader will find something worthy of attention only if

to him the absence of high-wrought literary grace is compensated by a simplicity coming direct from nature – if to him there be a poetry in the very consideration that such a thing, though a trifle, was perhaps the same trifle to many human beings like himself hundreds of years ago, and has, times without number, been trolled or chanted by hearts light as his own, long since resolved into dust.⁵

Chambers embraces the insignificance of his material and asks the reader to do the same. The 'trifles' of his collection are, indeed, the 'almost meaningless frolics of children', valuable and meaningful only because they constitute a continuous form of meaninglessness through hundreds of years of national history: the 'same trifle' sung 'to many human beings like himself hundreds of years ago'. Here, the sameness of the trifle produces the 'likeness' of the human beings across so many years. What the trifle is means nothing; that it has stayed relatively the same and produced the same cultural effect gives it significance.

Chambers locates the value of the popular rhyme not in its literary qualities – its rhymes, images, wit or narrative acuity – but in the historical endurance and cultural continuity it represents and effects. By stressing the age and endurance of even the most 'trivial' of rhymes, Chambers turns his readers' attention away from the scandalous content of the ballad or the dubious literary value of the rhyme towards the perseverance of their form, thus modelling an evaluation of traditional popular literature that empties it of what we typically call 'content' and emphasizes the continuity of what we might call its cultural 'form', its shape as a vehicle of cultural transmission.

Typical of Romantic antiquarianism more generally, the reading practice Chambers describes here is best understood as an 'antiquarian formalism', a framework which significantly shaped Romantic literary culture, its accommodation of popular literature and its construction of a national, vernacular literary tradition.

It is the formalism of the antiquarians that proves so important to Wordsworth's engagement with popular literature, its sensationalist content, and its trivial status, particularly in the poems and prose of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Because of his emphasis on feeling over action and incident, Wordsworth's ballads have an uncertain relationship to the traditional ballad. In poems such as 'Simon Lee, The Old Huntsman', 'The Idiot Boy' and 'The Thorn', he takes a poetic form traditionally defined as narrative, popularly conceived as eventful and sensational, and drains its narrative action (and even, at times, its level of feeling) to the most minimal level. Critics have pointed to the lyrical ballads' lack of clear action or event, pointed, in fact, to their lack of real content, as that which makes these ballads not only 'lyrical' but also original, serious, innovative and modern. Wordsworth gets his figures and scenes from the popular ballad tradition of his day, but his poems take on high literary value because of their formal experiments and, more precisely, because of the ways in which those formal innovations work to undermine, minimize or elide the contents of the poetry.

Are the *Lyrical Ballads* a poetry divested of content? Or do they instead enact a complex antiquarian practice of disregarding and historicizing their content in favour of a more formal reading? Perhaps turning to the example of one ballad will help clarify these questions and suggest some answers. In 'The Thorn', Wordsworth makes his debt to the ballad tradition most explicit. The poem takes its landscape of woman, thorn tree, pool and mound from such old Scottish ballads as 'The Cruel Mother', from a tradition in which the thorn tree is commonly associated with the misery of child murder. But in 'The Thorn', Wordsworth does not simply narrate the tale of Martha Ray, her love for Stephen Hill, his abandonment of her, her pregnancy, infanticide and madness. Wordsworth instead presents this traditional, sensational and intensely conventional story through the character of a narrator who does not or cannot know what exactly happened at the spot that Martha Ray, and now the narrator himself, obsessively haunt. He relates the local lore surrounding this mysterious woman, repeating what 'Old Farmer Simpson did maintain' (line 149) and what 'some will say' (line 214), but it is lore to which he cannot fully accommodate himself or that he cannot credit, as he repeatedly insists 'I cannot tell how this may be' (line 243). His function as a narrator, along with the ballad's narrative

form, thus winds down as the ballad proceeds and he cannot or will not tell the tale.

Indeed, this narrator has been troubling readers since his first appearance in 1798, and the poem received so much criticism that Wordsworth, in good antiquarian fashion, added an extensive note to the ballad for the 1800 edition. This note, also in good antiquarian fashion, directs the reader's attention away from the sensational content of the ballad towards the formal presentation of that content which is, here, the narrative style of the poem's speaker, whom Wordsworth now describes as someone like a retired sea-captain, a man with 'little to do' who thus becomes 'credulous', 'talkative' and 'prone to superstition'. Wordsworth declares that he selected such a character in order 'to exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind'. 'The Thorn' is not an infanticide ballad, Wordsworth insists, but a poem to 'shew the manner in which such [superstitious] men cleave to the same ideas' (*LB* 351). As Stephen Parrish once put it, if we fully credit Wordsworth's note to 'The Thorn', the poem 'becomes not a poem about a woman but a poem about a man (and a tree); not a tale of horror but a psychological study; not a ballad but a dramatic monologue'. Indeed Parrish argued influentially that 'the point of the poem may very well be that its central "event" has no existence outside of the narrator's imagination – that there is no Martha Ray sitting in a scarlet cloak behind a crag on the mountain top'.⁶

Redirecting readerly attention away from the body of a woman towards the mind of a man, Wordsworth's note to 'The Thorn' models an antiquarian approach for his readers: he would have them relate to the poem as antiquarians related to the old ballads they collected, historicizing the sensationalist stories and paying attention only to the form that conveys such stories. As Wordsworth describes the narrator's adhesive mind, his attachment to and repetition of words, his fear and his feeling, superstition itself takes on formal qualities and becomes a kind of style. It is this superstitious style – the very repetitions, stutterings and uncertainties that so many considered the faults of the poem – that should be the reader's object of interest and analysis. We should not be frustrated with the narrator's tortured desire to know and not to know what Martha Ray did to her child, to tell and not to tell what happened at that spot; such frustration would only reveal our own desire to know what happened, our own craving for 'extraordinary incident'. The task Wordsworth sets for his privileged readers is to analyze the desires and cravings of the narrator, not to indulge their own.

With the construction of this narrator and the addition of the note to 'The Thorn', Wordsworth effectively distances himself and his reader from

what are, in fact, the rather sensational contents of this ballad. This is a strategy that is, indeed, an innovative reworking of a traditional ballad, but one that must be seen as borrowing from and extending the formal practice of Enlightenment and Romantic antiquarian ballad collections. This formal practice enables a poem such as 'The Thorn' to have sensational contents and disavow them at the same time. Thus Wordsworth carefully crafts the relationship of his poem to popular tradition, writing poetry that, like the collections of popular antiquarians, both desires and disowns its own content.

The importance of popular tradition and antiquarian formalism to Wordsworth's poetry is not limited to the *Lyrical Ballads*. The literary 'trifle' as a form of historical endurance and cultural continuity also offers Wordsworth a framework for his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, and for that poem's profound engagement with the trivial and the insignificant. In Wordsworth's depiction of the child's mind and memory in the early books of *The Prelude*, an idea of literary formalism emerges that has much in common with the formalism underpinning popular, national antiquarianism. Animating the antiquarian understanding of literary form, as we have seen, is the larger project of bringing literature's trivial, vulgar and childish things into the larger literary tradition. The forms of literature and culture – the ballad, the tale, the game, the rhyme – come to be understood as historically produced and thus originally connected to a particular historical and cultural moment, while at the same time being formally autonomous and thus capable of continuing beyond their original context, of shedding inconvenient or irrelevant charges of meaning and affect and acquiring new associations and significances. This antiquarian mixture of historical formalism which elides literary content and values literary form as a vehicle of cultural continuity plays a central role in crafting a national, vernacular literary tradition in the Romantic period. For Wordsworth, it plays a central role in crafting a narrative that is simultaneously autobiographical and anthropological: a narrative of individual history characterized by continuity and development that recapitulates the progress and development of cultural history.

Wordsworth's child in *The Prelude* may best be understood as the ultimate formalist – 'form', the word or term, appears repeatedly in the 'spots of time' passages and throughout the poem – and Wordsworth's understanding of how the memories of childhood inhabit the mind of the man is essentially formalist as well. Like the literary forms collected by Romantic antiquarians, the forms of Wordsworth's mind and memory are valued for their continuity, their continued presence, rather than their high importance or stability of significance. They are forms and images originally

tioned to a particular time and place, a 'spot of time', yet able to slip free of that original context and to have an independent life of unfixed and flexible association. Wordsworth resists assigning these forms of memory specific meaning, heightened significance or fixed emotional value; the 'spots of time' simply describe how the ordinary and insignificant events of childhood somehow, for some reason, persist in the memory of the adult. It is the simple persistence of the trivial – how the forms and images of childhood arise unbidden in the mind, appear suddenly, acquire new meanings and emotional associations over time – that Wordsworth brings into poetry, a project modelled for him by Romantic antiquarianism and popular tradition.

Notes

1. Ironically, the *Lyrical Ballads*, which Wordsworth insists will not be 'popular' in the epigraph on the title page of the 1800 and subsequent editions – 'Quam nihil ad genium, Papiniane, tuum!' ('How utterly unsuited to your taste, Papinianus') – sold very well and was described by Francis Jeffrey in an otherwise damning review of Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* as 'unquestionably ... and ... deservedly popular' (CH 186). Jeffrey's harsh reviews of Wordsworth's poetry in 1807 and 1814 were uppermost in Wordsworth's mind when he wrote the 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface'. For a discussion of Jeffrey's and the *Edinburgh Review's* attacks on Wordsworth's poetry and its influence on Wordsworth, see [Chapters 6 and 7](#) above, and *Prose* III: 55–60.
2. This phrasing is taken from the 1802 version of the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.
3. Karen Swann, "Martha's Name", or The Scandal of "The Thorn", in *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry*, ed. Yopie Prins and Maera Shreiber (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 76.
4. Hugh Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian', in *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, ed. Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 345.
5. Robert Chambers, *Popular Rhymes, Fireside Stores, and Amusements of Scotland* (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, 1842), 4.
6. Stephen Maxfield Parrish, *The Art of the 'Lyrical Ballads'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 101 and 100.

CHAPTER 15

Elegy

Paul H. Fry

Elegy presents every thing as lost and gone, or absent and future.
(Coleridge, *Table Talk*)¹

It should never be thought cynical to say that an elegy is ultimately a poem of self-mourning, cheering the loneliness in which each person anticipates death. It is Margaret you mourn for. To point out that nearly all the best-known formal elegies or *tombeaux* in English² are for dead poets is not just to see the importance of Oedipal inheritance in what is often an inaugural performance of the Virgilian *cursus* (the classical poetic career of pastoral before georgic before epic), even though rivalry is often apparent. It is in 'When, to the Attractions of the Busy World' that John Wordsworth is called 'a *silent* Poet' (PTV 570; line 82), and it is there, even though the absent John is dead only in the melancholy footnote Wordsworth printed in 1815, that the rivalry is played out (PTV 677): 'while Thou, / Muttering the Verses which I muttered first / Among the mountains . . .' (lines 99–101). But it is not just a question of Oedipal inheritance in such moments. It is also to realize that what is lost or put in crisis when an admired poet dies is the way we hope to think about ourselves – living vicariously through our vocation – and not just the hope that our poems will outlive monumental brass.

In *The English Elegy* (1985), Peter Sacks works primarily with formal elegies, for the most part passing over Wordsworth, because the crisis of projection and introjection as it is staged by the formal conventions of elegy is a necessary starting point in the overcoming of melancholia in mourners. Not all formal elegists after Spenser are convincing mourners, though: Edward King we suppose to have been a pretext for Milton in 'Lycidas'; Shelley was still smarting from Keats having told him to load every rift with ore and I think said as much both in the prefatory note to *Adonais* and in the poem itself, which is a critique of 'the poetry of earth' (*Alastor* having been a less equivocal blueprint for separation from the somatic life); Jonson obviously felt some ambivalence about Shakespeare (as did Milton);

Auden about Yeats; and in 'Thyrsis' it is probably not really the *poet* Arnold mourns in Clough (or perhaps even, after all, in himself). If Sacks is right, then, elegy must be in some measure an imitation of a work of mourning, not an actual work of mourning. But this possible insincerity doesn't make 'Lycidas' 'easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting', as Johnson claimed.³ It is Margaret you mourn for, and Hopkins's little girl in 'Spring and Fall' (1880) is not a poet pretending to lament a poet's passing but a figure for ordinary consciousness authentically bereft, becoming painfully aware of the passing of all things.⁴

Hopkins's conception of Margaret follows from Wordsworth's conviction that he, 'a Poet', is a man speaking to men, not differing from others in kind – owing to some special, Coleridgean faculty – but only in degree. This is the rationale, convincing to me, that prevents *The Prelude* from being the monument to egoism its detractors say it is. On this view, there is no conceivable human consciousness in the elegiac mode for which the primordial loss, experienced as an endlessly repeated separation anxiety, is not the loss of *things*. The being of the natural world that endures and decays in Wordsworth – imperceptibly among the Lakes, apocalyptically in the Gorge of Gondo (in *1805 Prelude* Book 6, lines 556–72) – would seem to displace human being as the equivalent of Sacks's substitutive work of mourning. (Richard Onorato's Freudian biography of Wordsworth is only the most formulaic of the many arguments that nature in Wordsworth substitutes for the loss of his mother.)⁵ In my own view, though, for Wordsworth the human is not displaced on to nature but *rethought as nature*. Wordsworth's levelling instinct as noted by Hazlitt (see, for example, *CH* 892–3), singling out infants, the indigent, idiot boys, crazed sufferers and Alzheimer's victims, identifies the 'widest commonalty' of the human not as reflective consciousness but as embodied, marginally sentient being ('Prospectus', in *The Excursion* 39; line 18). Regardless of whether nature is 'fixed and dead' (Coleridge, *BL* 1:304) or instinct with the One Life, the recuperative task of the Wordsworthian elegist is to reduce to an absolute minimum the contrast between life and death. This movement of thought reduces the normative contrast between reflective intelligence (Enlightenment humanity) and non-human things to the commonalty of somatic being in the living as well as non-living things of nature.

For example, both house and grave, the former even stonier than the latter in the Lake District, are places of dwelling, as the epitaphic books (5–7) of *The Excursion* continuously insist. After the death of the deaf man – another marginal – 'a few short steps / Of friends and kindred bore him from his home / (Yon cottage shaded by the woody crags) / To the

profounder stillness of the grave' (Book 7, lines 482–5). All the dead of the parish are 'from their lowly mansions hither brought' (Book 5, line 654). The dead are gathered in the 'peaceful fold' of the churchyard, shepherds as sheep (Book 5, line 906), where "[t]o a mysteriously-consorted Pair / This place is consecrate; to Death and Life" (Book 5, lines 910–11). True community – the true community of high and low, clever and dull, living and dead – is embodied existence, and it is in that community, in that village spirit, that loss is attenuated. There are always *things*, and we, as things, roll indefinitely 'round in earth's diurnal course' ('A slumber did my spirit seal' (LB 164; line 7). Virgil's Hector appearing before Aeneas, Keats's Lorenzo appearing before Isabella, Dickinson's corpses talking about Truth and Beauty, are not ghosts, they are bodies living out a radioactive half-life.

I think it is this emphasis on the continued presence of the body in death that moves Wordsworth to champion the rural custom of carrying the unconcealed corpse from house to grave.⁶ The little girl of 'We Are Seven' sees no important difference between the absence of two siblings underground and the absence of two siblings overseas. 'What should it know of death?' (LB 74; line 4). She actually knows death at first hand, having watched both her siblings die in her cottage; but for her, the presence or absence of bodies constitutes their family resemblance far more than their life or death. It is indeed from her perspective that we can read 'When, to the Attractions of the Busy World' as an elegy for John before the fact; so little difference is there, in that poem, between absence and death.

* * *

If one is to claim that Wordsworthian elegy effects consolation by reducing the difference between states normally considered binary opposites, especially so by the grief-stricken, one needs to account for the pathos of the Lucy poems, especially 'oh! / The difference to me', which concludes 'She dwelt among th'untrodden ways' (LB 163; line 12–13). It is as though the adult speaker of this poem were still quarrelling with the little girl of 'We Are Seven': 'But they are dead; those two are dead!' he fulminates (line 65) – whereas the two who are overseas are alive. Yes, exclaims the mourner for Lucy in a similar vein, there really *is* a difference, even though nature scarcely reflects it. But this is as much as to say: in this extreme subjective state, mine and no one else's, the difference is enormous even though it may not exist objectively, or for others. As F. W. Bateson argued in his *Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation* (1954), the whole poem has been a reflection on the way difference is enforced by the vagaries of words.⁷ Bateson calls attention to the poem's predilection for oxymoron and other sorts of

contradiction. If a 'way' is a path, how can it be 'untrodden'? If there are at least a few to love her, why do none praise her? If the violet is presumably most striking when it is half hidden, scarcely glimpsed like the scarcely known Maid, why is the star with which it is compared in beauty fairest when it is unobscured by anything else? If the Maid was unknown, how can even a few know of her death? To be sure, all this can be smoothed over. 'We know exactly what he means', one says. Yet once they are noticed it is hard to ignore the unusual accumulation of expressions reminding the reader that difference is an effect of semiotic play. As a recent student of elegy remarks, 'skepticism about figuration has itself become a characteristic elegiac figure'.⁸ It is precisely 'to me', trying to make sense of things in themselves indifferent, that difference looms large.

One reason it is only proper for the poet to say Lucy has not (yet) been praised even though she was loved is that she was not praised in what we suppose to be this poem's predecessor, 'A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal' (*LB* 164). There, she is not evoked as anything but a thing. 'Slumber' does not declare the importance of a difference, like 'She Dwelt', but implies that difference as a structural feature, a rhetoric of anagnorisis familiar to all from 'Amazing Grace': the before and after of the two quatrains, past tense and present, then and 'now'. Yet the poem brilliantly fails to explain what the difference consists in, including even the difference between the living speaker and the dear departed. Both sleep: Lucy now and before her the speaker. His spirit was muffled by slumber, preventing his recognition, as much for himself as for Lucy, that 'human' things are mortal. Because she appears to have been a thing, Lucy when alive apparently felt the touch of earthly years no more than she does now. No *thing* can feel time, including clearly the formerly slumbering speaker; only the unsealed spirit can feel time and accordingly insist on difference. The poem's striking brevity, its reticence, borders on emotional silence, which is at the same time the emotional eloquence elsewhere expressed in underdetermined exclamation points and poignant hyphens. Here the celebrated abyss of death in the blank space between quatrains seals the spirit of the poem. As David Shaw remarks of elegy's growing reticence in Wordsworth (paving the way for Shaw's key figure, Tennyson), '[s]ilence seems the only possible response to the elegist's discovery that the universe of sense is also a universe of death'.⁹

It has been remarked that 'motion' and 'force' are Newtonian terms,¹⁰ without which, like the speaker without spirit, Lucy is simply mass. Neither seeing nor hearing, she is as oblivious in the sixth line as the speaker with no human fears was in the second. As she enters the unconditioned thing-hood of the earth, there is a remarkable result that I would identify as the heart of

Wordsworthian elegy. If things are in-different, there must be some means of bridging the difference between evanescent things, enduring only as symbols, and perdurable things, enduring in themselves as well as symbolically. And so there is: the successive vanishings of night and day, more rapid even than the wilting of flowers and effected by the endless spinning of the planet, belong as much to alluvial slow time as does the earth's mineral ground. So it is too in the skating episode of *The Prelude* (1799), written at virtually the same time. Through a projected vertigo such that one's own spinning in winter makes the landscape spin and leads to motionlessness in another season ('Till all was tranquil as a summer sea'), the boy has perceived in the projected spinning of external things the condition of their relative permanence: 'yet still the solitary cliffs / Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had rolled / With visible motion her diurnal round' (1799 *Prelude* 47; *Part 1*, lines 185, 180–2). Or, as one of Wordsworth's juvenile sonnets begins, 'Calm is all nature as a resting wheel' (*PTV*146).

'Strange Fits of Passion' revisits the underlying continuum between fleeting and lasting things. Lucy is first compared to a rose with its short lifespan ('in June'), and then, in an unsettling leap of thought, to the moon, simultaneously but here ambiguously a rock subject to gravity and also the poet's lucent inspiration (*LB* 161–2; lines 6, 21–8). The poet's fit of passion, an act of imagination whether poetic or otherwise, 'to me befel' as abruptly as the moon 'dropp'd' (lines 4, 24). Both are breaches of routine perception that point to a truth. Part of the shock is that we are accustomed even in Wordsworth's poetry to slower images of lunar progress like "With how sad steps, O Moon" (*PTV*118). The moon more typically lingers, outlasting the clouds that pass before it and the branches it passes behind. The very suddenness of the moon's disappearance, like the hyphenated instant that divides life and death, points to an obverse conclusion: as a thing, with rocks and stones such as the moon, Lucy will last as long as the moon. 'Earth! take these atoms!' – as Byron's Manfred will say in preparing to drop from an Alpine cataract.¹¹ Again in a Newtonian context, there is nothing more non-human about any object than its inert mass, as Wordsworth remarks of the dead Matthew's hand in one of the unpublished elegies for Matthew, 'Dirge' ('I bring, ye little noisy crew!'):

I kissed his cheek before he died;
I raised his hand up from his side,
And down it dropp'd like lead.
Like clay it fell – your hands do all
That can be done, will never fall
Like his till they are dead.

(*LB* 300–2; lines 5–10)

'Lucy Gray' is oddly literal in returning to the relation in 'Slumber' between the thing and the human. This little girl is younger than the 'maid' of the other poems (in 'Three Years She Grew', Nature makes her decision after three years but then Lucy grows to 'a stately height' and dies in puberty (*LB* 221–2; line 32)). She is introduced as 'The sweetest Thing' – innocuously enough, but then we are startled to find her thing-hood made a thing apart – 'that ever grew / Beside a human door!' (*LB* 170–2; lines 7–8). This connects her much more firmly with a foundation planting, or with the 'Fawn' or 'Hare' (lines 9–10), than would any mere comparison with a flower. Here indeed is a preliminary insight into what Wordsworth means in subtitling the poem 'Or Solitude' in 1815. Lucy Gray is ontologically solitary, apart from the human in her mode of being – as nature sprite or fair visitant – in anticipation of the horrible solitude of her death. In keeping with Lucy the girl in the ballad narrative, Lucy the symbol walks apart from, or 'beside', the human community. Emissary between father and mother in the nuclear family, she can be 'with' neither but is lost in an abyss between them. Yes, we must each be alone as we die our own death. Yet the excruciating pathos of Lucy's solitude in death (movingly recalled by Coleridge in 'Dejection') is what allows for her a very traditional form of elegiac hope. She becomes, or at least becomes in balladic folkways ('some maintain' (line 57)), a *genius loci*, the spirit of a place. She remains a 'living Child' (curiously resembling the apparition – 'Like a dead Boy he is serene' – in 'The Danish Boy') only insofar as she has always been a *thing*, appearing human yet merging with the elements of the natural world and singing 'a solitary song / That whistles in the wind' (lines 58, 63–4). Just so, in 'I travell'd among unknown men', the last poem in the sequence, Lucy becomes pastoral England itself.

There is another elegiac theme in Wordsworth that not only needs comment but may give pause, as it would seem to undermine what I have been saying about the strategy of weakening the difference between the human and the non-human, and between life and death. Offsetting the poetry of elision there is *the refusal to substitute*. We know it best perhaps from Matthew's refusal to substitute a living human being for the daughter he has lost in 'The Two April Mornings'. Here the seeming difference that is really no difference apparently turns itself inside out. The two mornings seem the same, but on the previous morning the lesson that loss is irreparable has already been taught, and on this one we learn belatedly ('Matthew is in his grave') that someone else who was then alive is now also dead (*LB* 212–14; line 57). In the third 'Essay Upon Epitaphs', where Wordsworth frequently draws a contrast between the vacillating passions of elegy and the

steadfast simplicity more proper for an epitaph, he sympathizes with the Duke of Ormond for having said of his son “that he preferred his dead Son to any living Son in Christendom”, although he thinks the eccentric hyperbole unsuitable for the public generalization of an epitaph (*Prose* 11: 88). We can see, then, that in the elegiac moment Matthew has uttered a sincere and heartfelt hyperbole that is as *private*, precisely, as ‘o! the difference to me’ – and that this poem may not be a counter-argument after all.

The equivalent of the refusal to substitute human beings in grief is the refusal to find consolation in the embodied continuity of no longer living human beings with the natural world – or ‘the process world’, as Keats criticism calls it. Wordsworth dramatizes this refusal by reconceiving the traditional faerie ring or enchanted green space as an accursed or moribund space, anticipating today’s themes of pollution. This happens most notably in ‘Hart-Leap Well’ and ‘A Fragment’ (‘The Danish Boy’). Where the hart dies in the former poem and the pleasure dome is thoughtlessly decreed in its honour by the childish minion of the chase, Sir Walter, nature soon withdraws, nothing grows, and no animal can be induced to drink from the well (*LB* 133–9). This is the opinion of the local shepherd, confined to folkways (again, ‘some maintain’), but the poet is more than prepared to acquiesce in the shepherd’s magical thinking, with this proviso: in time, nature will heal its own rift, and the moving accidents of ballad narrative will give way to the continuity in slower time of a lyrical ballad. The magic of ‘The Danish Boy’, concerning the visible spirit that haunts the site of the boy’s murder, is somewhat different. This is still a ‘lovely dell’, yet it remains so without a dynamic ecology: larks don’t nest there and bees don’t visit the flowers, hence it is also a ‘lonesome nook’ (*LB* 239–41; lines 22, 14). But it is difficult to read the barrenness of the site as punishment for the crime of murder. The emphasis here, as in ‘Lucy Gray’, is on the loneliness of death. The boy permeates all things in the dell with the necessarily self-sufficient solitude of one who has died alone, as we all do. Rather than merging with earth’s diurnal course, he remains before us, suspended in place by magic, to represent the principle that all existing things are at once the same and unique.

When Wordsworth does not introduce the voice of another (as in ‘The Two April Mornings’ and ‘Hart-Leap Well’), or represent himself in the throes of mourning (as in, for example, ‘Surprized by Joy’), we can argue that he reduces elegy to the epitaphic simplicity in which differentiation or dialectic would be obtrusive. When another voice is heard, Wordsworth is adapting the dramatic convention of the duelling shepherd-poets in pastoral elegy. Thus even though we know, and he knows, that the refusal to substitute is the very essence of the passion of grief (it is what, for Freud,

the work of mourning is meant to overcome in time), we find Wordsworth putting this refusal most often in the voice of another. The grieving man of 'giant stature' in 'Tis said, that some have died for love' refuses all consolation in the natural scene where his beloved Barbara lived and lies buried. Indeed, he execrates the natural world and wishes it away because without her presence all that is natural is a cipher for nothingness:

I look – the sky is empty space;
I know not what I trace;
But when I cease to look, my hand is on my heart.

(*LB* 176–8; lines 46, 18–20)

The refusal to elide the human with the non-human, the despairing lament not for the loss of things but for the obdurate persistence of things that are merely things, is the point of departure from which Wordsworthian elegy works itself away: a self-reminder, perhaps stoical, concerning the suffering that lies in store when one loves too well:

Turn from me, gentle Love, nor let me walk
Within the sound of Emma's voice, or know
Such happiness as I have known today. – (lines 50–2)

One could understand the plots of Wordsworth's two great naturalized pastoral elegies, 'Michael' and 'The Brothers', both dramatic poems rather than monodies, as poignant records of the failure to find consolation for human loss in a dwelling place.

The emptiness of the sky and the unresponsive indifference of the landscape are differing forms of that Wordsworthian blankness that plays such a central role in the formative moments remembered in *The Prelude*. It is in the forbidding nakedness of the world's rockfaces, ordinarily intolerable to human grief, that the poet finds his vocation. He undertakes to explain that the sheer being of things – whether suffused with the One Life or not – is our ontological home and resting place, the 'widest commonalty' for joy. That this is a difficult vocation, the least easy of paths and subject at every step to moral misunderstanding in particular (community on this view being grounded in the *existence* of others rather than the quality or identity of others), is what makes Wordsworth's voice at once controversial and original to this day. His work everywhere attempts the epitaphic inscription of elegy on stone.

Notes

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1835), II: 268.

2. On the sub-genre called the *tombeau* (for example by Mallarmé), see Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 138.
3. Samuel Johnson, 'Milton', in *The Lives of the Poets: A Selection*, ed. Roger Lonsdale and John Mullan (Oxford University Press, 2009), 95.
4. 'Spring and Fall', in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford University Press, 2002), 152 (line 15).
5. Richard Onorato, *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in 'The Prelude'* (Princeton University Press, 1971). Geoffrey Hartman anticipates this thesis with his customary finesse in *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787–1814*, new edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), and returns to it in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
6. Peter Sacks notes the practice that Wordsworth's preference resists: 'The original function of a funeral hearse was . . . to serve as the coffin's cover or frame' (*The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 39) – hence to superimpose a double remove from the body, or triple remove from the soul. Wordsworth's pious first 'Essay Upon Epitaphs' acknowledges that funerary custom may either disregard the body as "the shell of the flown bird" or respect the body as the house of the soul, and inclines toward the latter in recommending epitaphic practice, to be 'accomplished . . . in close connection with the bodily remains of the deceased'. Death and the sensation of its presence are, after all, the 'condition, wherein all men resemble each other' (*Prose* 11: 52–3, 59).
7. F. W. Bateson, *Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation* (London: Longman, Green, 1954), 30–4.
8. David Kennedy, *Elegy* (London: Routledge, 2007), 21.
9. W. David Shaw, *Elegy and Paradox: Testing the Conventions* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 104.
10. See the apparatus to "Slumber" in *William Wordsworth: The Poems*, 2 vols., ed. John O. Hayden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 1: 955.
11. Byron, *Manfred* 1.2.109, in Jerome J. McGann, ed., *Byron: The Oxford Authors* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 285.

CHAPTER 16

The sonnet

Daniel Robinson

The only poem Wordsworth singles out for criticism in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is a sonnet. According to Wordsworth, only five lines of the fourteen that comprise Thomas Gray's 'Sonnet on the Death of Mr Richard West' (1775) are 'of any value'; the defective nine suffer from Gray's 'curiously elaborate' diction (*LB* 749). Wordsworth's selection of a sonnet for critique is likely the result of discussions with Coleridge that informed the Preface, which Coleridge claimed to be 'half a child of my own Brain' (*CL* 11: 830). In his 1796 pamphlet *Sonnets from Various Authors*, Coleridge takes to task those contemporary sonneteers who have 'observed' the 'idle rules' of the form 'in their inverted sentences, their quaint phrases, and incongruous mixture of obsolete and Spenserian words'; he adds that the final result, when it 'is toiled, and hammered into fit shape', is more like 'racked and tortured Prose rather than any thing resembling Poetry'.¹ However, in 1802, two years after eviscerating Gray's sonnet and only a few weeks after expanding the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth began an engagement with the form that would ultimately produce more than five hundred sonnets, making him the most prolific sonneteer in the English language and, in the eyes of his contemporaries and the Victorians, the most significant writer of sonnets since Milton.

In 1800, when he commented on Gray's sonnet, Wordsworth had written only a handful of sonnets and had published only two. His first published poem was 'Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress', signed cheekily 'Axiologus', a transliterated pun in Greek that means 'words' worth' (*EPF* 396). The 'Axiologus' sonnet was influenced by Charlotte Smith's hugely successful *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784). More particularly, Wordsworth's sonnet responds to Williams's 1786 volume, *Poems in Two Volumes*. With the exception of one juvenile sonnet ('Calm is all nature as a resting wheel' (*PTV* 146–7)), Wordsworth never collected this or any of the other sonnets he wrote prior to 1802 for preservation among his *Poetical Works*, presumably because he did not

consider them to be good enough. Nonetheless, the pseudonym attached to the Williams sonnet shows that the not quite 17-year-old Wordsworth understood enough of the sonnet tradition to know that such audacity is practically mandatory. The choice of the form calls upon the traditional association of the sonnet with poetic fame. This convention began in the fourteenth century with Petrarch's punning on his beloved Laura's name to evoke, among other things, the coveted poetic laurel. A decade after the 'Axiologus' sonnet appeared in the *European Magazine*, the next of Wordsworth's sonnets to appear in print was his translation from Petrarch ('If grief dismiss me not to them that rest'), signed 'W. W.' and published in the London newspaper *The Morning Post* (EPF 726). These sonnets belong to the eighteenth-century mode of sensibility, which was itself partly inspired by Petrarch's sonnets, and from which Wordsworth was keen to distance himself as quickly as possible.

Once he had shrugged off his view of the form as 'egregiously absurd', Wordsworth found the sonnet appealing because of its enduring tradition, its adaptability to various topics, and its formal difficulty (LY 1: 125). Moreover, the difficulty of what was known during the period as the 'legitimate' (Petrarchan or Italian) sonnet's structure, ensures the 'co-presence of something regular' in poetry that Wordsworth valued as a way of regulating passion and, therefore, of warding against 'effusions', which the less formally rigid 'elegiac' sonnet, also called the 'illegitimate' sonnet, lent itself to promoting.² The 'legitimate' sonnet demands fewer rhymes – only four or five as opposed to seven – and is thus more of a challenge in English than in Italian. The Italian sonnet's bipartite rhetorical structure, consisting of the octave and sestet with a turn (*volta*) from proposition to resolution, was grounded in traditions of classical rhetoric; and its proportions – eight and six reducible to four and three – are influenced by medieval numerology in the implied movement from earth (the four elements) to heaven (the Trinity). Such English writers as Spenser, Johnson and Keats considered the Italian form to be impracticable and ill-suited to the English language but, like Wordsworth, found the alternative to be insufficiently challenging. Shakespeare's sonnets, Wordsworth notes, 'are merely quatrains with a couplet tacked to the end' (LY 11: 455). Wordsworth admired Milton's sonnets because he found them to preserve the more difficult rhyme scheme while baffling the neat division of the Italian sonnet through the enjambment of the octave and the sestet; the effect, then, is one of 'intense Unity', making what tends to be a linear and programmatic form into 'the image of an orbicular body, – a sphere – or a dew drop' (LY 11: 604–5). Alluding perhaps to Gray's sonnet, Wordsworth also remarked that

Milton's sonnets are 'undisfigured by false or vicious ornaments' (*EY* 379). The Miltonic variation on the 'legitimate' sonnet is unsurprisingly Wordsworth's preferred form, although he frequently experiments with the schedule of rhymes (see *LY* 11: 31).

Upon settling in Grasmere at the end of 1799, Wordsworth began to envision a poetic identity as part of the process of completing the two-part *Prelude* and preparing a second volume of new poems for the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Around this time, or shortly thereafter, Wordsworth became fixated on two forms that might potentially provide for him one of two poetic identities – the epic and the sonnet. He writes in *The Prelude* of his hope that there, in Grasmere, he would begin and finish 'some work / Of glory', code for 'epic poem' (1805 *Prelude* Book 1, lines 85–6). His investment in the epic grew out of Coleridge's certainty that Wordsworth was Milton's heir in that field of prowess and that the only way to improve upon *Paradise Lost* was to write a philosophical epic on 'man, nature, and society': 'The Recluse', that would 'benefit mankind'. Wordsworth and Coleridge agreed with Dryden's view of the epic poem as 'the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform'.³ As the 'Prospectus' to 'The Recluse' makes clear, Wordsworth conceived of the project as exceeding the scope and magnitude of *Paradise Lost*: he plans to invoke Milton's Urania or possibly 'a greater Muse' to accomplish his own 'high argument' (*Excursion* 39–40; lines 26, 71). Beginning in 1802, however, Wordsworth would gradually substitute Milton the sonneteer, the author of only twenty-four sonnets, for Milton the epic poet as a more congenial model of poetic achievement – and perhaps also in recalcitrance to Coleridge's ambitions for him. Years before *The Excursion* and the 'Prospectus', Wordsworth used the sonnet to convey – and to contain – such magnificent ambitions. One of his earliest sonnet series, begun in 1802 and published in 1807, concludes with these lines:

Blessings be with them, and eternal praise,
 Who gave us nobler loves, and nobler cares,
 The Poets, who on earth have made us Heirs
 Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays!
 Oh! might my name be numbered among theirs,
 Then gladly would I end my mortal days. (*PTV* 255)⁴

Wordsworth would find that, at least during his lifetime, the sonnet would answer this aspiration more readily than his other efforts.

And here, too, Milton would provide Wordsworth with a model and a benchmark. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth asserts that a poet makes a 'formal engagement' with his reader merely 'by the act of

writing in verse'; he also refers to this act as a 'promise' to the reader (*LB* 742–3). If the genre itself makes promises, then certainly specific forms make more specific ones. There would seem, then, to be no more binding formal engagement than those of the sonnet and the epic. All but one of the fifty-five sonnets to appear in Wordsworth's next book, *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), were written after his sister read Milton's sonnets aloud to him. As Dorothy Wordsworth notes, on Friday, 21 May 1802 'Wm wrote two sonnets on Buonaparte after I had read Milton's sonnets to him' (*DWJ* 101). Many years later Wordsworth recalled being

particularly struck on that occasion with the dignified simplicity and majestic harmony that runs through most of them – in character so totally different from the Italian, and still more so from Shakespeare's fine Sonnets. I took fire, if I may be allowed to say so, and produced three sonnets the same afternoon, the first I ever wrote, except an irregular one at School. (*FN* 19)

Wordsworth has forgotten or has disavowed all sonnets but one, the 'irregular one' ('Calm is all nature as a resting wheel'), that he had written prior to this watershed moment, which turned out to be especially formative in the development of his poetic identity.

While not as prestigious an achievement as an epic poem, the 'legitimate' sonnet, despite its being generally despised throughout the eighteenth century, still maintained its stature, only diminished in the eyes of some by Smith and her imitators. Despite his fame as the pre-eminent sonneteer, Petrarch was crowned Poet Laureate on the strength of his epic poem *Africa*, not his sonnets. But these small poems, more than his other work, are what later bestowed on Petrarch his literary immortality. When Wordsworth was appointed Queen Victoria's Poet Laureate in 1843, it was at the end of a long career that, the excellence of his other poems notwithstanding, had been defined largely and most recently by hundreds of sonnets. Even Francis Jeffrey's infamous condemnation of Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* as mostly 'trash' makes some exception for the sonnets in it. According to Jeffrey, when Wordsworth writes sonnets, he 'escapes again from the trammels of his own unfortunate system; and the consequence is, that his sonnets are as much superior to the greater part of his other poems, as Milton's sonnets are superior to his' (*CH* 200). Later, after the poor reception of *The Excursion*, *The White Doe of Rylstone* and *Peter Bell*, it was the publication of *The River Duddon: A Series of Sonnets* in 1820 that provided a much needed boost to the poet's career. According to Wordsworth's own estimation, the Duddon sonnets were 'wonderfully popular' and 'more warmly received' than any of his other poems

(*PW* III: 505). Wordsworth followed up this success with the *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822), a series of 102 sonnets on the history of Christianity in England, which was not as well received but to which, undeterred, he continued to add well into the final decade of his life for a total of 132 sonnets. The Duddon series also firmly established the sonnet as the preferred mode for travel series such as the *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820* (1822), *Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems* (1835) and *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837* (1842), each of which consists mostly of sonnets mixed with other lyrics. However, even as early as the 1802 sonnets, recognizing the portability of the form, Wordsworth carried the sonnet with him to France and back again using it to memorialize moments of insight received at particular locations. Some of his best-known sonnets such as 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' and 'It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free' are from this trip and, although more subtly so than the later sonnets, are itinerary poems too.

The ever-increasing number of sonnets issuing from Rydal Mount from 1820 to 1845 suggests that the sonnet had replaced the epic in Wordsworth's estimation of himself as a poet and of what he might be able to achieve. By 1841, A. Montagu Woodford could declare in his collection *The Book of Sonnets* that Wordsworth has raised the sonnet 'to the highest state of perfection in our language'.⁵ The sonnet's eminence among Wordsworth's corpus is marked by the publication of *The Sonnets of William Wordsworth* (1838), making the sonnet the only poetic form to be distinguished in the author's *oeuvre* by a separate collection. This volume features an arrangement of the sonnets peculiar to itself and distinct from the way the sonnets appear in the *Poetical Works*. In the Preface Wordsworth conspicuously aligns himself with Milton by declaring his debt to Milton's sonnets as having inspired the collection at hand. This fact is essential for understanding Wordsworth's obsession with the form. Although only a handful in number compared with Wordsworth's, Milton's sonnets established a model for this kind of variety and interplay when put together: the English sonnets in English (five are in Italian) range from celebrating parliamentary victories and Puritan heroes to bitter remarks on the reception of his tracts to righteous indignation at the massacre of peaceful Protestants by Catholic forces and to personal rumination on his blindness and grief at the death of his wife. Similarly, Wordsworth's classifications of his poems in editions of his *Poetical Works* starting in 1815 all make a distinction between the public or political sonnets and the 'miscellaneous', or personal ones, so designated because they treat the various and sundry matters of individual human experience. Wordsworth's career in sonnets includes a number of exquisite

personal sonnets such as 'Surprized by Joy', on the death of his daughter Catherine in 1812 (*SP* 112–13), or, much later, 'To R. S.' ('God's will ordained that piteous blight should reach'; *LP* 323), which addresses Dorothy Wordsworth's illness and probable dementia. The magnitude of personal grief is troped inversely by the form in the sense the personal sonnets give that feelings of such import can only be expressed in something so disproportionately small. The public sonnets, by contrast, often deal with 'great men', deeds of huge significance, and national pride.⁶ It is in this arena that Wordsworth most conspicuously contends for Milton's laurel.

In these sonnets Wordsworth seemingly takes on the mantle out of a sense of civic responsibility as much as he does from poetic ambition. Prefacing the 1838 *Sonnets*, Wordsworth further explains that the influence of Milton's sonnets is 'one of the innumerable obligations which, as a Poet and a Man, I am under to our great fellow-countryman'.⁷ The debt to Milton has much to do with an association Wordsworth sees between the form and what it means to be both a poet and a 'countryman'. The sonnet was Wordsworth's preferred form for responding to public events of great national significance, frequently in the periodical press, and other matters of historical, social, political or cultural importance. The public sonnet is ubiquitous throughout Wordsworth's career – from his first sonnet on Napoleon ('I griev'd for Buonaparte'; *PTV* 157–8), inspired by Milton in 1802, to his sonnet protesting the expansion of the railway into the Lake District ('Proud were ye, Mountains'; *LP* 390) in 1844. Both of these sonnets, written decades apart, appeared in the same London newspaper, *The Morning Post*, further indicating Wordsworth's sense that through them he was directly engaging his audience. The public sonnets address such topics as the ongoing conflict between France and Great Britain, the Haitian revolt in 1802 led by Toussaint Louverture, the abolition of the slave trade, the Tyrolese peasant revolt, the victory at Waterloo, the expansion of voting rights, copyright protection for authors, and the efficacy of capital punishment for the worst offenders.⁸

The public sonnets are 'occasional' and therefore driven by an urgency that abjures indirect poetical expression in favour of direct polemical discourse. For instance, they are given to exasperated rhetorical questions: in 1802 Wordsworth asks about Napoleon, 'the vital blood / Of that Man's mind what can it be? What food / Fed his first hopes? What knowledge could *He* gain?' (*PTV* 157–8). In 1844 he asks in response to the projected expansion of the railway, 'Is then no nook of English ground secure / From rash assault?' (*LP* 389). Or, the public sonnets opt for scolding admonishment: on the same topics cited above, for example, in 1802, Wordsworth

upbraids English sycophants enthralled by Napoleon's arrogation of power, 'Ye Men of prostrate mind! . . . Shame on you, feeble Heads, to slavery prone!' ('Calais, August, 1802'; *PTV* 156); and, in 1845, he contrasts the railway projectors with the railway labourers who, compelled to do their work, nonetheless feel reverence for the place, 'Profane Despoilers, stand ye not reprov'd, / While thus these simple-hearted men are moved!' ('At Furness Abbey'; *LP* 397) In this mode, Wordsworth deliberately invokes Milton who, following Tasso's example, expanded the purview of the sonnet beyond the erotic to the heroic in order to address public matters of political, historical, social or cultural importance. Wordsworth's sonnet 'London, 1802' is an epiclesis or invocation which figures Milton as a kind of national messiah:

Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
 England hath need of thee: she is a fen
 Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
 Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
 Have forfeited their ancient English dower
 Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
 Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power. (*PTV* 165)

Wordsworth's call for Milton to 'raise us up' echoes the proemium of *Paradise Lost* where the epic bard prays for the Holy Spirit to 'raise and support' 'what is low', invoking Milton himself as a muse as well as potential cultural saviour.⁹ Moreover, Wordsworth's supplication that Milton 'return to us again' is apocalyptic in its appeal for a second coming.¹⁰

Like the epic, which is always about being an epic, the sonnet is always about its relation to every other sonnet – as scores of sonnets about sonnets will attest. But any sonnet is also about its own proportions and its limitations. One of the things that so appealed to Wordsworth about Milton's sonnets was what he described as the 'energetic and varied flow of sound crowding into narrow room' (*EY* 379). Similarly, in 'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room' (the 'Prefatory Sonnet' to the 'Sonnets' section of the 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes* as well as the lead 'Miscellaneous Sonnet' in the 1838 *Sonnets* collection), Wordsworth celebrates the constraints of the form, 'the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground', by picturing the 'narrow room' not as a 'prison' but as a cheerful workplace that feels like home. Such constraint is a relief from 'the weight of too much liberty' (*PTV* 133). In 'Scorn not the Sonnet' (1827), the poet trying to write a sonnet must work within the form, making it his own; yet the form is a constraint,

as is the influence of the sonneteers who came before – Shakespeare, Petrarch, Tasso, Camöens, Dante, Spenser, Milton (*LP* 82). The self-reflexive nature of the form forces the poet to become an object to himself, and the object of his poem, all within fourteen lines. In *The River Duddon* Wordsworth clearly encourages this view of the sonnet as a trope unto itself, making an explicit connection between the form and its function; there, the river is a metaphor for the course of life from an unknowable source to immortality – ‘Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide; / The Form remains, the Function never dies’ (‘Conclusion’; *SSIP* 75). Of course, then, the form is also the sonnet, which presents, as Wordsworth writes of the stream, ‘Objects immense, pourtray’d in miniature’, and the function is poetic immortality (‘Hints for the Fancy’; *SSIP* 63).

Notes

1. As Paul M. Zall notes in the Preface to his facsimile edition, only three copies of Coleridge’s pamphlet are extant. His *Coleridge’s ‘Sonnets from Various Authors’* (Glendale: La Siesta Press, 1968) reproduces the one at the Huntington Library and is cited here.
2. For Coleridge’s discussion of ‘effusions’, see his Preface to *Poems on Various Subjects* (London, 1796), v–vi.
3. *The Works of John Dryden, 1697*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, H. T. Swedenberg Jr and Vinton A. Dearing, 20 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956–2000), v: 267.
4. These four sonnets were first presented as an unnamed poem in which the sonnets serve as stanzas but later were classified as four sonnets called collectively ‘Personal Talk’ and were classed among the *Miscellaneous Sonnets* in 1820.
5. A. Montagu Woodford, *The Book of Sonnets* (London, 1841), xix.
6. See, for example, the sonnets ‘Great Men have been among us’, ‘It is not to be thought of that the Flood’, and ‘When I have borne in memory what has tamed’ (*PTV* 166–7). There are dozens of others.
7. Advertisement for *The Sonnets of William Wordsworth* (London, 1838), iii.
8. Wordsworth’s sonnets on the Napoleonic Wars and related conflicts were written between 1802 and 1816; several of them appeared first in newspapers. The series appeared as ‘Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty’ in the 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes*; the series concluded with Napoleon’s defeat and the publication of the *Thanksgiving Ode* in 1816. The complete series of nearly a hundred sonnets were first collected in *The Miscellaneous Poems of William Wordsworth* (1820); they are to be found in *PTV* and *SP*. See ‘To Toussaint L’Ouverture’ (*PTV* 160); ‘To Thomas Clarkson, On the final passing of the Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, March, 1807’ (*PTV* 246); the Tyrolese sonnets (first published in *The Friend*) (*SP* 56–60); the Waterloo sonnets (*SP* 171–5, 207); ‘Protest against the Ballot. 1838’ (*LP* 328), ‘Said Secrecy to Cowardice and Fraud’ and ‘Blest

Statesman He, whose Mind's unselfish will' (*SSIP* 905–6); 'A Plea for Authors. May, 1838' and 'A Poet to his Grandchild' (*LP* 327, 329); and *Sonnets upon the Punishment of Death* (*SSIP* 869–77).

9. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, eds., *The Oxford Authors: John Milton* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 356; *Paradise Lost* 1: 23.
10. Stephen C. Behrendt, 'Placing the Places in Wordsworth's 1802 Sonnets', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 35 (1995), 656.

*Autobiography**Joshua Wilner*

Writing in the introduction to his ground-breaking edition of *The Prelude* in 1926, Ernest de Selincourt argued that Wordsworth's poem is 'the essential living document for the interpretation of Wordsworth's life and poetry'.¹ Although *The Prelude* is today as central to how we read Wordsworth as De Selincourt found it to be in 1926, this is largely a modern development. First completed in 1805, early in the poet's career, the poem was withheld from print until Wordsworth's death in 1850, although revisited in the interval time and again. While the existence of the poem was first publicly disclosed by Wordsworth in his 1814 Preface to *The Excursion* as a 'preparatory' biographical poem on 'the history of the Author's mind' (*Excursion* 38), the text of *The Prelude* was for decades virtually unknown to all but a small circle of his contemporaries, even as his standing as England's first poet was consolidated. Nor, following publication, did the poem begin to claim the critical attention it now commands until well into the twentieth century, starting indeed with the appearance in 1926 of De Selincourt's edition, the first to publish the 1805 version along with the 1850 text.²

That the last volume of Proust's monumental *A la recherche du temps perdu* should have appeared the following year may be a coincidence. But comparisons of Wordsworth and Proust, such as Willard Sperry's suggestion that 'Proust re-traveled at a later time the road down which Wordsworth had pioneered',³ were not long to emerge, and testify to the continuing ascendancy of an ideology of the aesthetic for which the poet's autobiographical or quasi-autobiographical account of the origins and development of his imaginative powers – tested and confirmed in the performance of that account – was an exemplary cultural achievement. But one need only compare Sperry's tribute with Wordsworth's own anxious sense, confided to Beaumont as the 1805 version was approaching completion, that it was 'a thing unprecedented in Literary history that a man should talk so much about himself' and the expression of a 'fault . . . in the first conception' that lay 'too deep' to be

corrected (*EY* 586–7), to recognize that a first task for *The Prelude* would be ‘to create the taste by which [it] was to be enjoyed’,⁴ starting with the poet himself as his own first reader.

The slow and uneven process of reception through which *The Prelude* may be said to have claimed its central share in Wordsworth’s legacy is, as has already been indicated, continuous with the peculiar history of the manuscript’s origins and development. As is well known, and acknowledged by Wordsworth himself in the Preface to *The Excursion*, as well as in many other places, his initial ‘determination’, conceived jointly with Coleridge around the time they were also collaborating on *Lyrical Ballads*, was ‘to compose a philosophical Poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society; and to be entitled, The Recluse’ (*Excursion*, 38). His failure to make headway with that project, amidst a dismal and homesick winter in Germany, where he and Coleridge and Dorothy had travelled in late 1798 following the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, appears to have been the occasion for a series of notebook entries, some continuous and some less so, that take off from the plaintive question,

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my Nurse’s song . . .

(1799 *Prelude* Part 1, lines 1–3)

and go on to include preliminary versions of some of the most well-known passages of what was to become *The Prelude*, such as the Boat-stealing episode of Book 1 and the ‘Winander Boy’ episode (‘There was a boy . . .’) of Book 5. As the Norton editors have observed, ‘At first Wordsworth almost certainly did not know that he was undertaking a poem of considerable scope’.⁵ To this one may add that, even once that intention had coalesced, the scope of what was being considered, and with it the overall design of the poem, underwent a series of radical revisions. To the entries in the Goslar Notebook of 1798 succeeded the so-called *Two-Part Prelude* of 1799, focused almost entirely on memories from childhood, with the ‘Spots of Time’ and ‘Blessed Babe’ passages providing the conceptual linch-pin in the first and second parts, respectively. This was followed in 1804 by a five-book version, the first four books of which extended the narrative through the end of Wordsworth’s Cambridge education, thus adding the influence of Education to that of Nature in the history of his development. These were then followed by a fifth book which began with the Ascent of Snowdon and concluded, insofar as can be determined, with the now repositioned Spots of Time. This version was then quickly superseded by

the thirteen-book version of 1805 which decisively expands the historical (as well as biographical) horizons to incorporate Wordsworth's time in London and France in the years immediately following the French Revolution, while still retaining Snowdon as a narrative culmination. The 1805 manuscript was then subject to periodic, sometimes major, revisions, resulting in the fourteen-book version published shortly after Wordsworth's death.

This abbreviated account suggests two things. First of all, although *The Prelude's* history of 'the growth of a poet's mind' proceeds along roughly chronological lines, the process by which the poem itself grew was highly non-linear, as one manuscript state was fed back into the writing process as past material to be worked over and elaborated. This is of course true of any revision process to a greater or lesser extent, but assumes a special significance in the case of autobiography, where the text's re-collection of itself becomes interwoven with the recollection of pre-textual material. Moreover, the delayed and staggered reception of *The Prelude* may be seen as a further extension of this structural system: the text had to be not simply read but recalled, resummoned from the past – quite literally in the case of the De Selincourt edition – before the conditions for the entry of the reader into its recursive system of transmission could be fully activated.

Secondly, the fact that the writing of *The Prelude* originated in the context of Wordsworth's failure to make headway with *The Recluse*, the envisioned magnum opus whose completion would be 'of sufficient importance to justify me in giving my own history to the world' (EY 470), assumes a different aspect in light of this compositional history. Rather than simply a precipitating cause dictating a preliminary retreat to a 'theme / Single, and of determin'd bounds' (1805 *Prelude* Book 1, lines 669–70) before embarking on the ultimate goal of writing *The Recluse*, 'a literary Work that might live' (Excursion 38), that failure appears as the abiding *ground*, early and late, of *The Prelude's* coming-into-being. Wordsworth's failure to write *The Excursion* is a 'permanent situation' in the formal sense that Kafka used the phrase,⁶ and constitutes the generative matrix that displaces the totalizing architectonic of *The Recluse* as the 'gothic church' to which *The Prelude* would be the 'ante-chapel'.⁷ *The Prelude* can therefore be conceived as achieving an 'effective finality'. By 'effective finality', I mean, first of all, that the poem was effectively Wordsworth's final work (allowing for its ongoing revision and eventual publication subsequent to *The Excursion*, itself intended as only the second of *The Recluse's* three parts). But secondly, following teleological understandings of 'finality', I mean that, within the context of a complex system of purposes, its completion was an end unto itself, and thus possessed a kind of 'intrinsic finality', as opposed to the

'extrinsic finality' that would be a function of its subordination to the writing of *The Recluse* as a final goal. Wordsworth's own intimation, early and late, of *The Prelude*'s effective finality is conveyed, furthermore, by the double stipulation which appears in a well-known letter to Richard Sharp of April 1804 that *The Prelude* was only to be published *either* upon completion of *The Recluse* or, failing that, upon the poet's death: 'it seems a frightful deal to say about one's self', Wordsworth remarks of *The Prelude*, 'and of course will never be published, (during my lifetime I mean), till another work has been written and published, of sufficient importance to justify me in giving my own history to the world' (*EY* 470; see also 454).

The effective finality of *The Prelude*, then, is not a contingent and as it were extrinsic event that befell the text. Rather, it is a complex condition of meaning – a way of inhabiting language – that pervades its texture and reserves of signification. To the extent that the continuous assertion and subversion of a more linear model of 'the growth of a poet's mind' is intrinsic to that complexity, we should guard against reading the various individual episodes of *The Prelude* (or, for that matter, signifying units obtaining at smaller scales of organization, such as the sentence or line) either as moments in a teleological development or as more or less discontinuous and self-contained 'spots of time'. They participate in and intimate a more enigmatic mode of totality, that 'dark / Invisible workmanship' by which, Wordsworth writes, 'the mind of man is framed' (1805 *Prelude* Book 1, lines 353–4, 352), even as he writes, in lines immediately following, of his belief

That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
A favor'd Being, from his earliest dawn
Of infancy doth open out the clouds,
As at the touch of lightning . . . (lines 364–7)

Pre-eminent among such openings out of the clouds would be the Ascent of Snowdon with which *The Prelude* concludes, its story of ascent to a position of comprehensive vision seeking to emblematically recapitulate the movement of the poem as a whole. Thus M. H. Abrams describes the passage as 'a metaphor for the climactic stage both of the journey of life and of the imaginative journey which is the poem itself and readily compares the poet's 'definitive vision' on 'a mountain-top' to that of Moses on Sinai.⁸ Writing from a less reverential perspective, Mary Jacobus nonetheless agrees that the ascent itself 'provides a representation of the entire narrative of *The Prelude*.'⁹

However warranted such an understanding of Snowdon's structural significance is (an understanding which Wordsworth evidently shared), it

nonetheless proves to be overdrawn in two related regards. Wordsworth begins the episode by recalling how he

... left Bethkelet's huts at couching-time,
And westward took my way to see the sun
Rise from the top of Snowdon. (Book 13, lines 3–5)

It is not hard to discern here the allegorical undercurrent, with its suggestion of a purgatorial ascent to a point of visionary illumination. But the narrative never arrives at this moment or this place. Instead it breaks off with a description of and meditation on the moon-lit land's end scene which spreads before the poet as he emerges from the cloudbank through which he has been climbing – what Wordsworth in early draft material refers to as 'the scene / Which from the *side* of Snowdon I beheld'.¹⁰

Nor, as I have been emphasizing throughout, did Wordsworth ever come near to completing the vast philosophical and poetic project to which *The Prelude* was meant to lead. That Snowdon tells the story of an interrupted rather than completed ascent prefigures, in retrospect, this more encompassing pattern of incompleteness. Or, to put the matter more precisely, the way in which the nocturnal scene beheld from Snowdon's slope *eclipses* the traveller's expectation suggests in turn how the writing of the *The Prelude* both displaces and exceeds the ambition in which it originates to create 'a literary Work that might live'.

The temporal complications that attend the writing, publication and reception of *The Prelude* also complicate any attempt to place this most representative of autobiographies within the context of the emergence of secular autobiography in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, beginning with the posthumous publication of Rousseau's *Confessions* in 1782, as itself a representatively modern genre or mode. De Quincey knew the poem in manuscript, and there is no question that it exerted a deep influence on both *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and *Suspiria de Profundis*, whose experiments in an autobiographical 'impassioned prose' pursue from the other side of the shield Wordsworth's own effort to bring the language of poetry and the language of prose together, an effort in which *The Prelude*, with its 'prosaic' subject matter, participates. The interaction between the autobiographical cast of William's poetic project and Dorothy Wordsworth's journals also merits attention, particularly if one bears in mind the way in which the discontinuous dailiness of a journal interferes with the ambition of autobiography to compose a continuous, integrated narrative, rather than simply expanding 'the range of "autobiography" to include all writing that inscribes subjectivity'.¹¹

The question of the relation of *The Prelude* to its most important immediate precursor, the *Confessions*, is also a vexed one. Although Rousseau's influence on Wordsworth as autobiographer is often taken for granted,¹² there is, as W. J. T. Mitchell acknowledges in an essay arguing for that influence, 'simply no direct evidence that Wordsworth ever read the *Confessions*'.¹³ Both internal evidence and Duncan Wu's extensive cataloguing of Wordsworth's reading point rather to the importance of travel narratives as models, these sometimes combining with conversion narratives, as in the case, in particular, of John Newton's 1764 *Authentic Narrative Of Some Remarkable And Interesting Particulars In The Life Of******.

More broadly, however, if we recall Wordsworth's stated aim in the Preface to *The Excursion* of 'record[ing], in Verse, the origin and progress of his own powers' (*Excursion* 38), *The Prelude's* relation to Enlightenment narratives of origins with broad philosophical aims (including Rousseau's Second Discourse) becomes readily apparent. Concomitantly, one appreciates the astuteness of Abrams's observation that 'in general content and overall design' Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology* is 'notably parallel to Wordsworth's exactly contemporary poem on the growth of his own mind . . . That is, it is the representative autobiography of a spiritual education'¹⁴ – while operating on a world-historical scale rather than at the level of the individual subject. What the history of *The Prelude* shows us, however, is the ongoing activity of that 'dark / Invisible workmanship' which resists subsumption within this system of self-reflexive totalization.

Notes

1. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude; or, Growth of a Poet's Mind*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), xv.
2. Stephen Gill identifies the appearance of the De Selincourt edition as 'the most important moment in the poem's history since the appearance of the first edition in 1850'. *Wordsworth: The Prelude* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 100.
3. Willard Learoyd Sperry, *Wordsworth's Anti-climax* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 137.
4. See Wordsworth's 'Essay Supplementary to the Preface' (*Prose*, III: 80): '... every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed'. Wordsworth is not speaking specifically of *The Prelude* but more generally of 'the fortunes and fate of poetical Works'. Here and elsewhere, Wordsworth attributes the idea to Coleridge.
5. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 485–6.

6. 'The epistolary form permits sudden change to be depicted as in the midst of a permanent situation, yet without depriving the sudden change of its suddenness; it permits a permanent situation to be made know by an outcry, and its permanency, moreover, continues to prevail'. Franz Kafka, 'A Novel about Youth – Review of Felix Sternheim's *Die Geschichte des jungen Oswald*', in *The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 310–11. The 'permanent situation' of the epistolary form is thus the distance between correspondents, which is the sustaining (and generative) ground of the exchange of letters. The permanent situation within which *The Prelude* takes shape would be the 'distance' between the intention to write *The Recluse* and the execution of that intention.
7. 'The preparatory Poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two Works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the Anti-chapel has to the body of a gothic Church' (*Excursion*, 38).
8. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 286.
9. Mary Jacobus, *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on 'The Prelude'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 267.
10. See in particular *1805 Prelude* 1805, 250 and 288 (MSS WW and W, respectively).
11. Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 157.
12. Eugene Stelzig's observation, for example, that 'Wordsworth repeats Rousseau's amnesic gesture [of declaring that he has no predecessors] even as he represses his famous predecessor', while carefully hedged, invites the presumption of direct influence. *Romantic Autobiography in England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 1.
13. W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Influence, Autobiography, and Literary History: Rousseau's *Confessions* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude*', *ELH* 57 (3) (autumn 1990), 645.
14. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 236.

*Epitaphs and inscriptions**Samantha Matthews*

– In our church-yard
 Is neither epitaph nor monument,
 Tomb-stone nor name, only the turf we tread,
 And a few natural graves (“The Brothers”, *LB* 143; lines 12–15)

For the Priest grumbling about tourists idling in remote Ennerdale, ‘natural graves’ evidence not lack but a community bonded by oral memory: ‘We have no need of names and epitaphs, / We talk about the dead by our fire-sides’ (*LB* 148, lines 176–7). However, for returning exile Leonard Ewbank, who ‘knew in what particular spot / His family were laid’, the absence of epitaphs licenses the self-delusion that the ‘Another grave . . . added’ is not his brother’s (lines 81–2). Leonard is excluded from this community: as he leaves, ‘looking at the grave, he said, “My Brother”’ (line 407), but the Priest does not hear. Yet the dialogue form records a sense of nostalgia for imperilled traditions of oral commemoration. Inscription poems not designed for a grave similarly articulate Wordsworth’s ambivalence about the commemorative text’s claim to define the dead. In ‘Lines written on a Tablet in a School’ (*LB* 211–12), the speaker conjures an ideal reader, Nature’s ‘favourite Child’, to contemplate the inscribed name ‘with no common sympathy’, then fulfils the vitalization of the dead by directly addressing Matthew’s spirit: ‘two words of glittering gold’ cannot be ‘all that must remain of thee’ (lines 11–12, 31–2).

Although it is denied in these examples, Wordsworth was throughout his career deeply preoccupied with the ancient textual form of epigraph (from the ancient Greek word *epigraphē*, meaning ‘to write on’) from which the literary epitaph (from ancient Greek *epitaphios*, ‘writing on a tomb’), and the inscription poem derive. Originally carved on rocks, graves and other monumental forms, epigraphs seek to name, epitomize and give permanence to a memorable object, place or situation. Like epitaphs, they exhort the reader to pause and reflect upon life and death. Wordsworth’s early poetry generally resists epitaph’s reductiveness and fixity, and privileges

elegiac speech referring to an actual grave – as in ‘We Are Seven’. However, he experiments with epitaph as early as 1788 (‘Epitaph I’ and ‘Epitaph II’, *EPF* 402–4), and in 1809–10 he translated ten epitaphs by the Italian poet Gabriello Chiabrera (1582–1638) and composed his most sustained work of critical prose, the three *Essays upon Epitaphs*. Although only six translations and the first essay were published in Coleridge’s ephemeral periodical, *The Friend*, the first essay found a permanent home in *The Excursion* (1814), as a long note illuminating ‘The Churchyard among the Mountains’ sequence in Books 5–7 (note to Book 5, line 984). The first ‘Essay upon Epitaphs’ views the epitaph as evidence of ‘the belief in immortality’, but also as ‘a record to preserve the memory of the dead, as a tribute due to his individual worth, for a satisfaction to the sorrowing hearts of the survivors, and for the common benefit of the living’ where possible ‘in *close connection with the bodily remains of the deceased*’ (*Prose* 11: 52, 53). It should speak ‘the general language of humanity’, as ‘not a proud writing shut up for the studious’ but ‘concerning all, and for all’ (57, 59). Wordsworth is tolerant of the ‘tender fiction’ by which survivors ‘personate the deceased, and represent him as speaking from his own tomb-stone’, but prefers ‘survivors [to] speak in their own persons’ (60–1).

While the turn to epitaph coincides with the end of Wordsworth’s ‘Great Decade’, recent revisionary studies claim a more secure place for the *Essays upon Epitaphs* in the canon, as contributing to a substantial body of criticism on Wordsworth’s preoccupation with epitaph and related site-specific inscription poems. This work began in 1965 with two influential essays. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch projected a coherent, career-long practice by connecting Wordsworth’s early interest in inscription to the later interest in epitaph by means of ‘the monumental metaphor’.¹ Contemporaneously, Geoffrey Hartman argued that Wordsworth helped to create ‘a new lyrical kind . . . the nature-inscription’ from a mixed eighteenth-century poetic inheritance of classical epitaph (‘*siste, viator!*’), votive epigrams adapted from the Greek Anthology, loco-descriptive verse, graveyard poetry, Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’, and particularly the inscription (‘any verse conscious of the place on which it was written . . . tree, rock, statue, gravestone, sand, window, album’), which he liberated ‘from its dependent status of tourist guide and antiquarian signpost . . . into a free-standing poem, able to commemorate any feeling for nature or the spot that had aroused this feeling’.² Liberated, that is, from the supposed occasional and site-specific nature of the inscription.

Bernhardt-Kabisch’s view that Wordsworth ‘came to find in the epitaph and the monument conceptual metaphors expressive of what he felt poetry

should be and do³ has been developed and complicated by critics including Douglas J. Kneale, who calls epitaph ‘Wordsworth’s master trope . . . in which the (absent) autobiographical self attempts to give itself textual form’.⁴ Kneale exemplifies a series of influential deconstructive accounts of Wordsworth’s ‘epitaphic mode’ as a trope for the textuality of writing, connoting absence and loss, as in Paul de Man’s proposal that the ‘Essay upon Epitaphs’ ‘evoke[s] the latent threat that inhabits prosopopoeia, namely that by making the dea[d] speak, the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death’ and that the ‘surmise of the “Pause, Traveller” thus acquires a sinister connotation’.⁵ The view of epitaph as a figure for a Wordsworthian poetics of autobiography, memory and immortality has been productive for readings of *The Prelude*, which is variously ‘a series of epitaphs spoken upon former selves’ and ‘the most comprehensive “epitaph” in our language’.⁶

However, epitaph’s privileging as ‘master trope’ entails avoidance of Wordsworth’s epitaphs strictly defined; as Joshua Scodel observes, ‘Wordsworth composed few actual poetic epitaphs, and they are not among his major works’.⁷ Scodel persuasively reads Wordsworth’s epitaphic poetry as indicative of the ‘process by which the poetic epitaph ceased to be a vital literary genre in the early nineteenth century’, caused by ‘the social elite’s new interest in churchyard inscriptions upon the humble and its new anxiety concerning the response of the “stranger” to the poetic epitaph’.⁸ Scholars of book history interpret epitaph as a means of understanding the poet’s changing relation to readers and the material text, as in Scott Hess’s study of uses of prosopopoeia ‘to develop, theorize, and justify a new poetics and a new authorial role in relation to an expanding print culture’.⁹ Leaving aside these competing notions of Wordsworth’s literary epitaphs as sacrificed to or exemplary of the ‘new’, my approach aligns with Peter Simonsen’s revisionary account of the later work as Wordsworth ‘writing for posterity’ and envisioning ‘the book rather than the monumental stone as the ideal medium for the inscriptional and epitaphic poetry’.¹⁰

The shared ground of epitaphic and inscriptional poetry is evident in Wordsworth’s earliest nature inscription, the 1794 manuscript version of ‘Inscription for a seat by the pathway side ascending to Windy Brow’ (published in 1800). The vigorous young walker who ‘need not rest’ is exhorted to stop and empathize with the old or sick who gratefully sit and ‘ponder here / On the last resting place’ (*EPF* 752, lines 2, 7–8). In the nature inscriptions, the dynamic of ephemerality and endurance is inseparable from the bounding and domestication of inscriptive sites. Early inscriptions are set in lonely, wild locations (on steep paths; on the desolate

lakeshore; on an uninhabited island), where they can expect few readers and where the recorded text appears vulnerable to erasure. In 'Lines left upon a seat in a Yew-tree', the sixty-line poem telling the 'Traveller' the salutary tale of a solitary who built the rustic seat on which he rests is most plausibly imagined as a manuscript that a breeze could blow away at any moment (*LB* 47–50; line 1). Three poems' titles identify them as written in the impermanent medium of pencil or slate pencil on stone, as though the printed poem claims authority as the stranger's transcription recording the poem for posterity before rain washes it away. 'Lines Written with a Slate pencil upon a Stone, the largest of a heap lying near a deserted Quarry upon one of the Islands at Rydale' (1800) explains the stones and quarry as 'monuments' of Sir William's abandoned plan to construct a 'pleasure-house' (*LB* 209–10; lines 13, 6). Any 'Stranger' tempted to similar architectural folly should take Sir William's case as a warning to 'leave / Thy fragments to the bramble and the rose' (lines 1, 32–3): slate pencil, composed of shale or soapstone, is a pointedly organic writing medium that does not leave an indelible mark. 'Written with a Slate-pencil, on a Stone, on the Side of the Mountain of Black Comb' (1815) propitiates the bleak mountain's weather spirits, and hopes that the walker's efforts will be rewarded by 'the grand terraqueous spectacle, / From centre to circumference, unveiled!' (reading text 2; *SP* 97, lines 10–11). However, the traveller is also warned of a 'geographic Labourer' who gained experiences 'of Nature's processes / Upon the exalted hills' (lines 14, 19–20), the chief of which is not sublime spectacle, but sudden darkness. The map-maker understands the limit of his powers as he 'sate alone, with unclosed eyes, / Upon the blinded mountain's silent top!' (lines 28–9), the map made invisible, just as the pencil marks will disappear.

Four inscriptions written by 1811 for the grounds at Sir George Beaumont's Coleorton Hall are Romantic rewritings of eighteenth-century garden inscriptions whereby natural elements acquire meaning within the symbolic order of the landowner's 'patrimonial grounds' (*SP*, 106; line 13). As commissioned pieces for engraving on seats and urns associated with newly planted trees, and honouring Wordsworth's friendship with Sir George, in the Coleorton inscriptions Beaumont's family history dominates the scenery. In the style of a votive inscription seeking Nature's protection for a cedar 'Planted by Beaumont's and by Wordsworth's hands', 'In the Grounds of Coleorton, the Seat of Sir George Beaumont, Bart. Leicestershire' ('The embowering Rose . . .') imagines a future in which the mature tree's 'potent branches' protect the 'memorial Stone', so that 'Here may some Painter sit in future days, / Some future Poet meditate his lays' (*SP*, 100–1; lines 11, 12, 15–16). To prevent these future second selves

from displacing and ghosting the living Beaumont and Wordsworth, and thus breaking the promise of survival, the poem imagines them remembering further back to Sir George's Renaissance literary ancestor, Francis Beaumont. Wordsworth later recalled that 'these verses are engraved on a stone, placed near the Tree, which was thriving & spreading when I saw it in the Summer of 1841' (*FN* 29). Beaumont had then been dead for fifteen years, but the verses borrow the tree's vigour, converting the poem's provisional 'If but the Cedar thrive' (line 3) into an assurance of survival affirmed also in the multiplication of the printed text.

Yet the monumental convention is interrogated in 'In a garden of the same' ('Oft is the Medal faithful'), which instead entrusts continuity to 'things obscure and small' (*SP* 107; line 4). The 'Mansion' and 'stately trees' are imagined 'passed away': 'This little Niche, unconscious of decay, / Perchance may still survive' (lines 5, 7, 9–10). Not part of Beaumont's grand design, the sandstone niche was 'scooped within the living stone' by Mary, Dorothy and William, 'wrought in love' while labourers constructed the Winter Garden (lines 10, 13).¹¹ This stone is not enduring but soft and organic; unsuitable for inscription but transcendent in print. Wordsworth confirmed that since 'This inscription is not engraven' (*FN* 29), it is like 'This little Niche, unconscious of decay' (line 8).

In 1812–13, Wordsworth's theories of epitaph took a more personal form, as he composed 'Six months to six years added, He remain'd' for his young son Thomas's grave in the churchyard of St Oswald's, Grasmere. With the move to Rydal Mount, Wordsworth made his mark by cutting walks and terraces, and prompted by threatened departure and death anxiety, several inscriptions written to be engraved into this domesticated landscape take an epitaphic turn. 'Inscription' ('The massy Ways, . . .' (1826)) was, according to a manuscript note, 'Intended to be placed on the door of the further Gravel Terrace if we had quitted Rydal Mount', when in 1825 Lady le Fleming attempted to break the lease (*LP* 57, 429). Cast as a votive inscription to protect the 'humble Walk' shaped 'on the mountain's side / [By a] Poet's hand', the poem's evocation of the poet pacing 'At morn, at noon, and under moonlight skies, / Through the vicissitudes of many a year' (lines 5–6, 8–9), like an injured ghost, offers a graphic reproach to the putative next tenant.

Wordsworth's territoriality is attributable not simply to ageing but to a generic shift from literary inscriptions to literal inscriptions – in Scodel's terms, from pseudo-inscriptional to inscriptional.¹² The literary inscription's connection with the landscape is more imagined than actual, and therefore translates into print more readily than a text conceived for a literal

monument but which is then deprived of its originating context, as in 'Inscription Intended for a Stone in the Grounds of Rydal Mount' (1830):

In this fair Vale hath many a Tree
 At Wordsworth's suit been spared:
 The builder touched this old grey STONE –
 'Twas rescued by the Bard –
 Long may it last! – and here, perchance,
 The good and tender-hearted
 May heave a gentle sigh for him,
 As one of the Departed. (MS 120 (B); LP 216–17)

Wordsworth explains to John Kenyon that 'in a hazel nook of this favourite piece of ground is a Stone, for which I wrote one day the following serious Inscription, you will forgive its Egotism' (LY1: 426). In fact, in contrast to the early inscriptions' first-person demand for the stranger's attention, self-praise is neutralized by the distancing devices of third-person and past tense. Wordsworth writes in 1830 as though he was already 'one of the Departed'. In print this may read as an exercise in bad faith, but 'Engraven, during my absence in Italy, upon a brass plate inserted in the stone' (FN 29) and read in situ, the poem's anonymous voicing and simple language presents an unsettling self-epitaph.

His letters testify to the problems Wordsworth experienced when writing verse epitaphs for memorials to friends including Charles Lamb (d. 1834), Owen Lloyd (d. 1841) and Robert Southey (d. 1843), whether sited outside in the churchyard or inside the church. Although he worried about satisfying the grieving family and friends, his greatest difficulties lay in reconciling a portrait of 'what was peculiar to the individual . . . subordinate to a sense of what he had in common with the species' and that is pervaded with 'commiseration and concern', with the restrictions on length dictated by a stone memorial (*Essays upon Epitaphs*, III; *Prose* 11: 89). In July 1830 Lady Bentinck asked Wordsworth to compose an epitaph to her late husband based, as he wrote to Samuel Rogers, 'Upon her own ideas, and using mainly her own language' (LY11: 309). Wordsworth admitted the result was 'too long and somewhat too historical' for the memorial in Lowther parish church, although 'it wanted neither discrimination nor feeling'. The epitaph on Charles Lamb, 'To the dear memory of a frail good Man', he wrote quickly and without revisions in November 1835 (LP 297–8). Although modelled on Chiabrera's 'characteristic and circumstantial' epitaphs, and extending to thirty-four lines, it yet failed to treat Lamb's main characteristic – 'his faithful and intense love of his Sister' – a subject only possible

‘[h]ad I been pouring out an Elegy or Monody’ (*LY* III: 114). The inevitable revisions rebalanced the ‘delicate delineation’ of Lamb’s eccentric character: ‘the weaknesses are not so prominent, and the virtues placed in a stronger light’ (*LY* III: 120). However, Wordsworth’s desire to portray the siblings’ affection in an expansive and expressive elegiac form is clear both in his initial suggestion that the epitaph’s ‘extreme length’ be managed by carving ‘double-column’ like a printed page, and by his later hope that ‘If the length makes the above utterly unsuitable, it may be printed with [Lamb’s] Works as an Effusion by the side of his grave’ (*LY* III: 114, 120). The verse for Lamb’s headstone was composed by H. F. Cary, while Wordsworth’s epitaph was reframed in the monody ‘Written after the Death of Charles Lamb’.

It is a piquant irony that Wordsworth’s compulsive revising intensified in later life as he received more requests to write texts to be set in stone. The daunting responsibility is palpable even in the first of the *Essays upon Epitaphs*, in ‘the appearance of the letters, testifying with what a slow and laborious hand they must have been engraven’ (*Prose* II: 60). The most graphic case is the ‘Inscription for a monument in Crosthwaite Church, in the Vale of Keswick’ (1843–4). Wordsworth’s first attempt was a prose epitaph in which Southey’s character was overshadowed by the dementia of his last years, the ‘slowly working and inscrutable malady’ imposed by ‘the awful dispensations of Providence’ (*LP* 379). With the verse epitaph, revising continued between publication in *The Times*, on 26 December 1843, and the mason carving the text on the stone, where the first two lines were removed to give the familiar opening ‘Ye vales and hills whose beauty hither drew’ (*LP* 385). Further, visitors to the Southey monument can still see where, as Jared Curtis notes, ‘changes in lines 17–18 were made on the stone by grinding off the earlier reading and engraving the new one in its place’ (*LP* 383). The monument itself records Wordsworth’s conflicted attitude towards the engraved commemorative text.

Wordsworth’s heightened awareness of book and grave as cognate inscriptive sites, and his conscious hybridizing of inscription and epitaph to address questions of textual and spiritual survival, is epitomized by a short poem on the death of the Reverend Matthew Murfitt (1764–1814), vicar of Kendal. Its status as an inscription is clear from the long title recording the occasion and place of writing: ‘Written, November 13, 1814, on a blank leaf in a Copy of the Author’s Poem THE EXCURSION, upon hearing of the death of the late Vicar of Kendal’ (*SP* 154). In plain rhyming couplets Wordsworth recuperates his ‘reluctance strong’ to publish the ‘unfinished’ *Excursion* by taking pleasure that the work was published in time for ‘pious,

learned, MURFITT' (lines 1, 5) to read it before he died. The sublimely egotistical Wordsworth seems to be to the fore – 'I look / With self-congratulation on the Book', 'Upon my thoughts his saintly Spirit fed' (lines 3–4, 6) – but this transmutes into wonder at how the flawed work was itself transformed by the 'one happy issue' of the premature 'deliver[y]' (lines 3, 2). Murfitt 'conn'd the new-born Lay with grateful heart; / Foreboding not how soon he must depart' (lines 7–8). This 'saintly' reader derives the 'joy . . . / Which good Men take with them from Earth to Heaven' (lines 6, 9–10), connecting Wordsworth to an immortal afterlife and sanctifying the book. This short inscription is characteristic of Wordsworth's use of the act of writing to tie an ephemeral moment ('November 13, 1814') to a perpetuity at once immaterial and material. Ketcham notes that 'The poem is, literally, written (with a number of erasures) in WW's hand on the verso of the dedication' of a first edition of *The Excursion* (SP 531). As published in 1815, the typographic medium and the title's more generalized temporality ('Lines Written On a Blank Leaf') discipline the provisionality articulated by the manuscript 'erasures'. The occasional poem's swift publication explains why the prose inscription on Murfitt's memorial in Holy Trinity Church, Kendal, echoes Wordsworth's 'pious, learned, Murfitt' in characterizing him as 'a pious, learned and eloquent Divine: A sincere friend, a kind husband, and in every relation of Life a most worthy man'.¹³ Similarly, although Wordsworth was unable to provide the epitaph for Lamb's grave in Edmonton churchyard, three lines of the epitaph section of 'Written After the Death of Charles Lamb' are quoted in the 1880s mural tablet erected to Lamb, Cowper and Keats in Edmonton church. The inscribed stone records the persistence of the literary pseudo-inscription, while the multitudinous and mobile printed and electronic texts of Wordsworth's poems record his long preoccupation with epigraphy.

Notes

1. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch, 'Wordsworth: The Monumental Poet', *Philological Quarterly* 44 (4) (October 1965), 517, 512.
2. Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry', in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), 31–46.
3. Bernhardt-Kabisch, 'Wordsworth: The Monumental Poet', 509.
4. Douglas J. Kneale, *Monumental Writing: Aspects of Rhetoric in Wordsworth's Writing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), xviii.
5. Frances Ferguson, *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 55; Paul De Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 78.

6. Ferguson, *Wordsworth*, 155; Karen Mills-Court, *Poetry as Epitaph: Representation and Poetic Language* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 187.
7. Joshua Scodel, *The English Poetic Epitaph: Commemoration and Conflict from Jonson to Wordsworth* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 384.
8. *Ibid.*, 385.
9. Scott Hess, 'Wordsworth's Epitaphic Poetics and the Print Market', *Studies in Romanticism* 50 (1) (spring 2011), 55.
10. Peter Simonsen, *Wordsworth and Word-Preserving Arts: Typographic Inscription, Ekphrasis and Posterity in the Later Work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 39.
11. See Jessica Fay, 'Prospects of Contemplation: Wordsworth's Winter Garden at Coleorton, 1806–1811', *European Romantic Review* 24 (3) (2013), 307–15.
12. Joshua Scodel, 'Epitaph', in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Greene et al., 4th edn (Princeton University Press, 2012), 451.
13. 'Memorials inside the church' adapted from Edward Bellasis, 'Church Notes', 1889 (www.kendalparishchurch.co.uk/memorial%20names/mu.html).

CHAPTER 19

Sensibility, sympathy and sentiment

James Chandler

Looking back on the previous half-century or so from 1850, on the occasion of Wordsworth's death, Matthew Arnold compared that poet's achievement with the only two contemporaries who could rival him in the whole of Europe:

Ah! since dark days still bring to light
Man's prudence and man's fiery might,
Time may restore us in his course
Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force;
But where will Europe's latter hour
Again find Wordsworth's healing power?
Others will teach us how to dare,
And against fear our breast to steel;
Others will strengthen us to bear –
But who, ah! who, will make us feel?¹

Byron teaches courage and Goethe teaches wisdom, both ancient virtues that date from the time of the Greeks. These virtues have surfaced and resurfaced over a long course of time. Odds are, suggests Arnold, they will again. What Wordsworth teaches is not easily captured in the classical lexicon of virtue that gives us, say, republican bravery and Stoic philosophical resignation. What Wordsworth teaches is something more modern in its provenance, something that Arnold intimates may in fact be singular, not replicable. It is not classical virtue. It may be closer to traditional Christian charity, but it is not that either. It is something more elusive, a power of healing that comes of a certain kind of feeling.

Arnold's question prompts several others, which might also be called 'contextual'. What is there about Wordsworthian modernity, the late moment in European history that Arnold's generation evidently still inhabits, which calls for a specific capacity to make us feel? How is it that we should understand Wordsworth's particular role within this moment and why, of all writers in this later age, should he be the only one who truly

manages to make us feel? Perhaps the first question to address, however, is just how we are to understand that term 'feeling' itself in Wordsworth's self-understanding. As it happens, the question is one that he takes up directly in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, where he mentions a 'circumstance' that distinguishes the poems in this volume from 'the popular Poetry of the day' – namely, 'that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation and not the action and situation to the feeling'. Arguing, not only for this particular mark of distinction but also for what he calls 'the general importance of the subject', he explains himself as follows:

For the human mind is capable of excitement without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know that one being is elevated above another in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day. (*Prose 1*: 128)

Let us not fail to recognize the huge claims embedded in these few sentences. One is that the capacity of a mind to be excited without strong stimulation supplies a crucial principle of hierarchy in the moral universe. A claim entailed by this one is that a poet may best elevate his readers morally by helping them develop this capacity. And, finally, there is an implicit claim that the turn of the nineteenth century involves a special urgency for the poet's timeless mission to make us feel.

These self-representations, then, conform broadly with Arnold's assessment of Wordsworth's poetic legacy a half-century later. But what exactly is this capacity to feel, to enjoy a heightened capacity for excitement without gross stimulation? One way into the problem is to see how Wordsworth relates his great poetic purposes to the crisis he sees around him 'at the present day'. His account of this crisis and its causes, much influenced by conversations with Coleridge, stands as one of the earliest modern instances of what, in contemporary academic terms, we might now call cultural analysis inflected towards critical media studies:

For a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary

incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespear and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse. – When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble effort with which I have endeavoured to counteract it. (*Prose 1*: 128–30)

Wordsworth must find a way to make his readers feel because of the condition into which they have been cast by historically unprecedented social and cultural conditions. The litany may look familiar to us now – urbanization, the monotony of the modern workplace, political upheavals, technological speed-up – but few poets were thinking in such terms before Wordsworth. Standing on the threshold of the nineteenth century, in the nation with the most advanced commercial and manufacturing economy in the world, Wordsworth produces here an extraordinary act of cultural stocktaking to contextualize his own poetic experiments.

The analysis is not, of course, altogether of his own making. His term for contemporary condition – ‘torpor’ – is borrowed from a somewhat earlier analysis along some of the same lines in what might seem like an unlikely source: Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. In the often neglected fifth book of that work, Smith, writing a quarter of a century before Wordsworth, offered this analysis of the effect of division of labour on individual workers:

The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects, too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life.²

Smith’s twentieth-century reputation as unconcerned with the moral effects of commercial modernity, together with Wordsworth’s disparaging remarks about him in print, has masked the debt of the Preface to *The Wealth of Nations*. But the coupling of the key terms in their respective analyses – exertion and torpor – is hard to dismiss as coincidental. Wordsworth also borrows something from another older contemporary, Erasmus Darwin,

part of the so-called Lunar Society in Birmingham who helped to launch the so-called First Industrial Revolution in Britain in the 1770s and 1780s. Darwin, one of whose anecdotes is used for the experimental ballad 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', was a theorist of psychological stimulation whose thinking carried some influence at the time. Darwin's *Zoönomia*, in particular, is thoroughly preoccupied with explaining the circumstances in which the repetition of a stimulus tends to the diminution of response, even at higher levels of stimulation. Wordsworth expands these elements to include the effects of urbanization and communication technology in the analysis, and, more to the point, he couples this entire critique with a wholesale critique of cultural production in his moment. He attacks the literature and theatre of the late eighteenth century – singling out Gothic fiction, *Sturm und Drang* theatre, and sensationalizing ballads – for their tendency to cater to rather than combat the kind of 'craving' that the social world of his moment had generated. To crave, in this context, is to be in need of outrageous stimulation. It is not to be capable of excitement without it. It is not to be able, in the relevant sense, 'to feel'.

In the modern English lexicon there is a relatively familiar term that seems to capture something of the capacity to 'feel' in this sense: *sensibility*. The age into which Wordsworth was born is itself often called 'the age of sensibility', and one of the dominant literary figures of that age, Samuel Johnson, defined the term in his famous dictionary as follows: '1. Quickness of sensation' and '2. Quickness of perception'. Only the first is illuminated with an example, from Joseph Addison's *Spectator*: 'Modesty is a kind of quick and delicate feeling in the soul: it is such an exquisite *sensibility*, as warns a woman to shun the first appearance of every thing hurtful'.³ In view of Wordsworth's interest in quickness of feeling, it is unsurprising that some form of the word *sensibility* appears several times in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. It tends to figure there in his description of what it takes to be a poet. Indeed, it is listed first among these requirements. Thus, answering his own question – 'What is a Poet?' – in a passage he added to the Preface in 1802, Wordsworth declares, famously: 'He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively *sensibility*, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind' (*Prose* 1: 138). Liveliness – quickness – is the leading characteristic of a *sensibility*, and the poet must, in the first instance, be especially well endowed with that gift. That this is indeed to be understood as an endowment is clear from what Wordsworth had already noted in the Preface of 1800 on this subject: 'Poems to which any value can be attached, were never

produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply' (*Prose* I: 126). The modifier 'organic' indicates that for Wordsworth quickness or liveliness of sensibility is, precisely, an endowment – something the poet receives, as it were, from nature. The larger burden of this passage is to stress that sensibility is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for producing poems of value.

This clarification enables us to see one important difference between Wordsworth's understanding of sensibility and that of the writer who is perhaps most appropriately associated with the term, Laurence Sterne. In Sterne's hands, the notion of sensibility carries a certain mystical significance, as is evident in a frequently anthologized passage from his *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768):

– Dear sensibility! source inexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows! thou chainest thy martyr down upon his bed of straw – and 'tis thou who lifts him up to HEAVEN – eternal fountain of our feelings! – 'tis here I trace thee – and this is thy divinity which stirs within me – . . . all comes from thee, great – great SENSORIUM of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in the remotest desert of thy creation.⁴

The apposition implied in the parallel acts of apostrophe – 'Dear sensibility! . . . great SENSORIUM of the world!' – provides a clue to the particular theological provenance of Sterne's own conceptual vocabulary, one that is also to be associated with a certain modernity. For the term 'sensorium' was coined by Henry More in the mid seventeenth century in Latitudinarian debates about the soul in the face of materialist and mechanist challenges by thinkers like René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza.

More proposed to save the soul by way of a compromise. He posited that the soul, though not itself material, resided in what he called its 'vehicle' – he also coined Sterne's word 'sensorium' as an alternate form of nomenclature for it – which was itself composed of what More technically termed subtilized matter. This meant that the vehicle could be understood as relatively material in relation to the soul but nonetheless relatively immaterial in relation to the rest of the body.⁵ The argument came to be known as the vehicular hypothesis, and it shaped much British moral thought for decades, as the notion of a 'vehicle' came to be concretized in relation to the figure of the horse-drawn carriage. The vehicular hypothesis was given a full, if idiosyncratic, elaboration in Abraham Tucker's *The Light of Nature Pursued* (1768), the same year in which Sterne produced

Sentimental Journey, with its complex running jokes about various kinds of 'vehicles': the sentimental traveller should not be distinguished only by the 'Novelty of [his] Vehicle'.⁶ In Sterne, who was trained as a Latitudinarian divine, the notion of sensibility thus carries specifically anti-materialist overtones, as in the episode that leads to his apostrophe, 'Dear sensibility!', where Parson Yorick, having passed a vehicular handkerchief between himself and the forlorn shepherdess, Maria of Moulines, concludes: 'I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pester'd the world ever convince me of the contrary.'⁷

By contrast with Sterne's influential account, Wordsworth's view of the poet's needed 'organic sensibility', and indeed of the likewise necessary 'comprehensiveness of soul', seems to emphasize that they are both best understood as preliminary to the poet's work. He emphasizes that the poet, though in need of such gifts in the first place, must also think 'long and deeply'. Thus, any full account of our Arnoldian question (how does Wordsworth make us feel?) must engage with the question of how feeling and thought are interconnected – that is, how sensibility, lively though it must be in its organic nature, is developed through what Wordsworth calls certain 'habits of meditation'. This is how he explains himself on this point:

For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings connected with important subjects will be nourished, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much organic sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated. (*Prose 1*: 126)

We note that Wordsworth *again* repeats the necessary but not sufficient condition of being 'originally possessed of much organic sensibility'. This certainly seems to be requisite for what might be called the 'continued influxes of feeling'. But the emphasis here is on how these feelings are 'modified and directed'. The complication is that this process of modification and direction takes place by virtue of 'representatives of all our past feelings' – 'general representatives', as Wordsworth puts it. And his other name for these general representatives is 'our thoughts'.

This epistemology derives quite directly from the opening pages of David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), with 'feelings' substituted for Hume's 'impressions' and 'thoughts' substituted for Hume's 'ideas'. For Hume, an idea is nothing other than a surviving trace or representative of a fleeting impression. The second phase of Wordsworth's process, that in which we contemplate 'the relation of these general representatives to each other', is derived from Hume's second phase, which Hume addresses under the concept of 'the impression of reflection'. On Hume's account, impressions are affective and ideas are cognitive. But ideas once formed can return to strike the mind again in its act of contemplation. This recurrence of the idea to the mind creates a second-order affect. And this is what Hume calls an impression of reflection. In Hume, it is the process by which we produce sentiments – as Annette Baier has persuasively shown – and it serves the same function in Wordsworth's little epistemological account in the Preface.⁸ Wordsworth extends the account to suggest that, with the proper habits of meditation, the sentiments formed and uttered by the poet will be connected with appropriate objects and will necessarily elevate the reader both in thought and feeling. If, as Wordsworth later sums things up, 'the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement' (*Prose* I: 142), then the elevation of the reader will follow along similar lines.

Wordsworth's ability to 'make us feel', to influence our capacity for feeling beyond what our natural quickness of sensibility permits, is thus linked on his own account with his ability to make us think. It is dependent, in other words, on his capacity to induce a response in which feeling and thinking are deeply connected, a response that involves the production of 'sentiments' by what Hume calls 'reflection'. In a passage elsewhere in the Preface that hews more closely to Hume's vocabulary of 'impressions' and 'ideas', Wordsworth explains the poet's form of reflection as encompassing both 'ideas and sensations'. It is here that he introduces another key term, 'sympathy', into the mix:

What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; . . . he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding every where objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment. (*Prose* I: 140)

The poet's work is actually described here as a *double* act of reflection, in that the poet reflects on human reflection. That is, the poet '*considers* [man]

as *looking*' on a complex scene of ideas and sensations created by his interaction with the objects in his environment. What the poet finds is what the man he contemplates finds, namely, objects that excite 'sympathies' that bring him great pleasure. What then is the role of sympathy – another central topic of the age of sensibility – in our answer to the Arnoldian question of how Wordsworth makes us feel?

In perhaps the most influential account of sentiment formation in the age of sensibility, one closely derived from Hume's, Adam Smith emphasizes the role of another kind of reflection in which sympathy is directly involved. This is the sort of thought-inducing mirroring act that comes of the everyday operations of human sympathy, a term also important for Hume, although Smith explains its operation rather differently. For Smith, sympathy names the two-staged process in which we first put ourselves in the place of another in order to imagine how we should feel in a like situation, and then determine the degree to which our feelings in such a case might or might not be attuned with those we find expressed by the other. This notion of sympathy as a kind of projection is decidedly different from Hume's understanding, in which sympathy operates as a kind of contagion. In Hume's own terms, we might say that Smithian sympathy operates by (imagined) resemblance whereas Humean sympathy works by (actual) contiguity. It is Smithian sympathy that involves reflection:

We begin, upon this account, to examine our own passions and conduct, and to consider how these must appear to them, by considering how they would appear to us if in their situation. We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct.⁹

Smith produces a sociable version of Hume's 'impression of reflection', we might say, in which the 'idea' that strikes us in a second-order affective experience is the picture we form of how our own experience appears in a point of view not our own. And just as in Hume, the process by which we move from impression to impression of reflection is meant to be understood as improving sensibility, moving us towards what Hume calls a 'general point of view', so in Smith the process of social reflection through sympathy produces the generalized perspective of the 'impartial spectator' as a check to our natural biases in moral perception.

In a poem from *Lyrical Ballads* such as 'Tintern Abbey', we can see Wordsworth linking these two forms of sentimental reflection, which for shorthand we can call the Humean and the Smithian. He begins the poem

from a redoubled sense of the Wye Valley landscape as both the present impression and the thought that is the representative of his impression from five years earlier: 'The picture of the mind revives again' (*LB* 118; line 62). He closes the poem with a kind of reflection born of human sympathy, when he turns to Dorothy and sees his own former experience mirrored in her face and eyes. Three years before Wordsworth's return visit to the Wye Valley, Friedrich Schiller noted that the reflection that is characteristic of the sentimental mode produces the 'mixed feeling' that for him defines this mode.¹⁰ Wordsworth seems to register some such consequence near the start, when he notes that the redoubled image of the landscape brings him both 'pleasing thoughts' and 'somewhat of a sad perplexity' (lines 64, 61), and again near the close, when thoughts of his communion with his sister mitigate the thought of his own mortality. As he explains in the Preface, 'wherever we sympathize with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure' (*Prose* 1: 140).

Wordsworth's arguments about sentiment and sympathy thus share more with Hume's and Smith's writings than he might have liked to acknowledge. Like them, too, he sees sympathy as generalizable in its natural tendencies. In the Preface he stresses the importance of the poet's contact with 'the sympathies of men' and 'the general sympathy' (*Prose* 1: 124, 138). Like them, he emphasizes the importance of common life in thinking through what it means to cultivate appropriate sentiments. An important point of difference from Hume and Smith turned on the question of where to locate common life and the general sympathies that inform it. As his friend Coleridge later complained, Wordsworth's understanding of common life was epitomized by what Wordsworth called 'low and rustic life' (124). His experiments with ordinary spoken language did not look for evidence in the polite circles of Hume's and Smith's 'conversable world', but aimed to show instead 'how far the language of conversation in the *middle* and *lower classes of society* is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure' (116; italics added). For Hume and Smith, the experience of the commercial world sweetens our dispositions by polishing our sentiments. Polish – in poetry as in life – is one of the aspects of contemporary culture that troubled Wordsworth almost as much as the tendencies to overstimulation that he found in the Gothic and the *Sturm und Drang*. These were all for him signs of a modern decadence that Wordsworth addressed in ways that Arnold worried could not be repeated in Europe's later hour.

In 1828 a somewhat hostile reviewer called Wordsworth the Laurence Sterne of his age, and I have suggested that Wordsworth derived from Sterne a whole way of writing about the dilation of ordinary experience

through a developed sensibility.¹¹ Further, in ‘Hart-Leap Well’, the lyrical ballad that Hazlitt pointed to in calling Wordsworth a ‘poet of mere sentiment’,¹² Wordsworth echoed the same line of Othello that Sterne had echoed in *Sentimental Journey* – ‘Moving accidents of flood and field’ – to align himself against the tendency to sensationalism in contemporary narrative: ‘The moving accident is not my trade’.¹³ For both writers, profound emotions could be ‘the simple produce of the common day’ for the quick sensibility that has been developed in habits of reflection (*HG* 103; ms D, line 808).

But Sternean feeling ultimately develops towards a notion of refinement that is playful, erotic, urbane – again, decadent. Wordsworth, by contrast, develops his already quick sensibility with a discipline that is more sober, more chaste, and more countrified. He enlisted the poetics of the English ballad in this effort in ways that changed the course of modern poetry.

Notes

1. Matthew Arnold, ‘Memorial Verses’, in *The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry (Oxford University Press, 1950), 272. I would like to thank Andrew Yale for his help with the preparation of this essay.
2. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols., ed. R. H. Campbell, et al., *Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (1776; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), 11: 782.
3. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755), s.v. ‘sensibility’.
4. Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, ed. Ian Jack and Tim Parnell, new edn (Oxford University Press, 2003), 98.
5. Henry More, *The Immortality of the Soul* (London, 1659), 300; for the use of ‘sensorium’, see *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, s.v. ‘sensorium’.
6. Sterne, *Sentimental Journey*, 10 (italics in original).
7. *Ibid.*, 95.
8. Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
9. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, *Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (1759; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 112.
10. Friedrich Schiller, ‘On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry’, in *Essays*, trans. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 1993), 204.
11. [Alciphron], ‘Some Speculations on Literary Pleasures – No. VIII’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* (May 1828), 399–400.
12. William Hazlitt, ‘On the Living Poets’, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 21 vols., ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent, 1930–4), v: 156.
13. *LB* 136; compare Sterne, *Sentimental Journey*, 24.

PART IV

Cultural and historical contexts

*Revolution**John Bugg*

Wordsworth once remarked that he gave ‘twelve hours thought to the conditions and prospects of society, for one to poetry’.¹ This collation of social concern and literary endeavour recalls a moment at the opening of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in which Wordsworth explains that he could not provide a full treatise on poetry ‘without retracing the revolutions not of literature alone but likewise of society itself’ (*Prose* 1: 120). Because such an account would ‘require a space wholly disproportionate to the nature of a preface’, Wordsworth instead offers ‘a few words of introduction’ to his poems, which he describes as ‘materially different from those, upon which approbation is at present bestowed’ (120). Despite Wordsworth’s deflection, what made these poems so different had to do precisely with revolution, in this case a literary revolution inspired by the political revolutions of the age. The revolutionary era, which we can trace from Boston in 1776 to Bois Caïman in 1791 to Naples in 1820, had of course its defining event in the French Revolution, described by Percy Bysshe Shelley as ‘the master theme of the epoch in which we live’.² The profound significance of this ‘master theme’ for Wordsworth is clear from Books 9 and 10 of the *Prelude*, which chronicle his time in France and offer a retrospective on his feelings about the revolution as the 1790s unfolded. But this is not a biographical story alone. William Hazlitt famously wrote that Wordsworth’s poetry ‘partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age’.³ In what follows I examine the importance of the French Revolution for Wordsworth’s writing, paying special attention to the vision for a new poetry he offered at the end of the revolutionary decade in *Lyrical Ballads*.

Wordsworth first visited France in 1790, arriving on 13 July, the eve of the great Fête de la Fédération, the grandest celebration of the revolution’s early, hopeful phase. ‘Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive’, Wordsworth would famously recall in the *Prelude*, ‘But to be young was very heaven’ (1805 *Prelude* Book 10, lines 692–3). This optimism was widely felt. ‘How glorious’, exclaimed Joseph Priestley, ‘is the prospect, the reverse of all the

past, which is now opening upon us, and upon the world. Government, we expect to see, not only in the theory, and in books, but in actual practice, calculated for the general good'.⁴ Wordsworth became more committed to this glorious prospect during his next trip to France (from November 1791 to December 1792), during which he fell in love with the young French woman Annette Vallon (their daughter Caroline was born in December 1792), and formed a friendship with the French officer (and supporter of the revolution) Michel Beaupuy. In the *Prelude* Wordsworth describes encountering an impoverished, 'hunger-bitten girl' while on a walk with Beaupuy:

my Friend
 In agitation said, 'Tis against that
 Which we are fighting', I with him believed
 Devoutly that a spirit was abroad
 Which could not be withstood, that poverty,
 At least like this, would in a little time
 Be found no more, that we should see the earth
 Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
 The industrious, and the lowly Child of Toil,
 All institutes for ever blotted out
 That legalised exclusion, empty pomp
 Abolish'd, sensual state and cruel power
 Whether by edict of the one or few,
 And finally, as sum and crown of all,
 Should see the People having a strong hand
 In making their own Laws, whence better days
 To all mankind. (1805 *Prelude* Book 9, lines 518–34)

But this dream of better days was catastrophically interrupted. Wordsworth returned to Britain in December 1792 intending to secure a position in the church so that he could marry Vallon, but within six weeks war had broken out between France and Britain, and travel routes were closed.⁵ This profound personal trauma, as critics have long noted, assured that, even if Wordsworth had not been invested in that blissful dawn, the French Revolution would stay with him for the rest of his life. What is less clear is the precise nature of his regard for the revolution as the 1790s unfolded. It is sometimes assumed that the execution of Louis XVI (21 January 1793) and the Terror (1793–4) brought to an end Wordsworth's support for the revolution and his republican principles more broadly. This question has been debated with particular intensity over the past few decades, although no clear consensus has formed. For some critics, Wordsworth had adopted a Burkean conservatism by the mid 1790s; for others, he maintained progressive political beliefs at least into the early years of the nineteenth

century.⁶ What we can say with some certainty is that the execution of Louis XVI did not change Wordsworth's support for political reform in Britain, nor did the Terror alter his political self-identification: 'I am of that odious class of men called democrats', he told a friend in May 1794, 'and of that class I shall for ever continue' (*EY* 110).

By this point Wordsworth had come under the influence not only of the French Revolution but also of the debate it fostered in Britain. The revolution controversy was inaugurated by a sermon that dissenting minister Richard Price delivered in London on 4 November 1789, in which he celebrated the 'Glorious Revolution' of the previous century and cheered the current age's revolutionary movements: 'Behold kingdoms, admonished by you, starting from sleep, breaking their fetters, and claiming justice from their oppressors!' Price also issued a warning to the 'oppressors of the world': 'Restore to mankind their rights and consent to the correction of abuses, before they and you are destroyed together'.⁷ His jeremiad was greeted by a counter-warning from Edmund Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) defended traditional social order against the upheavals of revolution. Burke's tract was in turn met with a flurry of responses from writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, James Mackintosh, Benjamin Flower, and most influentially, Thomas Paine.⁸ Wordsworth, too, wished to enter the revolution debate. He framed his 1793 political pamphlet, *A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, as a response to a reactionary tract that Richard Watson (bishop of Llandaff) had appended to one of his sermons, in which he protested the regicide and warned against the spread of radical ideas in Britain.⁹ In the *Letter*, Wordsworth responds that the execution of Louis XVI must be understood as a sad inevitability, for the dire conditions of late eighteenth-century France had made revolution and even regicide historical necessities. Wordsworth even hints that something similar could soon happen in Britain: 'Pure and universal representation . . . cannot, I think, exist together with monarchy. It seems madness . . . They must war with each other, till one of them is extinguished. It was so in France, and * * * I shall not pursue this topic further' (*Prose* 1: 41). Wordsworth himself inserted the string of asterisks, and his caution here is obvious, as he wished to avoid naming the execution of George III within a tract intended for publication in Britain. His wariness in this sentence extended to the work's publication, and in the end he decided to withhold it from the press, perhaps taking notice of other political writers who were arrested and imprisoned across 1792/3 in the British government's crackdown on radical discourse. The *Letter* was never published in Wordsworth's lifetime (it finally appeared in print in 1876).¹⁰

The revolutionary spirit of the *Letter*, however, did not remain shut up with the tract. It reappears across Wordsworth's works of the 1790s, and in *Lyrical Ballads* he brought this spirit to the very question of poetic composition. Contemporary reviewers had no trouble recognizing the political sympathies of *Lyrical Ballads*. If Wordsworth's new poetry harnessed the democratic energy of the Paineite movement, Francis Jeffrey provided the Burkean response. Jeffrey described this new style of poetry as the 'most formidable conspiracy that has lately been formed against sound judgment', and charged that a 'splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society' was powering the offensive.¹¹ Writing in the *Monthly Review*, meanwhile, Charles Burney warned readers that 'The Last of the Flock' supported the revolutionary idea of 'rigid equality of property', and of the narrative of a poor woman's theft of firewood in 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', Burney asked, 'if all the poor are to help themselves, and supply their wants from the possessions of their neighbours, what imaginary wants and real anarchy would it not create?' (*CH* 77, 76). Burney's critique of the volume's disregard for the contemporary legal system extended to his claim that 'The Convict' showed dangerous sympathy for a prisoner (*CH* 77–8), and Jeffrey likewise fumed about the author's 'unconquerable antipathy to prisons, gibbets, and houses of correction, as engines of oppression, and instruments of atrocious injustice'.¹² For Jeffrey and other critics, *Lyrical Ballads* was received as a political plot within the house of poetry.

Wordsworth's suspicion that this would be the case is signalled by the brief 'Advertisement' that he included with the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. The 'Advertisement' is essentially a call for independent judgment, as Wordsworth asks readers not to reject the volume's poems just because the style and subject matter may not be familiar:

if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, [readers] will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title. It is desirable that such readers, for their own sakes, should not suffer the solitary word Poetry, a word of very disputed meaning, to stand in the way of their gratification; but that, while they are perusing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains human passions, human characters, and human incidents; and if the answer be favorable to the author's wishes, that they should consent to be pleased in spite of that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision. (*Prose* 1: 116)

'Our own pre-established codes of decision': this phrase may as easily have appeared in Burke's *Reflections*. For Burke, what distinguishes the British

from the French is that the wisdom of tradition, embodied in 'prejudice', unburdens them from the need to rely on their own fallible judgment. 'Prejudice', Burke argues, provides the nation with needful stabilization in an era of revolution.¹³ But in Wordsworth's 'Advertisement', reliance on 'pre-established codes of decision' is the 'most dreadful enemy to our pleasures', and so he challenges readers to disregard what they thought poetry must be, and instead use their own judgment to assess the poems. Two years later in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth would lay out this idea in the spirit of a manifesto.

The Paineite republicanism that excoriated an inequitable social order grounded on the systemic corruptions of monarchy (and, more to the point, the discourses that preserve this order) pulses through Wordsworth's Preface. We see it in his plan for a new poetry that attends to the condition of 'low and rustic life', and in his effort to craft sincere, emotionally legitimate verse from the plain language of common people. We see it too in his critique of traditional poetic language:

I hope it will be found that there is in these Poems little falsehood of description, and that my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. Something I must have gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely good sense; but it has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets. (*Prose* 1: 132)

In this poetic declaration of independence, Wordsworth recognizes, even celebrates, the forfeiture of his 'inheritance', for much of the language of traditional poetry is clichéd beyond repair, and the gains of starting afresh will compensate for the traditions lost. He especially means to reject the Neoclassical verse of writers such as Thomas Gray, whose poetry, he argues, relies on an etiolated system of 'poetic' terms and allusions. Against the diminution of sincere thought and feeling in such verse, Wordsworth argues that his new poetry will instead emerge organically from real emotion: 'the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation', he says of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, 'and not the action and situation to the feeling' (*Prose* 1: 128). Wordsworth's emphasis on feeling is part of his larger vision of a poetry that he believes could heal an ailing national culture. This poetic mission, he argues, is of particular urgency at this moment:

For a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor.

The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. (*Prose* 1: 128)

This is a toxic confluence: the industrial revolution is filling cities with workers whose repetitive labour ‘produces’ not only goods but a ‘craving for extraordinary incident’, and this ‘craving’ is partly answered by reports of the war, those ‘national events daily taking place’. To make things worse, ‘literature and theatrical exhibitions’ have shaped themselves to answer this craving. Wordsworth’s account of a British reading public feverishly attached to extravagant narratives helps us to understand his effort to craft a curative poetry rooted in plain language and honest emotion.

At this point it may be worth pausing to consider together the two kinds of cultural production that Wordsworth’s poetic revolution seeks to combat: the rote, enervated poetry of the earlier eighteenth century, and the narratives of excitement meant to entertain those suffering in mind-numbing jobs. What do these two kinds of writing have in common? Crucial to Wordsworth’s rejection of ‘poetic inheritance’ is the tendency for the authority of tradition to substitute for independent thought: poets recruit hackneyed words and phrases which readers passively receive. It is this problem of acquiescence that also defines the popular culture of the day, as an exhausted public craves and receives stimulation in a dynamic that leaves no room for thoughtful engagement. This is the heart of the social appeal of the Preface, a call for active readerly participation rather than passive acceptance of either the empty language of tradition or the frenzied narratives of the moment. It is a rejection not only of Burkean prejudice, but also of the uncritical absorption of any discourse. On display throughout *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth’s sense that readers must think for themselves is perhaps most sharply dramatized in ‘Simon Lee’.

Beginning in the style of a traditional ballad, ‘Simon Lee’ recounts an old servant’s days of sport and revelry. But soon enough the poem begins to crumble before our eyes. First we learn that the aristocratic order of which Simon was once a part has passed away:

His Master’s dead, and no one now
 Dwells in the hall of Ivor;
 Men, dogs, and horses, all are dead;
 He is the sole survivor.

(*LB* 65; lines 21–4)

Simon's membership in the aristocratic world of the Hall of Ivor was temporary, and he and his wife Ruth are now left to die in poverty. It is after detailing the brutal lives of Simon and Ruth that the narrator, instead of offering an exciting account of one of Simon's adventures, announces his refusal of generic tradition:

My gentle reader, I perceive
How patiently you've waited,
And I'm afraid that you expect
Some tale will be related.

O reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle reader! you would find
A tale in every thing.
What more I have to say is short,
I hope you'll kindly take it;
It is no tale; but should you think,
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

(lines 69–80)

'Perhaps a tale you'll make it': Wordsworth challenges readers actively to participate in the production of meaning. For the 'more' he has to say, the narrator does not fall back on conventions from poetic tradition or the fashioning of 'extraordinary incident'; rather, he presents a minor episode from everyday life, the significance of which is left ambiguous. The narrator describes coming upon Simon labouring to cut a stubborn old tree root. But Simon has grown very weak:

The mattock totter'd in his hand;
So vain was his endeavour
That at the root of the old tree
He might have worked for ever.

'You're overtasked, good Simon Lee,
Give me your tool' to him I said;
And at the word right gladly he
Received my proffer'd aid.
I struck, and with a single blow
The tangled root I sever'd,
At which the poor old man so long
And vainly had endeavour'd.

(lines 85–96)

This is as close as Wordsworth comes in *Lyrical Ballads* to allegorizing his own labour as a poet, working to sever ties to the past, the decrepit aristocratic legacy represented by the empty Hall of Ivor. Hazlitt's description of what he referred to as Wordsworth's 'levelling' muse, which brought

to the field of poetry the revolutionary energies of the era, illuminates the significance of this moment in ‘Simon Lee’: ‘[H]is popular, inartificial style gets rid (at a blow) of all the trappings of verse, of all the high places of poetry’.¹⁴ Not only in this bold gesture of severing ties with poetic tradition, but throughout *Lyrical Ballads* – in its subject matter and characters, in its use of the ballad tradition, and in its Preface calling for a newly democratic, vernacular poetic language – we see how the ideals of the revolution inspired Wordsworth to chop a deadened tradition off at the root, and offer the prospect of a new poetic order.

Notes

1. Wordsworth’s statement was reported by Orville Dewey in *The Old World and the New: Or, A Journal of Reflections and Observations Made on a Tour in Europe*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros., 1836), 1: 90.
2. *Letters of Percy Shelley*, 2 vols., ed. F. L. Jones (Oxford University Press, 1964), 1: 504.
3. Hazlitt, ‘Mr Wordsworth’, in *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, 21 vols., ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent, 1930–34), xi: 81.
4. Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Right Honorable Edmund Burke* (Birmingham, 1791), 145.
5. Traditional scholarship has Wordsworth not returning to France again until the Peace of Amiens made travel possible in 1802, but Kenneth R. Johnston and others have argued that it is likely Wordsworth visited France surreptitiously in September 1793. See Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth*, rev. edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 358–400.
6. See James Chandler, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), and E. P. Thompson, ‘Wordsworth’s Crisis’, in *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (Rendlesham, Suffolk: Merlin Press, 1997). For an account of the new historical critique that influentially found in Wordsworth’s work a ‘Romantic ideology’ that elides politics and history, see M. H. Abrams, ‘On Political Readings of Lyrical Ballads’, in *Doing Things with Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory*, ed. Michael Fischer (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 364–91.
7. Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (London: T. Cadell, 1789), 50–1.
8. For a full list of responses to Burke, see Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England’s Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, Polemics, and Political Ideals* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2005), 46–52.
9. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser conclude that Wordsworth likely composed the *Letter* in February or March of 1793 (*Prose* 1: 20). Richard Watson, *A Sermon Preached Before the Stewards of the Westminster Dispensary . . . With an Appendix* (London: T. Cadell, 1793).

10. Johnston and others have reasoned that the intended publisher for the *Letter*, Joseph Johnson, may have dissuaded Wordsworth from publication (*Hidden Wordsworth*, 339).
11. Jeffrey's comment comes in his review of Robert Southey's *Thalaba, the Destroyer*, and is directed at the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey (*Edinburgh Review* 1 (October 1802), 71).
12. Jeffrey takes aim here at the pair of prison poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth's 'The Convict' and Coleridge's 'The Dungeon' (review of *Thalaba*, 71).
13. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. VIII, *The French Revolution, 1790–1794*, ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford University Press, 1989), 138.
14. Hazlitt, 'Mr Wordsworth', 81, 87.

*Poverty and crime**Toby R. Benis*

William Wordsworth's engagement with the idea of place, embodied in landscape, topography and less tangible senses of belonging, was accompanied by a lifelong fascination with those who lacked a stable or clearly defined position within Georgian society. Placelessness in Wordsworth's poetry can be literal, concerning individuals lacking a fixed residence, or more metaphorical, in the case of those who choose not to occupy, or are prevented by circumstances from occupying, an economically stable, socially approved or easily defined position in the contemporary milieu. The social group most emblematic of such conditions in Wordsworth's writing is the poor. And while not a crime per se, poverty in the Georgian period is associated with a range of illegal behaviour, from vagrancy and theft to sedition and murder. The Wordsworthian 'poor' is a vast, diverse group, including abandoned women or widows, discharged veterans, beggars, gipsies and children. Wordsworth's representations of such figures dramatize the complexities of his immersion in the political and social contexts of his era.

Wordsworth's lifetime coincided with far-reaching changes in the way poverty and the poor were viewed. Historically, the British state's stance on poverty had been codified by the Elizabethan poor law of 1601: in this statute, the crown recognized destitution as a condition that the government was bound to ameliorate, without challenging the fundamental biblical claim that poverty was inevitable and eternal: 'ye have the poor always with you' (Matthew 26:11). In its original form, the poor law made the Anglican parish a civil as well as a religious entity, responsible for collecting a tax on those living in its bounds to be distributed as alms by parish officers to those in need. The 1662 Act of Settlement refined this injunction; seeking to prevent itinerant paupers or those at risk of such a state from leaving less prosperous parishes to seek more generous benefits in richer ones, eligibility for poor law aid was now tied to proof of 'settlement' in the community, typically ascertained through birth but also through

employment or property ownership or rental. Such church and state aid existed alongside the unofficial assistance offered by a variety of charitable societies and, of course, by individuals. But during the eighteenth century the view of poverty as an inevitable part of the theologically sanctioned social order, whose effects should be softened by acts of Christian charity, was challenged by observers who viewed it more as a social problem, a symptom of flaws in the arrangements of secular society. Such thinking gained new urgency in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, as the ranks of the poor, and the severity of their circumstances, grew. While their social superiors experienced hardship, the poor were on the front lines of the suffering brought on by the economic instability, years of famine, forced military service and crime waves attendant on the conflicts with American, and later French, revolutionary regimes. During the 1780s, property crime soared when veterans returning from the American war were greeted by widespread unemployment and a trade depression brought on by the loss of colonial markets. The practice of 'crimping' or kidnapping military recruits, bad harvests and rising food prices during the 1790s resulted in rioting in London and elsewhere. The early effects of industrialization further exacerbated the period's distresses, as evidenced for example by the 1811–12 Midland rioting of weavers put out of work by the advent of new wide-frame machinery. The legal mechanisms and ideologies the Georgians had inherited from their predecessors were inadequate in the face of such ongoing crises.

British authorities responded to the deteriorating conditions of the poor with an ambivalent mix of repression and relief. Blocked from using transportation to America as a criminal punishment during the 1780s, magistrates sentenced convicts to hanging in numbers not seen since the 1720s. During the 1790s the Pitt Ministry shored up the established order by arguing for the suspension of habeas corpus and expanded grounds for prosecutions for sedition and treason, particularly after a London crowd attacked the king's carriage in 1795 while protesting against skyrocketing bread prices and the French war. In addition, Parliament renewed its commitment to criminalizing disruptive activities associated with the poor such as vagrancy (and by implication, begging) and poaching. Not coincidentally, this period also saw the emergence of speculative schemes for ensuring social order, such as Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, a model prison predicated on far-reaching surveillance and prisoner isolation.¹ Yet the decentralized nature of government before the Victorian era meant that local authorities possessed considerable discretion in enforcing national decrees; a key site for the exercise of such discretion, and often leniency,

was the legal code regarding the poor. A series of bad harvests and acute wartime inflation, particularly during the mid 1790s, led to innovations in local poor law policy aimed at cushioning the severity of the period's economic blows. The most influential of these, the so-called Speenhamland System (1795), attempted to compensate for sharply rising prices by using the poor rate to supplement wages so that their value was tied to the price of bread. Originating in Berkshire, this practice soon was adopted by many communities across England, even as it was criticized for its putative tendency to subsidize lower-class idleness – itself punishable under vagrancy law – and employer greed, since the system enabled employers to reduce what they themselves paid workers.

In this environment, literature, like social policy, reflected the deeply conflicted, dual sense that the increasingly visible poor were menaces to political and social order even as they were also victims of circumstances beyond their control. The sharpened awareness of this conflict marked a departure from writing earlier in the century: the poor had been in vogue as literary subjects for decades, but often they were presented at a distance or in isolation, and via ideological positioning that reinforced the extant social hierarchy. The recital of 'the short and simple annals of the poor' in Thomas Gray's iconic 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' offers an opportunity for the upper-class speaker to demonstrate his refined emotional responses as well as to reflect that, if rural obscurity prevented some of those he eulogizes from achieving merited greatness, it also prevented others from wading 'through slaughter to a throne'.² Alternatively, Thomas Moss's widely anthologized 'The Beggar' (1769) presents its pauper as resigned to his state – 'Heaven sends misfortunes – why should we repine?' – and deferential to those he petitions, asking only that his social superiors fulfil their customary obligations to the poor.³ Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) features an encounter between the protagonist and a tramping beggar who admits his dishonest posturing in the pursuit of charity, but his cheerful idleness and fraudulent fortune-telling are comically picaresque rather than socially threatening. By the century's end, however, such depictions frequently gave way to representations that used the worsening conditions of the poor as a springboard for explicit discussions of wartime policies and of social and political critique. In works such as 'The Soldier's Wife' (1797) and 'The Sailor's Mother' (1799), Robert Southey sympathizes not only with those who die or are maimed in battle, but also with the dependents and loved ones left behind, heartbroken and often penniless. At the other end of the political spectrum, Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) castigates the poor law for encouraging

idleness and child-bearing during times of scarcity by those who cannot afford to support themselves, much less any resulting offspring; to this extent, he argues, the poor laws 'may be said therefore in some measure to create the poor which they maintain'.⁴

Wordsworth's responses to the poor are distinguished by a refusal to reproduce the simplifications, the alternating condescension and hostility, that characterize much of the discourse on poverty and crime from the eighteenth century through to the present day. Indeed, the poor compel Wordsworth's attention because their actual lived experiences stubbornly resist such simplifications, in turn calling into question a much broader tendency in modern society – thrown into relief during the pressurized years of conflict with revolutionary France – to reduce complex affiliations and identities to easily parsed categories that elicit predetermined social and personal responses. When Wordsworth's poetry of the poor invokes such categories, it often does so in order to interrogate them. More frequently, the poet bypasses such classifications altogether in favour of an ethnographic approach to the lives of the poor that focuses on material details and interpersonal exchanges. This emphasis demonstrates the inadequacy of ideology that depends on static demarcations between oppositions such as idleness and industry or criminality and innocence.

The Salisbury Plain poems constitute Wordsworth's first, and in some ways most sustained, engagement with the social conditions of the poor. Wordsworth began work on a poem he called 'Salisbury Plain' in 1793, revised his original draft into 'Adventures on Salisbury Plain' in 1795, published the central section of the poem separately as 'The Female Vagrant' for inclusion in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, and finally published a significantly revised version of the entire work in 1842 as *Guilt and Sorrow; or, Incidents upon Salisbury Plain*. Centred around the lives and language of the most abject members of Georgian society, the early Salisbury Plain poems anticipate the poems in the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, in particular 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', 'Simon Lee', 'The Thorn', 'The Mad Mother' and 'Old Man Travelling', as well as the aesthetic programme set forth in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* enjoining the reader to look to 'low and rustic life' for a linguistic and conceptual antidote to the artificiality and duplicity of the socially privileged: among the rural poor, 'the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language' (*Prose* 1: 124). Emphatic language is at the core of the Salisbury Plain poems, which present a conversation between a war widow and her male interlocutor, a discharged sailor who is likewise on the road. Both

principal characters are criminals – the woman through her vagrancy, and the man through a murder committed in a rage after he is cheated of prize money following his military service in the American war. One of the poems' most characteristic features is the crippling guilt the female vagrant and her male travelling companion share, despite the very different nature of their offences. These early poems offer no solution to this state of affairs, prefiguring the refusal in later poems like 'Simon Lee' to provide a stated moral to the description of a destitute old man, long a faithful servant and now reduced to living on the village common. Just as Simon Lee's physical decay is attributable to the ardours of his youthful employment by a local lord, so the Salisbury Plain poems trace the crimes of both protagonists to the pervasive corrupting effects of imperial war.

In their pointed references to the social conditions following the American Revolution, the Salisbury Plain poems represent some of Wordsworth's clearest commentaries on the relation between poverty and crime and their shared political and economic causes. The poems' protracted evolution into the 1842 *Guilt and Sorrow* also offers an example of the way in which Wordsworth's habit of revision could result in a product substantially different from that with which he began. The advertisement affixed to the 1842 poem cites its origins in the early 1790s and those 'calamities, principally those consequent upon war, to which, more than other classes of men, the poor are subject' (*SPP* 217). But what separates the final poem from its earlier iterations is its concluding faith in the healing power of religious salvation and community compassion for the poor. Like previous versions, this poem concludes with the sailor's execution after he eventually turns himself in for murder. Unlike previous versions, in the 1842 text the sailor goes to the scaffold sure of his immortal part: 'My trust, Saviour! is in thy name!' (*SP* 281; line 657). The legal system, in turn, takes pity on him by not hanging his corpse in chains, a punishment meted out for particularly heinous crimes in the eighteenth century and explicitly visited on the sailor's body in the version of the poem from the mid 1790s. On one hand, such an appeal to conventional pieties might seem consistent with the claim by the discharged soldier of *The Prelude* Book 4, an episode that was originally drafted in the late 1790s, that 'My trust is in the God of Heaven / And in the eye of him that passes me' (1805 *Prelude* Book 4, lines 494–5). Yet in that episode, the traumatized veteran's disassociation from his own experiences seems so acute as to cast doubt on the restorative force of any trust on offer from organized religion. Instead, in *The Prelude* the encounter concludes with a single, discrete offer of concrete assistance: the narrator finds the soldier a place to stay for the night. At the

same time, the young poet combats his own frustration over the man's uncanny unresponsiveness to his surroundings. In respecting the soldier's irremediable otherness, Adam Potkay argues that the narrator allows him his 'distance, which is the distance that makes ethics possible'.⁵ The poetry of the 1840s strikes a very different tone in this regard. Such changes with regard to depictions of the poor are consistent with the more generally evolving conservatism of a writer who, by the 1840s, had embraced religious and political orthodoxy.

A similar transition in Wordsworth's attitude towards the poor characterizes the evolution from the early draft *The Ruined Cottage* (1798) to what would become Book 1 of *The Excursion* (first edition, 1814). *The Ruined Cottage* chronicles the slow death of a woman whose husband enlists in the military to support his family after an economic downturn exacerbated by war deprives him of work as a weaver. As in 'The Brothers' and 'Michael' of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, the industry of the poor is repeatedly asserted, contradicting the stereotype that such individuals by definition were prone to idleness; the husband becomes one of the 'shoals of artisans' who are forced to seek parish help in the absence of work (*RC* 53; line 154). The husband's abrupt enlistment, unannounced in advance to his wife, ushers in a psychological decline as she continually, and futilely, hopes for his return until despair and self-neglect cause her own death. In the 1798 version the tale is framed within the context of a conversation between the narrator and a pedlar who has observed the woman's pathetic physical and mental deterioration over the course of years. To this extent, the text recalls the approach to the poor inherited from writers like Thomas Gray: the poet's knowledge of such individuals is mediated through other people and through objects (in Wordsworth, the remnants of the cottage that gives the draft its title). But Wordsworth's narrator, overcome with grief, cannot take refuge in the religious and sentimental truisms that conclude Gray's 'Elegy'; instead, he is speechless in the end. And the Pedlar's comfort, such as it is, consists of the contention that 'what we feel of sorrow and despair / From ruin and from change, and all the grief / The passing shews of being leave behind' appear an 'idle dream' (lines 520–2, 523) when subject to contemplation. The upshot of this injunction is debatable, but it certainly does not conform to available political or theological models for rationalizing this tragedy.

Even in the poems from this period where Wordsworth does provide a clear line of interpretation, the line of argument tends to disagree with the likely terms of debate. Thus, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' (1800) presents the spectacle of poverty as unifying a rural area: the charity given by even

very poor residents to a local vagrant becomes an example of how habitual action can foster social virtue, reminding us that 'we have all of us one human heart' (*LB* 233; line 146). The moral and emotional connections such gestures foster explain why the speaker in that poem rejects a solution to the condition of itinerant poverty that relies on its criminalization through the establishment of a workhouse, here characterized as a 'House, misnamed of industry' (line 172). It bears noting that while Wordsworth criticizes government proposals, he does not take the truly radical step of arguing that all in need are entitled to help; rather, as David Simpson observes, Wordsworth makes 'the apparently unproductive beggar the provider of a social good that deserves to be called work'.⁶ In this way, Wordsworth hopes to redefine the notion of industry in an emerging capitalist order. Industry can involve the production not only of commodities, but also of modes of belonging so tenuous (the beggar is repeatedly cast as 'a solitary Man' (lines 24, 44)) that they defy conventional understandings of community membership. Both here and in the 1798 manuscript of *The Ruined Cottage*, Wordsworth does not offer any clichéd gloss on the story of suffering. In keeping with the changes to the Salisbury Plain poems, however, there are significant alterations to the *The Ruined Cottage* as it becomes Book 1 of *The Excursion*, the poem that defined Wordsworth's epic ambitions to his contemporaries (as opposed to the posthumously published *Prelude*). Over the years of revision, Wordsworth gives the episode's female protagonist a name, Margaret, and in changes dating to the 1840s, a distinctly Christian sense of resignation to her fate. The Pedlar now claims that Margaret's soul always remained 'Fixed on the Cross' from which she derived consolation, even amidst her decline (*Excursion* 75n).

Ultimately, Wordsworth's understanding of the causes of poverty and the plight of the poor remain fairly constant over his career. His understanding of the significance of such suffering, however, gradually pivoted away from the pointed critique of his earlier years. The Poet Laureate of the 1840s was a figure incorporated into the very British establishment he had challenged earlier for taking refuge in sentimental stereotypes and stigmatization rather than looking closely at the diverse circumstances and social and political implications of the lives of the poor. But whether one speaks of the 'early' or the 'later' Wordsworth, his responses to the most destitute and marginal figures in his culture in many ways defined his aesthetic, disclosing for him key truths about the constitution of the literary tradition, British society, and the mind's own multifaceted responses to circumstances which baffle available legal, moral and aesthetic categories.

Notes

1. As Quentin Bailey's *Wordsworth's Vagrants: Police, Prisons and Poetry in the 1790s* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011) explains, Bentham's scheme was only one among many such responses to what was perceived as a criminal crisis.
2. Thomas Gray, 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', lines 32, 67, in Roger Lonsdale, ed., *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 355–6.
3. Thomas Moss, 'The Beggar', line 25, in Lonsdale, *Eighteenth-Century Verse*, 553.
4. Harley's encounter with the beggar in Mackenzie appears in [chapter 14](#) of *The Man of Feeling*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford University Press, 1987); for Southey's poems, see *Robert Southey: Poetical Works 1793–1810*, ed. Lynda Pratt (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), v: 104, 316; for Malthus, see his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Geoffrey Gilbert (Oxford University Press, 1993), 39.
5. Adam Potkay, *Wordsworth's Ethics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 60. Potkay analyzes several of Wordsworth's 'encounter' poems featuring the poor and the vagrant, seeing in the poet's acceptance of such figures' irreducible separateness from his own experiences and beliefs an anticipation of Emmanuel Levinas's ethical theories.
6. David Simpson, *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 65. More generally, Simpson sees the spectrality, or alterity, of representations of the poor in Wordsworth as a reflection on how modern economic and political systems, such as capitalism and industrialization, are reducing the significance of social relationships and objects to their cash value.

*Europe**Michael Ferber*

We inherit a deep and indelible image of Wordsworth as the poet of a particular place, the Lake District, where he was born, lived most of his life, and died. He was *Home at Grasmere* and the Sage of Rydal Mount; a well-known late portrait by Benjamin Robert Haydon sets him on Mount Helvellyn. He wrote 'Poems on the Naming of Places' and there are places named after him for his poems, such as 'Wordsworth Point' on Ullswater, where a host of his daffodils still dances. Tourists come by the coachload to ramble where he rambled and look at what he looked at, his *Guide to the District of the Lakes* at hand.

Wordsworth has long been cherished for his rootedness in and around Grasmere, but in his own time he was often derided for parochialism. If he thought the world was too much with us, the world's spokesmen thought he knew very little of it outside his parish. Francis Jeffrey loftily dubbed him a member of 'the Lake School' of poets, which Byron reduced to 'the Pond School'. Indeed it was probably Byron who did the most to stamp this image on Wordsworth, both by what he said of Wordsworth and by how he lived his own life. In his 'Dedication' to *Don Juan*, Byron mocks Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth for their 'long seclusion / From better company': 'There is a narrowness in such a notion, / Which makes me wish you'd change your lakes for ocean'.¹ Byron, of course, was the great traveller and writer of versified travelogues such as *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; he even sailed the ocean, or at least the part of it between England and Portugal, and a good deal of the Mediterranean. He had no Grasmere; he was not at home in England or his Scottish birthplace but, if anywhere, in Italy, not to mention Switzerland, Greece and Albania. He made himself into a European.

It is easy to forget, then, how worldly and well travelled, indeed how European, Wordsworth really was. It is true that his first book, *An Evening Walk* (1793), describes a ramble among the lakes, but his second, *Descriptive Sketches*, published the same year, is about his walking tour of France, northern Italy, and the Alps, which he took in 1790 at the age of 20. Neither poem

found many readers, but *Descriptive Sketches* was a sort of prototype for such later books or sections of his collected poems as 'Memorials of a Tour in Scotland' (one in 1803, another in 1814), 'Memorials of a Tour on the Continent' (1820) and 'Memorials of a Tour in Italy' (1837). He was a travel writer no less than Byron.

Wordsworth made eight trips to the Continent, and a brief listing of them should pretty well dispel the image of the parochial pond-creeper.

- (1) France, Switzerland, northern Italy, journey down the Rhine, Belgium (lands at Calais on 13 July 1790, back in Cambridge by mid October) (3 months).
- (2) France: late November 1791 till early December 1792 ('a whole year's absence', *1805 Prelude* Book 10, line 202).
- (3) Germany: September 1798 till May 1799 (9 months).
- (4) France (Calais): August–September 1802 (1 month).
- (5) France, Low Countries, Germany, northern Italy, Switzerland: July to October 1820 (4 months).
- (6) Low Countries: May–June 1823 (1 month).
- (7) Low countries: June–August 1828 (7 weeks).
- (8) Italy, France and Germany: March–August 1837 (5 months).

By the time he turned 30, then, Wordsworth had spent two years on the Continent, and in his later years he spent more than another. I am leaving out his possible return to France in 1793, either to see his mistress Annette Vallon or on some political mission. His main biographers are divided on this possibility: Moorman entertains it as possible but difficult to imagine; Gill thinks the evidence for it is strong; Johnston argues for it at length; and Barker dismisses it as incredible.² Whether he sneaked back into France or not, however, France was certainly on his mind constantly that year and the next few years.

To these journeys we should add four tours of Scotland (1803, 1814, 1822, 1831) and one of Ireland (1829). And of course he was an indefatigable walker, putting in thousands of miles as he tramped all over England and Wales as well as more distant lands. We should remember, too, that travelling then was a lot more rugged than travelling now. Even short trips across the Channel between Dover and Calais did not always seem very short, and they could be dangerous. On their return from France in October 1820, William and Dorothy were shipwrecked within a few minutes of embarking and would have drowned had the tide been running in rather than out. You had to be adventurous and committed to go abroad, especially if, like Wordsworth and his family, and unlike Byron, you were not wealthy.

A skeptic might reply that perhaps in Wordsworth's case 'travelling is so narrowing' (as Oscar Wilde is said to have said), for all it did was confirm Wordsworth in his love of Grasmere. Certainly Wordsworth's miserable winter months with Dorothy in provincial Goslar in 1798/9 might bear out that theory. And later travels were sometimes dampened by bad weather and worse accommodations. But he was no Dickensian Podsnap, startled to find that Italy was not England. He loved Italy, in fact, and if war had not been looming in 1792 he might have remained in France with a French bride. For the next few years he felt painfully alienated from his country and its war with revolutionary France. What we can say, and it is hardly surprising, is that after some years of wandering about the Continent and even more about England and Wales, Wordsworth *chose to return* to the region of his birth and boyhood. He celebrates that return in *Home at Grasmere* and the opening of *The Prelude*, and it does not seem a lapse or a defeat.

For a poet, wide travelling is not as important as wide reading, and although Wordsworth famously demands we quit our books and listen to the linnet and the throstle, he quite obviously read a great deal from boyhood onwards, and much of it was in European languages ancient and modern.

At Hawkshead, young William would have been immersed in Latin, not only as a subject in itself but as the language of instruction in some other subjects; in fact the boys were expected to speak only Latin (or Greek) in the classroom.³ He would have studied Virgil, Horace, Catullus, Caesar and Cicero. At Cambridge there is evidence that he translated Virgil, especially the *Georgics*, as well as Horace, Juvenal, Tacitus and Livy. His possession of Latin remained a resource for the rest of his life, most visibly in the epigraphs to the 'Intimations' ode and the 'Ode to Duty', among other poems, in the translation of part of the *Aeneid* (published in 1832), and in allusions such as his emulation of Horace in the opening sonnet of *The River Duddon*, but also in the 'classicizing' manner some scholars have identified in many of his later works. His command of Latin, too, would have made it easier to acquire at least a reading knowledge of the modern Romance languages. Greek he would have begun at Hawkshead, and probably got as far as the *Iliad*, while at Cambridge he seems to have read Xenophon, Demosthenes and Sophocles, and in particular the *Oedipus at Colonus*.⁴

At Cambridge he fell in love with Italian and its literature, which was mainly outside the required curriculum, and engaged a tutor, Agostino Isola, to teach them to him. Isola was a gifted teacher and much admired by his many students; he published studies of Tasso and Ariosto and translated Gray's 'Elegy' into Italian. Wordsworth read Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* with Isola, and took that poetic romance with him on his first tour of the

Continent between Cambridge terms in 1790. He was soon acquainted with Dante, Petrarch, Tasso and Marino; Isola also had him read *Don Quixote* in Spanish.⁵ Dorothy, reunited for a time with her brother after he graduated, wrote to a friend in June 1791: 'He reads Italian, Spanish, French, Greek and Latin, and English, but never opens a mathematical book. We promise ourselves much pleasure from reading Italian together at some time, he wishes that I was acquainted with the Italian poets' (*EY* 52). Ten years later he was translating poetry by Metastasio, and later by Ariosto, Michelangelo, Chiabrera and Tasso, some of which he published.⁶ His knowledge of Vincenzo da Filicaja's odes, June Sturrock thinks, influenced his 'Thanksgiving Ode' and other poems published with it in 1816, and his absorption in Ariosto affected *Peter Bell*.⁷

As for French, he must have learned enough to read it by the time he left Cambridge, for he tells us he was led to his second visit to France (1791–2) 'chiefly by a personal wish / To speak the language more familiarly' (*1805 Prelude* Book 9, lines 36–7). He would certainly have succeeded during his twelve months there, where he held long conversations with Michel Beaupuy and others caught up in the political convulsions, listened to speeches, read the master pamphlets of the day, and had his affair with Annette Vallon. Yet it is surprising that he seems not to have been much taken with French literature. There is evidence that he read *Gil Blas* by Le Sage while still a schoolboy, perhaps in French, and during his visits to France he seems to have read Rousseau, Montesquieu, Racine's *Athalie*, Lafontaine and Jacques Delille in the original.⁸ Beyond that he shows little engagement with French literature. He does not mention Corneille, Molière, or any other play by Racine, for example. His sonnet 'Scorn not the sonnet' (published in 1827) lists seven great sonneteers – three English, three Italian, and one Portuguese – but no French; Ronsard and Dubellay are missing (*LP* 82). In *The Excursion* he pours scorn on Voltaire's *Candide* (*Excursion* 90–1; Book 2, lines 466, 505–12). He never mentions his contemporaries Chénier, Chateaubriand or Madame de Staël, nor the younger generation of poets Lamartine, Hugo, Vigny, Musset or Sainte-Beuve; one would think he would have been interested in all of them. We can only speculate, but perhaps his memories of France grew too painful for him to risk reviving them by immersing himself in French again. It is also interesting that Agostino Isola, who was a master of Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish and English, seems not to have concerned himself with French.

German Wordsworth never mastered, though he gained enough to read it to some extent. He seems to have read Goethe's *Werther* (in English) while still at Hawkshead, and knew enough about Goethe and Schiller to

discuss them with the eminent poet Klopstock in Germany in 1798.⁹ In 1796 or 1797 he would have encountered several English translations of Bürger's sensational ballad 'Lenore' (1773), one by his future friend Walter Scott, and he would have discussed it, and one or two other ballads by Bürger, with Coleridge, Southey and Lamb. Writing to Wordsworth while both were in Germany, Coleridge thought 'the Lenore [in German] is greatly superior to any of the 'Translations' while Wordsworth, perhaps because he was making less progress with his German, disagreed: 'upon the whole we were disappointed, particularly in 'Leonora', which we thought in several passages inferior to the English translations' (*CL* 1: 438, 565–6). Nonetheless several scholars have detected the influence of Bürger on a few of Wordsworth's ballads,¹⁰ although it is often hard to separate it out from other influences, such as the ballads in Percy's *Reliques* (1765), which Wordsworth was to compare favourably to Bürger in 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' (1815). The year in Germany, in any case, was not an educational success: as Wordsworth wrote to Coleridge in February 1799, in the middle of the very cold winter in Goslar, 'I acquired more French in two months, than I should acquire German in five years as we have lived' (*EY* 255). For many years thereafter, of course, as he listened and listened to Coleridge's endless talk, Wordsworth would have learned quite a bit more about German literature and philosophy.

In his knowledge of European languages and literature, then, Wordsworth makes a very respectable showing even beside the cosmopolitan Byron. He had Europeanized himself very well by the time he left Cambridge, and within a year came very near Gallicizing himself to the point where he would have ceased to be English, or at least an English poet, even if he had not, as he himself imagined, been killed on a battlefield in a French uniform (1805 *Prelude* Book 10, lines 194–5).

* * *

How did the Continent receive Wordsworth? Compared to its rapturous reception of Byron, it scarcely noticed him for quite a while. Today you can buy *Le Prélude*, *Il Preludio* or *Präludium oder das Reifen eines Dichtergeistes* for a few Euros, but translations were very slow in coming. Why this was so is difficult to say. We would have to compare Wordsworth's reception not only to Byron's but also to those of many other English poets in order to gain a baseline against which to judge how Wordsworth appealed or failed to appeal to readers' tastes across the Continent, a project beyond the scope of this chapter.

But he did acquire readers gradually here and there. When Henry Crabb Robinson arrived in Germany in 1800 to begin five years of study, he

brought with him a copy of *Lyrical Ballads* (the 1800 edition) and showed it to as many poets and critics as he could. It is pleasing to know that the brothers Schlegel, who launched the word 'Romantic' in its modern sense as a term for a literary movement, found some of Wordsworth's poems 'pleasing'. And that Clemens Brentano, who was soon to collaborate on *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, a central document of German Romanticism, had a go at translating 'The Thorn'. And that Robinson lent his copy of *Lyrical Ballads* to Johann Gottfried Herder, the grandfather of German Romanticism, and found Herder agreed with Wordsworth about poetic diction.¹¹ Nothing much came of these encounters, however; it was another generation before the first translations and appreciations began to appear in print, and only late in his life did Wordsworth meet August Schlegel and Brentano.

The first selection of Wordsworth's poems in French appeared in Amédée Pichot's *Voyage historique et littéraire en Angleterre et en Écosse* (three volumes, 1825). According to Maxwell Smith, after about 1830, at the prompting especially of Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, the French Romantic generation began to absorb Wordsworth, a process traceable in Victor Hugo, Lamartine and others.¹² As Emile Legouis has summarized it, Sainte-Beuve spread among the great French Romantics 'the idea and taste for this informal vein of which they had not dreamt at first. It is difficult to exaggerate their debt to him in this respect. Hugo abruptly renounced the exoticism of *Orientales* (1829) to write in succession *Les Feuilles d'Automne* (1831), the *Chants du Crépuscule*, the *Voix intérieures*, the *Rayons et les Ombres*, all full of echoes of this Wordsworth'.¹³

In his *Vie, poésies et pensées de Joseph Delorme*, published in 1829, Sainte-Beuve included three loose translations or 'imitations' of poems by Wordsworth: 'The Longest Day (Addressed to my Daughter Dora)' and the sonnets 'I am not One who much or oft delight' (entitled 'Personal Talk' after 1820) and 'Scorn not the sonnet'.¹⁴ They were exhibits in two of his projects: to make better known in France the English *lackistes*, in his charming spelling,¹⁵ and to reintroduce the sonnet to France after more than a century of neglect. Here is Sainte-Beuve's version of 'Scorn not the sonnet' and my (I hope not too loose) translation:

Sonnet: Imité de Wordsworth

Ne ris point des sonnets, ô critique moqueur!
 Par amour autrefois en fit le grand Shakespeare;
 C'est sur ce luth heureux que Pétrarque soupire,
 Et que le Tasse en fers soulage en peu son cœur;

Camoens de son exil abrège la longueur,
 Car il chante en sonnets l'amour et son empire;
 Dante aime cette fleur de myrte, et la respire,
 Et la mêle au cyprès qui ceint son front vainqueur;

Spencer, s'en revenant de l'île des féeries,
 Exhale en longs sonnets ses tristesses chéries;
 Milton, chantant les siens, ranimait son regard;

Moi, je veux rajeunir le doux sonnet en France;
 Dubellay, le premier, l'apporta de Florence,
 Et l'on en sait plus d'un de notre vieux Ronsard.

Do not laugh at sonnets, mocking critic!
 With them great Shakespeare turned his love to art;
 Upon this graceful lute would Petrarch sigh,
 And Tasso in his chains would ease his heart.

Camoens abridged his exile's length of years
 By singing sonnets for his love's renown;
 Dante loved and breathed this myrtle flower,
 And wove it with the cypress for his crown.

Spenser, dreaming of his faerie realm,
 Expressed in sonnets all his cherished griefs;
 Those Milton sang restored its great regard.

I would revive the sweet sonnet in France;
 Du Bellay from Florence first brought it here,
 And we know a few from our old Ronsard.

By reducing Milton to a line, Sainte-Beuve made room to repair Wordsworth's odd omission of French sonneteers that we noted earlier, and thereby enlist Wordsworth in his campaign to resuscitate Ronsard and the Pléiade group and promote the sonnet as a still viable form.

At least since Petrarch, the sonnet has been self-conscious, but with the Romantics, who were deliberately bringing it back, its self-referential tendencies grew. Besides 'Scorn not the sonnet', Wordsworth also wrote 'Nuns fret not', and Burns, Keats, A. W. Schlegel, Goethe and Tieck, among others, all wrote sonnets on the sonnet. Sainte-Beuve's version of Wordsworth was the first such sonnet in French in the nineteenth century. It is a startling fact, too, that within a year of its appearance Pushkin made his own imitation of 'Scorn not the sonnet' in Russian, shortening

Wordsworth's list of poets but adding Mickiewicz, Delvig and Wordsworth himself. Pushkin admired Sainte-Beuve, and almost certainly read *Joseph Delorme* before writing his own imitation, although he also went to the original English and even quoted most of the first line (in English) as an epigraph. Here is my translation (with help from friends who actually know Russian):

Sonnet (1830)

Scorn not the sonnet, critic.
– Wordsworth [in English]

Stern Dante did not despise the sonnet;
Petrarch filled it with his ardent love;
The maker of Macbeth was taken with it;
Camões would weave his sorrows in its cloth.

Even now it captivates the poet:
Wordsworth chose the sonnet as his form
When in his refuge from the hectic world
He painted scenes of nature's ideal realm.

In the shadow of the Taurid mountains
The bard of Lithuania [Mickiewicz] would seal
Within its narrow frame his every dream.

Our maidens here had not yet known it
Till Delvig abandoned for its sake
The classic hexameter's sacred theme.

Wordsworth, alas, was entirely unaware, as far as we know, that France's leading critic and Russia's greatest poet had turned to him for their salutes to the sonnet.

Notes

1. Jerome J. McGann, ed., *The Oxford Authors: Byron* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 374; lines 33–4, 39–40; see also Canto 3, lines 875–8.
2. Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography, The Early Years, 1770–1803* (Oxford University Press, 1957), 238–42; Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 76; Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 358–400, Juliet Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life*, abridged version (New York: Ecco, 2006), 93–5.
3. Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading, 1770–1799* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 165.

4. Ben Ross Schneider Jr, *Wordsworth's Cambridge Education* (Cambridge University Press, 1957), 95, 263. See also Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading*, 129.
5. June Sturrock, 'Wordsworth's Italian Teacher', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67 (2) (1985), 797–812. See also Schneider *Wordsworth's Cambridge Education*, 103; Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading*, 43.
6. Moorman, *William Wordsworth*, 1: 100.
7. Sturrock, 'Wordsworth's Italian Teacher', 807–12.
8. Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading*, 85, 101, 114.
9. *Ibid.*, 67, 69.
10. See, for example, Moorman, *William Wordsworth*, 1: 428–9; see also Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 217–24.
11. John Williams, *Wordsworth Translated: A Case Study in the Reception of British Romantic Poetry in Germany, 1804–1914* (London: Continuum, 2009), 23–9.
12. Maxwell Smith, *L'Influence des Lakistes sur les romantiques français* (Paris: Jouve, 1920), 216–23, 343–58.
13. Émile Legouis, *La Jeunesse de William Wordsworth: 1770–1798* (Paris: Masson, 1896), x–xi.
14. Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Vie, poésies et pensées de Joseph Delorme* (1829), ed. Jean-Pierre Bertrand and Anthony Glinoe (Paris: Bartillat, 2004).
15. *Ibid.*, 213.

*War**Simon Bainbridge*

William Wordsworth created his greatest literary works in wartime, a martial context that defined his personal and political development and shaped his poetic career. In 1793, the year the poet published his first two volumes of verse, *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, revolutionary France declared war against England, causing an extraordinary inner turmoil for the republican, pro-Gallic and anti-war writer who ‘felt / The ravage of this most unnatural strife / In my own heart’ (1805 *Prelude* Book 10, lines 249–51). The fierce global conflict continued for the next twenty-two years on an unprecedented scale and with only two brief breaks in the fighting, the Peace of Amiens of 1801–3, during which Wordsworth returned to France for the first time since his visits of the early 1790s, and the eleven-month cessation following the French emperor Napoleon’s first abdication in April 1814, the year in which the now established poet and Distributor of Stamps for Westmoreland published *The Excursion*. The war was finally brought to a close by Wellington’s victory over Napoleon at Waterloo in June 1815, a battle Wordsworth marked with a series of sonnets and odes and which he celebrated as the culmination of his own imaginative campaign against the national enemy.

As this preliminary account would suggest, Wordsworth’s attitude to the conflict between Britain and France and to the idea of war more generally changed dramatically over time, but throughout the early and middle phases of the poet’s career national combat remained a key subject of his writing and, at times, a personal obsession. The poet directly addressed the war with France in some of his best-known and most highly regarded works, including *The Prelude*, as well as in a range of lesser-known writings, such as the sonnets he wrote for more than a decade on the specific events of the conflict with France and the extensive prose tract *The Convention of Cintra* (1809), which he hoped would constitute a major intervention in the conflict. Wordsworth’s consistent and enduring engagement with war in both specific and abstract terms can be seen to have significantly shaped his

ideas about the roles of poetry and the poet and to have influenced some of his most important conceptualizations of the imagination itself.

At the start of his literary career, Wordsworth was an anti-war poet. Writing even before the outbreak of the conflict with France in *An Evening Walk* (composed 1788–9), he included a fairly conventional poetic portrait of an impoverished war widow who drags ‘her babes along this weary way’ and ‘bids her soldier come her woes to share, / Asleep on Bunker’s charnel hill afar’ (*EW* 60, 62; lines 244, 253–4). Such images of suffering, in this case as a result of the American War of Independence (the reference is to the battle of Bunker Hill of 1775), were a common feature of much late eighteenth-century poetry, but they regained significant political and poetical power following the commencement of hostilities with France. Like other anti-war poets of the 1790s, such as Charlotte Smith, Robert Southey and a host of lesser-known writers publishing in newspapers and magazines, Wordsworth focused on conflict’s victims, believing that it was the poor who were particularly vulnerable to the ‘calamities . . . consequent upon war’ (*SPP* 217). Examples of those broken, dispossessed, bereaved, impoverished or traumatized by war in Wordsworth’s poetry of the 1790s include the following: the soldier’s family of ‘Salisbury Plain’, who become camp followers, ‘dog-like wading at the heels of War’ (*SPP* 31; line 313); the tragic Margaret of *The Ruined Cottage*, reduced to madness after her husband enlists; the haunting ‘Discharged Soldier’ of Wordsworth’s poetic fragment, later incorporated into *The Prelude*, returned from ‘the tropic isles’ and ‘travelling to regain his native home’ (*LB* 280; lines 99–103); and the moving figure of the ‘Old Man Travelling’ of *Lyrical Ballads* who, when asked ‘the object of his journey’ by the poem’s narrator, replies:

Sir! I am going many miles to take
 A last leave of my son, a mariner,
 Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
 And there is dying in an hospital. (*LB* 110; lines 17–20)

As Charles Burney commented in a contemporary review of the volume, these lines seemed ‘pointed against the war’ (*CH* 77).

While Wordsworth’s representation of the victims of war can be placed within the broader context of the decade’s vast outpouring of anti-war verse, several critics have also seen the poet’s developing treatment of such figures as an index of his growing poetic maturity during the 1790s, arguing that he increasingly moved away from a polemical verse of humanitarian protest and towards a psychological poetry more deeply concerned with states of mind and being. For example, Wordsworth revised *Salisbury Plain*, which

Mary Jacobus has described as the ‘most impressive protest poem of its time’,¹ into the version now known as *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. As Stephen Gill has argued, *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* ‘continues the social and political interests of the poem, and even extends them . . . [through] a fully dramatized presentation of human calamities consequent upon war, but Wordsworth’s interest was rapidly shifting from social and political phenomena to the more complex phenomena of human motives and behavior’ (*SPP* 12).

Wordsworth’s developing treatment of these figures of war was influenced by the war’s changing nature as well as by his own poetical maturation. Writing in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes his sense of France’s shifting role in the conflict. At the outbreak of the war, the poet had believed that revolutionary France was fighting for self-preservation and on behalf of Liberty against the oppressive forces of the monarchical regimes, Prussia and Austria. As the decade progressed, however, French military policy became increasingly aggressive and expansionist, as Wordsworth describes in his epic autobiography:

And now, become Oppressors in their turn,
Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defense
For one of conquest, losing sight of all
Which they had struggled for . . .

(1805 *Prelude* Book 10, lines 791–4)

Following events such as the French invasion of Switzerland in 1798 and the increasingly bellicose policy of Napoleon Bonaparte, who had seized power in a *coup d’état* of 1799, Wordsworth found his faith in France and the Revolution increasingly tested. Though it is difficult to precisely pin down his shifting loyalties to specific dates, he himself would later argue that the war against France became ‘just and necessary’ ‘some time before the Treaty of Amiens, viz. after the subjugation of Switzerland’ or, in other words, between 1798 and 1801 (*Prose* 1: 226). It is indicative that when in March 1802 Wordsworth composed a poem entitled ‘The Sailor’s Mother’, he reworked ‘Old Man Travelling’ to offer a figure of a bereaved parent who now represented his own rediscovered sense of British values, describing her in the language that he would adopt in his sonnets to celebrate the ‘good old cause’ of English republicanism:

A Woman in the road I met,
Not old, though something past her prime:
Majestic in her person, tall and straight;
And like a Roman matron’s was her mien and gait.

The ancient Spirit is not dead;
 Old times, thought I, are breathing there;
 Proud was I that my country bred
 Such strength, a dignity so fair: . . . (PTV 77; lines 3–10)

In addition to such a positive re-envisioning of the earlier victim of war, Wordsworth's shifting response to the war is also illustrated by the fact that he omitted the final six lines of 'Old Man Travelling' from all published versions after the 1805 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, turning it from a poem pointed against the war into an untroubled celebration of precisely its opposite, of a figure 'by nature led / To peace so perfect' (LB 110; lines 12–13).

France's increasingly militarist policy under Napoleon, and particularly its attempt to invade Britain during the years 1803–5, drew a strikingly martial response from Wordsworth and brought out a combative element in both his personality and his poetry. The poet would later recall that he 'had studied military history with great interest, and the strategy of war; and he always fancied that he had talents for command'² and as early as *Home at Grasmere* of 1800 he revealed that his dedication to the poetic role was achieved at the cost of the suppression of a more martial desire, describing how, as 'an innocent little-one', he felt excited when:

. . . I heard of danger met
 Or sought with courage, enterprize forlorn,
 By one, sole keeper of his own intent,
 Or by a resolute few, who for the sake
 Of glory fronted multitudes in arms. (HG 96; lines 923–7)

In the following lines, Wordsworth acknowledged with a slight degree of embarrassment that he continued to experience this vicarious martial thrill in response to the present war's conflicts:

Yea, to this day I swell with like desire;
 I cannot at this moment read a tale
 Of two brave Vessels matched in deadly fight
 And fighting to the death, but I am pleased
 More than a wise Man ought to be; I wish,
 I burn, I struggle, and in soul am there.
 (HG 96–8; lines 928–33)

During the invasion threat, Wordsworth was able to direct these martial urges into the war against France, preparing to fight Napoleon and his army as both a soldier and a poet. On 3 October 1803 he joined the Grasmere Volunteers, donning uniform as part of the nationwide campaign of home defence, and the following week Dorothy reported that 'surely there was

never a more determined hater of the French nor one more willing to do his utmost to destroy them if they really do come'.³ Taking up the sonnet as his main poetic weapon of these years, Wordsworth was an equally determined participant in the national verse war against France, instructing the Men of Kent that 'Now is the time to prove your hardiment' and defining the nation as united with them in its martial intent:

No parleying now! In Britain is one breath;
 We all are with you now from Shore to Shore:—
 Ye Men of Kent, 'tis Victory or Death! (PTV 171; lines 4, 12–14)

Wordsworth sought the widest and most immediate readership for his war sonnets, initially publishing many of them in newspapers before collecting them together as 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) and *Poems* (1815), the latter volume also including an additional thirty-two sonnets written between 1807 and 1813 and addressing the war from a series of wider, European perspectives. In addition to these texts written directly about the conflict, Wordsworth's wholehearted engagement in the war with France can also be seen to have shaped his conception and articulation of his own poetic powers and particularly of the imagination during this period. Wordsworth describes the climactic ascent of Snowdon in Book 13 of *The Prelude*, for example, as undertaken 'as if in opposition set / Against an enemy' (1805 *Prelude* Book 13, lines 30–1), and deploys a militaristic and combative vocabulary in his famous account of the 'Imagination' in Book 4 ('Power', 'might', 'glory', 'strength', 'Greatness', 'banners militant', 'prowess', 'Strong') (1805 *Prelude* Book 6, lines 525–48). Rather than being a state of spiritual quietism or a power privileged at the expense of a suppressed history, as some critics have argued, the Wordsworthian imagination of *The Prelude* is a militant and active force that evolves out of the poet's engagement with the war with France.

While the French war shaped Wordsworth's conception of the imagination, the poet also came to see the key arena of the conflict as the imagination itself. In his tract on the *Convention of Cintra*, written in outrage in 1808–9 at what he felt was the British government's failure to properly support the Spanish and Portuguese people's uprising against French invasion, Wordsworth argued that the most important outcome of the Duke of Wellington's early victories in the Iberian Peninsula was that 'there was an anticipation of a shock to [Napoleon's] power, where that power is strongest, in the imaginations of men, which are sure to fall under the bondage of long-continued success' (*Prose* 1: 249). It was this essentially imaginative nature of the struggle with France in the Iberian Peninsula that the British generals who

ratified the convention, allowing a defeated French army safe transport home, had failed to grasp: 'We combated for victory in the empire of reason, for strong-holds in the imagination. Lisbon and Portugal, as city and soil, were chiefly prized by us as a *language*; but our Generals mistook the counters of the game for the stake played for' (*Prose* 1: 261–2). As with his sonnets, Wordsworth hoped that *The Convention of Cintra* would be a major textual intervention in the conflict with France, working obsessively on it and 'carried forward by a strong wish to be of use in raising and steadying the minds of my countrymen' (*Prose* 1: 237). However, although the tract has since been recognized by critics as 'one of the masterworks of English Romantic prose' and 'one of the great political essays of the Romantic era' respectively,⁴ it had no immediate impact with Dorothy reporting within a few weeks of publication that 'nobody buys' (*MY* 1: 370). Of a print run of 500 copies, 178 were sold for waste paper two years later.

The culmination of Wordsworth's martial poetic campaign came in response to the final defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815. The poet's initial celebration of the victory was conducted with Robert Southey and their respective families, lighting a bonfire on Skiddaw around which the party sang 'God Save the King' and ate 'roasted beef and boiled plum puddings'.⁵ In poetic mode, he turned initially to the sonnet, the form in which he had conducted his anti-Gallic campaign since 1802, writing three sonnets that transformed the conflict into the war in heaven, the triumph of Christianity over the infidel, and Agincourt, and invoking the figure of 'The Bard' who 'Shall comprehend this victory sublime; / And worthily rehearse the hideous rout' ('Occasioned by the Same Battle. February, 1816' (*SP* 172; lines 11–12)). Wordsworth's own most extended attempt to comprehend and rehearse Waterloo came in early 1816 when he adopted the Pindaric ode form for what is generally referred to as the 'Thanksgiving Ode' ('Ode. The Morning of the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving. January 18, 1816'). In this highly elevated piece, Wordsworth presents Waterloo not as a national victory (the keynote of the huge number of other poems on the battle in the period), but as a divine event, invoking the poem's occasion of a day appointed for a general thanksgiving, to emphasize that the defeat must be properly comprehended as an act of 'Almighty God' – 'Him who lifteth up and layeth low' (*SP* 183; lines 90, 89). This sense of warfare as a divine force rather than a man-made calamity had been present in Wordsworth's poetry since the time of the invasion threat. In the sonnet 'Anticipation. October 1803', for example, the poet had argued that there must be a 'Divine' element in the anticipated triumph when 'even the prospect of our Brethren slain, / Hath something in it which the heart enjoys' (*PTV* 173; lines 10–13). But in

the 'Thanksgiving Ode', Wordsworth investigated the full implications of this understanding of war as the working out of a divine plan, producing some of the most notorious lines of his poetic career:

Nor will the God of peace and love
Such martial service disapprove . . .

. . . For Thou art angry with thine enemies!
For these, and for our errors,
And sins that point their terrors,
We bow our heads before Thee, and we laud
And magnify thy name, Almighty God!
But thy most dreadful instrument,
In working out a pure intent,
Is Man – arrayed for mutual slaughter, –
Yea, Carnage is thy daughter!

(SP 187–8; lines 260–1, 274–82)

For radical and liberal writers like William Hazlitt, Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, these lines came to exemplify what they saw as the reactionary political beliefs of the later Wordsworth, and they frequently invoked and parodied them. The lines certainly illustrate the distance that Wordsworth had travelled in his response to war since his depiction of the woeful war-widow of *An Evening Walk*.

Writing after twenty-two years of war with France, Wordsworth also used the 'Thanksgiving Ode' to commemorate a key moment in his own poetic history, describing how

Imagination, ne'er before content,
But aye ascending, restless in her pride,
From all that man's performance could present,
Stoops to that closing deed magnificent,
And with the embrace is satisfied. (SP 185; lines 163–7)

Here Wordsworth reconceives the history of the imagination, presenting it as finding in the victory of Waterloo an event worthy of its embrace. No longer seeking to transcend history, Imagination finds its ultimate satisfaction in battle, testifying to the crucial role of combat in Wordsworth's own sense of his poetic identity and role.

Notes

1. Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Lyrical Ballads, 1798* (Oxford University Press, 1976), 148.
2. *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1876), III: 451–2.

3. Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography, The Early Years, 1770–1803* (Oxford University Press, 1957), 602.
4. Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 276; David Bromwich, 'Vicarious Feeling: Spanish Independence, English Liberty', in William Wordsworth, *Concerning the Convention of Cintra: A Critical Edition*, ed. Richard Gravil and W. J. B. Owen, with a critical symposium by Simon Bainbridge, David Bromwich, Timothy Michael and Patrick Vincent (Tirril: Humanities-Ebooks, 2009), 34.
5. *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Robert Southey*, 6 vols., ed. Rev. Charles Cuthbert Southey (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1850), IV: 121–2.

*Nature and the environment**Scott Hess*

Many Victorians conflated nature and William Wordsworth's poetry so strongly that the two began to seem consubstantial. Hence Matthew Arnold in the 'Introduction' to his 1879 *Poems of Wordsworth* wrote that 'Nature herself seems, I say, to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power'.¹ While Wordsworth and his writing became specifically associated with the English Lake District, or more broadly with a distinctively English nature, his influence in defining attitudes towards nature and environment subsequently spread throughout the English-speaking world. Widely read in the United States, Wordsworth's individualized and spiritualized version of nature became a seminal influence on the founders of the American nature-writing tradition, including Henry Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Muir. At the same time, Wordsworth's poetry found its way into school readers and curricula throughout the British Empire, helping to define an idealized English countryside at the centre of national and imperial identity.

Wordsworth's association of nature with deep individual feeling and an amorphously transcendental spirituality, in opposition to modern social and economic life and the city, remains probably his greatest environmental legacy today. When we appreciate nature in reverent, solitary contemplation, with a fusion of aesthetic and spiritual rapture that seems to define our deepest self, we follow Wordsworth's example, whether we realize it or not. Correspondingly, when we enshrine these deeply spiritualized moments in memory as the foundation for our individual identity, we construct our own selves according to the pattern of the 'spots of time' that Wordsworth established as central to his relation with nature. Individual 'Love of Nature' according to this pattern comes first and prepares the way for social 'Love of Mankind'.²

By helping to set this paradigm of environmental consciousness, Wordsworth has had immense influence on the development of modern environmentalism and the nature-writing tradition, both institutional and

ideological. Wordsworth single-handedly promulgated what was arguably the first modern environmental protest – an 1844 campaign to exclude the railways from running into the heart of the Lake District at Lake Windermere – a failed attempt that nevertheless set much of the rhetoric through which later environmental campaigns were fought. The National Trust and the English Lake District Defence Society, two foundational and closely linked late Victorian organizations for the preservation of nature, originated directly out of Wordsworth's influence. Wordsworth's hope in his *Guide Through the District of the Lakes* that the English Lake District should be set aside as 'a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy' (*Prose* II: 225), is often cited as one of the originating statements of a National Park idea, and Wordsworth's writing and identity continue to define the Lake District as a National Park and icon of English nature today. This association between the individual 'genius' of the writer and areas of special natural beauty, typically set apart from modern life and development, has also had a formative influence on the nature-writing tradition from Thoreau's *Walden* up to the present day, helping to shape the larger environmental movement.

Unsurprisingly, given such vast influences, the emergence of environmental criticism (or ecocriticism) in literary studies has also tended to look to Wordsworth as a foundational figure for ecological thinking and attitudes. Karl Kroeber and Jonathan Bate, among the pioneers of environmental criticism, identified Wordsworth with holistic thinking; a deep feeling for and identification with nature (as opposed to separation from or mastery over it); and an ecological consciousness harmonized with its environment.³ These and other critics also often cite Wordsworth as a foundational figure for dwelling in place, modelling a 'green language' or 'ecopoetics' that roots the poet in a specific local environment.

Much of this early environmental criticism pitted Wordsworth as a poet of nature specifically against contemporary literary theory, which it associated in Wordsworthian terms with a deracinated, fragmented and over-abstracted urban culture, in contrast to the supposedly holistic immediacy of ecological consciousness. Further developments in ecological thinking, however, have revealed that 'nature', far from an immediate or transparent given, is always socially constructed in an ongoing dialectic, at once material and ideological, between the human and more-than-human world. Although a biological and physical world exists beyond our human constructions, we can never access that world except through those constructions: hence 'nature' can never simply be taken as a given. There is no single

'nature' in human representations, only socially constructed and contested 'natures', imagined by differently situated people out of different social situations and needs. William Wordsworth's 'nature' in this sense inevitably supports a variety of human distinctions, including specific models of class, gender, ethnicity, race and national or imperial identity, among other relevant categories. Such perspectives also fit with recent developments in the environmental movement, including environmental justice, ecofeminism, and social ecology, all of which link human social hierarchy and oppression in various ways to environmental damage and domination.

* * *

'I wandered lonely as a Cloud' exemplifies the imaginative pattern of the 'spot of time' that lies at the heart of Wordsworth's environmental writing. The narrator encounters the natural world in this poem in complete solitude and isolation from all human community, likening himself to a 'Cloud' that wanders 'lonely' above a landscape of 'Vales and Hills' (*PTV* 207; lines 1–2). This undirected wandering snaps abruptly into focus as the narrator encounters an image of 'dancing Daffodils' (line 4) beside a lake. After an initial general description, the poem then shifts to concentrate attention not on the daffodils or the natural landscape but on the mind and imagination of the poet himself – first as he 'gaz'd – and gaz'd' on the scene before him, and later, when he lies alone in his room 'in vacant or in pensive mood' and that scene revives upon the 'inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude' (lines 11, 14, 15–16). The replayed memory of this heightened, aesthetic experience of nature defines and fills the vacancy of the narrator's autonomous self.

'I wandered lonely as a Cloud' ends with the narrator's deep feeling of harmony with nature, a seeming ecological holism in which 'my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the Daffodils' (lines 17–18). This assertion of immediate participation and holism with nature, however, is contradicted by the perceptual structures of the poem, for the narrator only views the daffodils from high above, without physically entering the landscape, and his heart only 'dances' with them after he has securely separated himself from them in both space and time. The true value of the daffodils and the narrator's connection with them – and metonymically with nature in general – thus does not emerge in the experience itself, but only in the internalized act of imagination that follows, after he has in effect captured the daffodils in the 'inward eye' of memory.

Environmental critics often claim that Wordsworth rejected the separation of nature and observer typical of picturesque landscape vision.⁴ Yet the

structure of experience in the poem, stopping to compose an aesthetic view from a specific stationed viewpoint, then capturing that view to carry it away for future imaginative engagements, is classically picturesque. Nature appreciation here takes the form of contemplative, solitary, high-aesthetic experience, as the narrator appreciates the daffodils with much the same social and environmental detachment as a connoisseur communing with a work of art in a museum. The truly significant 'place' of the daffodils is not in the environment, but inside the self of the narrator, whose radically individualized and hence vacant identity they define and fill.

'Tintern Abbey' is a much longer and more complex poem, but its basic structure follows 'I wandered lonely as a Cloud' quite closely. Once again the narrator stops his wandering at a high viewpoint above a landscape, which he composes into pictorial significance from what is essentially a picturesque station (Tintern Abbey itself, located several miles downriver from the scene of the poem, was famous as the main stop of the Wye River Valley picturesque tour). Once again the landscape, so composed, allows the narrator to establish a desocialized, individual identity, as he captures its pictorial image in memory and brings it back with him to fill the otherwise 'lonely rooms' among 'the din / of towns and cities' with 'sensations sweet' of meaning, happiness, and purpose (*LB* 117; lines 26–8).

'Tintern Abbey' associates nature with 'elevated thoughts' and an ineffable 'sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused', that flows through both the natural world and the 'mind of man' (lines 96–7, 100). Some environmental critics argue that such formulations express the harmonious integration of human mind and nature, in which a Cartesian desire for separation and mastery is replaced by a deep identification with and participation in the holistic processes of nature. Yet it is important to remember that the poem's narrator associates himself with nature without ever physically entering the scene that he appreciates, effectively disembodied himself as he is 'laid asleep / In body, and become[s] a living soul' (lines 46–7). Disavowing the 'glad animal movements' (line 75) of his youth, he now claims to 'see into the life of things' (line 50) entirely through vision and a kind of abstracted, disembodied consciousness. Ecocritics have also interpreted 'Tintern Abbey' as a model of dwelling in place; but the poem's narrator is in fact a traveller, passing by this landscape view for only a second time, and so he sees and idealizes the 'pastoral' (line 17) landscape from the distanced, primarily visual point of view of the traveller, not as a dweller or an inhabitant.

That environmental critics often read 'Tintern Abbey' as a model of ecological consciousness demonstrates how powerfully Wordsworth has

shaped and continues to inform modern environmental attitudes. Nature's value in the poem is associated with reverent individual contemplation, contrasted against ordinary social and economic life and the city. Ecological holism in this paradigm depends on one's state of consciousness rather than on material or social relationships. Yet Wordsworth's high-aesthetic attitude towards nature in poems such as 'Tintern Abbey' supports a whole range of social distinctions and privileges, which ecological readings must also register. The narrator's aesthetic detachment and seemingly disembodied vision reflect his class position, including his ability to define his relation to the landscape apart from work or direct bodily involvement (except for recreational walking). His freedom to wander alone in nature and define his identity autonomously there also reflects his gender privilege as a man, as does his invocation of the sublime, typically associated with men rather than women at the time. While the narrator does introduce his sister in a supportive role at the end of the poem, as a future echo of his self after he has already established his own autonomy, her more embodied association with nature, in which the 'misty mountain winds [will] be free / To blow against thee' (lines 137–8), reflects their contrasting gender positions. Even the narrator's ability to compose a unified landscape, as the sign of a more generalized and abstracted 'nature', reflects the privilege of his liberal arts education, the foundation for abstract thinking that distinguished the gentleman's point of view at the time from the concrete thinking and particularity associated with women, physical labourers, the poor and non-white 'savages'. 'Tintern Abbey's' seemingly universal version of nature thus supports a specifically male, Anglo-Saxon, socially elite and aesthetically educated version of the self. These socially specific versions of nature and the self subsequently played a central role in the development of modern environmental consciousness and the environmental movement in the English-speaking world.

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These imaginative patterns in 'Tintern Abbey' run throughout William Wordsworth's environmental *oeuvre* and legacy. Wordsworth celebrated deep feelings of harmony with nature, yet he tended to express that harmony, as in the 'Immortality' ode, in terms of a detached visual consciousness rather than physical embeddedness and participation in the environment. He in one sense identified intensely with place, returning to settle in his native Lake District in ways that are often cited today as a model for ecological inhabitation. Yet he remained throughout his life an inveterate traveller, and much of his most celebrated writing on nature, including

The Ruined Cottage, *The Excursion* and the Simplon Pass and Mount Snowdon episodes of *The Prelude*, define the poet's identity and relation to nature through the experience of travel. *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes*, arguably his most extensive environmental writing, combines these drives by defining his home landscape for the point of view of the traveller. The *Guide* advocates some principles of ecological design in harmony with nature; yet in other ways it is thoroughly infused with the aestheticizing ethos of the picturesque, viewing social and economic relations almost entirely through the aesthetic prism of landscape forms. Many of Wordsworth's writings, such as 'Michael' and the *Guide*, celebrate the Lake District freeholders as models of dwelling in nature associated with traditional English virtue and character. Yet this idealized representation often occludes the agency and voice of local culture, as in *The Excursion*, where the lives of the local labouring class appear primarily as a series of gravesite exhibitions in a mountain churchyard, as narrated by the Wordsworthian Pastor.

Home at Grasmere, often read as Wordsworth's most fully realized poem of ecological dwelling, expresses many of these same attitudes and contradictions. It is on one level Wordsworth's great poem of commitment to place, as he affirms Grasmere Valley as being central to his identity, identifying himself with 'this majestic, self-sufficing world, / This all in all of Nature' (*HG* 48; lines 204–5). Yet even in this great poem of rooting, he presents himself mainly through the subjectivity of a traveller. The poem begins with the boyhood Wordsworth looking down and fantasizing about living in the valley from the station of a picturesque tourist. It then presents his later inhabitation there through a seemingly endless series of recreational walks, without ever describing the interior of his dwelling or the social, economic or material details of his daily life. Wordsworth even uses the metaphor of mists unfolding a scene to a 'passing Traveller' (line 698) to describe his process of getting to know the valley, as if he relates to it from a traveller's distanced point of view. As in 'Tintern Abbey', Dorothy provides a supportive presence in the poem that anchors William in place, but William also uses his relation to nature to declare his own autonomy, celebrating 'the individual mind that keeps its own / Inviolat retirement' (lines 969–70). In the end, Grasmere Valley becomes only a launching place for an epically imagined individual poetic journey, later published as the 'Prospectus' to *The Recluse*.

Influentially for the future environmental movement, Wordsworth thus defines his relation to nature in the poem through solitude rather than social relationship or activity; and through aesthetic appreciation and leisure

rather than work or material subsistence. Troublingly, from the standpoint of environmental justice, Wordsworth claims Grasmere for himself in these ways by appropriating it from its existing, mostly labouring-class inhabitants. The poem thus describes William and his sister arriving 'like two Ships at sea' (line 226), as if explorers or colonizers, and it is full of the language of possession and appropriation (lines 43, 52, 85–92, etc.). The local inhabitants are described as admiringly harmonized with nature, but at the same time 'untutored' and 'subservient more than ours / To every day's demand for daily bread' (lines 665, 668–9), lacking the economic disinterestedness that allows William and his sister to appreciate the landscape at a more refined aesthetic and spiritual level. The one social gathering of labouring-class people represented in the poem, in the local pub, is significantly labelled a 'prophanation', as the 'Shepherd's voice', so pleasing when heard alone echoing through the landscape, becomes 'debased' in collective 'ribaldry and blasphemy and wrath' (lines 423–6). *Home at Grasmere* thus constructs Grasmere Valley through the poet's social privilege, presenting nature as a mirror for his favoured activities and values and idealizing the local shepherds' harmony with nature only by subordinating their agency and voice to his own.

Home at Grasmere in these ways represents the complex legacy of William Wordsworth's attitudes towards nature and environment. On one hand, Wordsworth in this poem and throughout his *oeuvre* expresses a deep feeling for and identification with nature, one connected to specific place. By imbuing nature with spiritual and aesthetic value, he sets it in opposition to modern urbanization, industrialization, utilitarianism and materialism. His writing thus helps to establish nature as a site or standing reserve of resistance against the economic instrumentalization of both people and environment. This motif has subsequently helped shape environmentalism's tendency to focus on preserving special 'pristine' and aesthetic landscapes, such as the Lake District, from modern development. Yet on the other hand, by defining nature as a locus for individual imagination and the construction of deep individual identity, Wordsworth's writing also ironically supports the autonomous individualism that lies at the heart of the modern social and economic order – simultaneously opposing and promoting that order in ways that create a rift of contradiction within this version of ecological consciousness. His separation of nature and society has also made it difficult for the environmental movement to focus on restructuring social and material relations to nature or to imagine more ecological versions of modern social and economic systems, such as the sustainable city. Wordsworth's writing often celebrates rural labouring-class people in an

idealized harmony with nature, but in so doing denies them a place in the modern world that poet and readers inhabit. It associates nature with individual retirement and contemplation, not social struggle or environmental justice. These patterns in Wordsworth's representation of nature have helped to define the emergence of modern environmentalism: a movement which, like 'nature' itself, is now a contested legacy.

Notes

1. Matthew Arnold, 'Preface to the Poems of Wordsworth', from *Complete Prose Works*, vol. 9, *English Literature and Irish Politics*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), 53.
2. Quoted from the title to Book 8 from the *1805 Prelude* Book 1, line 221.
3. See for instance Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and "'Home at Grasmere": Ecological Holiness', *PMLA* 89 (1) (1974): 132-41; and Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), and *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), esp. ch. 5.
4. See Bate, *Song of the Earth*, ch. 5, and James McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), esp. 28, 56.

*London**Christopher Stokes*

Although the association of canonical Romantic poetry with valleys, lakes, mountains and flowers stubbornly persists, the work of some writers of the period (Keats, Lamb, the late Coleridge, in particular) is at least as much about the city, and about London specifically, as it is about the countryside. Recent collections of essays edited by James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin, and by Larry Peer, constitute forceful considerations of the urban in Romantic-period writing.¹ New Historicism's methodological turn towards networks and coteries, print culture and reading audiences has more generally shifted our critical attention to the city, above all to London, as the material site of literary production and circulation. But what of a metropolitan Wordsworth? He remains at first glance one of the most determinedly anti-urban of the canonical Romantic writers in temperament and ideology, and simply in the settings of his work. Nevertheless, Wordsworth was repeatedly drawn to the British capital during his career, and his *oeuvre* includes two meditations on London life – Book 7 of *The Prelude* ('Residence in London') and the sonnet 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3rd, 1802' – which are as important and searching as any written during the period.

The young Wordsworth probably saw London for the first time in 1788, during a vacation from Cambridge University. It was 'at least two years / Before this season when I first beheld / That mighty place, a transient visitant', he explains in *The Prelude* (1805 *Prelude* Book 7, lines 72–4). Book 7 of that great poem conflates a series of later and more substantial visits in the early 1790s into a kind of palimpsest, a chronology of which is not easy to discern due to sketchy biographical data. Nevertheless, following Stephen Gill, we might surmise that the young poet was at least partially involved in the city's thriving radical culture.² Certainly, in 1795, when the biographical picture clears, we find Wordsworth moving to London for several months to be closer to the political events of the day, and to mingle with key radicals: Thomas Holcroft, William Frend and William Godwin.

He continued to visit the capital and to maintain links with these friends for the next decade, but by 1806 new connections were dominating. In the Royal Academy exhibition of that year, Sir George Beaumont, by now Wordsworth's patron, presented one painting inspired by 'The Thorn', and one which in turn inspired Wordsworth to write the poem entitled 'Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont'. Beaumont's social circle was wider, and more socially elevated: Wordsworth even met Charles James Fox. From this point onwards, described by Gill as Wordsworth's entrance into polite society, the poet's relationship with London altered.³ There was more sociability and more respectability. He would return to the city to negotiate with publishers, and to maintain his fractious friendship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the latter himself increasingly embedded in the high cultural life of London.

The interactions with the capital which we find marking Wordsworth's biography are in many ways typical of writers of the era. Intellectual, literary and publishing cultures – both high and low – were naturally caught in London's orbit. It was impossible for any aspiring poet, even one as dedicated to the value of the rustic as Wordsworth, to avoid considerable contact with the vast, chaotic city of London. He was at times, as Chandler and Gilmartin remark, 'part of that demographic shift – "the accumulation of men in cities" – that he had written about' in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.⁴ Yet it is London as a symbolic place for Wordsworth – or, perhaps its resistance to being placed – which most powerfully drives his poetry and proves distinctive. Book 7 of *The Prelude*, in particular, shows that he does not simply turn away from the modern city; indeed, it suggests that he is both compulsively drawn to and ambivalently enthralled by it. However, Wordsworth also turns to the city as a problem, for London systematically counters a series of his primary values. In particular, the city disrupts three central tenets in Wordsworth's work – the organic community, the stable sign and the poet's gaze. But in this chapter we will also examine the strategies through which the urban was partially recuperated and made to work within those terms once more.

From the earliest moments of Book 7, the city is rendered as a palpable shock to the observer, a startling experience of intensity, speed and variety:

the quick dance
Of colours, lights and forms; the Babel din;
The endless stream of men, and moving things;
From hour to hour the illimitable walk
Still among Streets with clouds and sky above;
The wealth, the bustle and the eagerness . . . (Book 7, lines 156–61)

The lines register urban dislocation, an experience already visible in eighteenth-century London journalism but increasingly characteristic of a modern poetry that will culminate in Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot. The city is chaotic, pulsing with overwhelming and seemingly infinite chains of stimuli; it is also abrasive, with the poem evoking the rough velocity of carriages and carts on the Strand and the tidal momentum of crowds. All this unsettles a poem which generally privileges retirement and recollection. Walking is, of course, crucial to the Wordsworthian poetic, but here walking as the expression of freedom that is celebrated elsewhere in the poetry, is impossible. The crowd grips and impels the speaker's body, and the metre itself struggles to contain the energy of the urban mass as the poem is seized by apparently endless, staccato enjambment. As E. W. Stoddard points out, 'the rhythm and the syntax create the effect of being carried along, as on a wave, through masses of various beings'.⁵

That the city is chaotic – a Babel, a nightmare – also posits it in opposition to the kind of natural, organic communities we find perennially idealized by Wordsworth. Indeed, it is no accident that the succeeding book begins by evoking Grasmere Fair, for the articulation of that community – spare, rooted, pastoral – is almost a point-for-point inversion of London's monstrous and pulsating crowds. Geraldine Friedman notes that the revolutionary violence of the urban mob is always on the edge of Book 7, most notably when Wordsworth remarks on

. . . times when half the City shall break out
Full of one passion, vengeance, rage, or fear,
To executions, to a Street on fire,
Mobs, riots, or rejoicings

(Book 7, lines 646–9)⁶

Equally apparent is a simpler point about the crowd. Where the Lakes and other rustic communities are valorized for their production of 'Man free, man working for himself, with choice / Of time, and place, and object' (Book 8, lines 152–3), London is a site of alienation and *anomie*. Wordsworth compares the welter of anonymous faces to a dreamlike procession, to a displaced second sight, and individuals mingle in a glittering diversity which is nevertheless ultimately deindividualizing and dehumanizing.

Where Grasmere Fair is a healthy, cheerful and bountiful community, embraced by its 'circumambient World' (Book 8, line 47) of mountain and open sky, London is repeatedly associated with disease and deformation. Throughout Book 7, sick and defective bodies appear, be they beggars and cripples or 'Giants and Dwarfs, / Clowns, Conjurers, Posture-masters, Harlequins' (Book 7, lines 293–4). A rhetoric of prodigies and freaks reaches its

peak at St Bartholomew's Fair, figured as a 'Parliament of Monsters' (line 692). Nevertheless, this monstrosity turns out to be not so much an aberration as an apposite synecdoche for the city as a whole: 'O blank confusion! and a type not false / Of what the mighty City is itself' (lines 696–7). Although in one sense London spectacularly fulfils the functions of a healthy and vigorous body (growth, reproduction, circulation) and centres not only a country but an empire, it is obvious that Wordsworth sees it as a grotesque malformation.

A rhetoric of the body is also important to the second Wordsworthian value I wish to consider: regimes of signification. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, we find the famously *real* language of an experimental poetics defined against the print and visual culture of the modern city swollen by urban migration. According to Wordsworth, 'a multitude of causes' acts to 'blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor . . . the encreasing accumulation of men in cities . . . produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies'. 'To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves', Wordsworth continues, resulting in 'frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse' that feed the public's 'degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation' (*LB* 746–7). Just as Wordsworth's analysis of rhyme and metre in the Preface is ultimately physiological – based on 'tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling' (*LB* 755) – an urban physiology that is primarily responsive to 'gross and violent stimulants' (*LB* 746) determines its fascination with degraded forms of culture. With its capacity for feeling ground down by repetitive labour, an urban readership seeks only the lowest and most superficial forms of stimulant: gaudy, addictive and spectacular in order to rouse jaded, supine appetites.

If the Preface makes a negative and critical gesture towards the cultural effect of urban labour and over-population (citing news media, theatricals and popular literature), then *The Prelude* greatly extends this critique. Its portrayal of London life is permeated by the popular culture of the city: ballads dangling on 'dead walls' (Book 7, lines 209), the modern urban technology of the panorama (an illusionistic 360-degree painted scene), animal displays, pleasure-gardens, pantomimes, fairs and the conspicuously lower-class Sadler's Wells theatre. Wordsworth is keen to distinguish his own art from these degraded alternatives: unlike his own, these arts are not 'subtlest craft / By means refined attaining purest ends' (lines 252–3) but forms characterized by mere spectacle, surface allure or slavishly mechanical forms of imitation. Moreover, falsity of signification – 'mimic sights that

ape' (line 248) – is not limited to popular entertainments. A performativity based on an excessive and therefore dissimulating set of surfaces and superficial gestures permeates the general civic and moral life of the city too. 'Extravagance in gesture, mien and dress' (line 573) is as characteristic of the lawyer or clergyman as it is of the actor, and all public spaces are shown to be corrupted by deceptive theatricality.

Some of Wordsworth's anti-urbanism in relation to spaces like the theatre is moralistic: he has already used a Hogarthian evocation of a corrupting metropolis ensnaring the innocent in poems such as 'Michael', and we find its threat clearly inscribed in the Maid of Buttermere episode from *The Prelude* (Book 7, lines 311–435), with its pointed opposition between the rural and the urban. Yet Wordsworth's critique of visual and theatrical cultures indicates that his anxieties about urban institutions and spaces are fundamentally involved with what we might term readability. Unlike most of the rural scenes found elsewhere in *The Prelude*, which are made to sing with meaning, a certain unreadability dominates London: the texts of its popular culture, the chaotic signs of its capitalism (advertisements, shopfronts, vendors' cries), the unknown and inscrutable faces in crowds and streets, and just the 'random sights' (line 233) of city life in general. It is this loss of readability in the metropolis which leads us to one final Wordsworthian trope, and the one most intimately involved in attempts to later recuperate urban experience: the positioning of a gaze.

Part of the problem is that the gaze is entangled in the very phenomenon it is attempting to decipher. So, for instance, while Wordsworth habitually distances himself from the forms of representation discussed above (theatre, spectacle, entertainment), he does so not only because they are *opposed* to privileged modes of Romantic aesthetics but also because at times they run uncomfortably *close* to them. The crowd-pleasing panorama, with its totalizing vistas of landscape, is uncannily similar to forms of the Wordsworthian sublime. The poet finds himself ambiguously enthralled by popular theatre, pleading that

. . . though I was most passionately moved,
And yielded to the changes of the scene
With most obsequious feeling, yet all this
Pass'd not beyond the suburbs of the mind.

(Book 7, lines 504–7)

Nevertheless, despite or perhaps because of these problems, it is always an attempt to position and stabilize the gaze – to read the city – that acts as the foremost strategy for recuperating the urban.

This strategy is particularly evident in the two lyrics, 'St Paul's' and the famous 'Westminster Bridge' sonnet ('Composed upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 3, 1803'). The latter carefully stations its gaze at a distance:

Earth has not any thing to shew more fair:
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
 A sight so touching in its majesty:
 This City now doth like a garment wear
 The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
 Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
 Never did sun more beautifully steep
 In his first splendor valley, rock, or hill;
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
 The river glideth at his own sweet will:
 Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
 And all that mighty heart is lying still!

(PTV₁₄₇)

London is something that one passes alongside and stops to observe calmly, rather than an entity that seizes the narrator within its motions and flows, as in Book 7 of *The Prelude*. Indeed, motion is systematically voided: only skyline tips (towers, domes, masts) are visible, and the city itself is compared to a sleeping body or unbeating heart. Its object thus contained (the sonnet form itself, with its enveloped rhymes a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a and c-d-c-d-c-d, aids this), the contemplative gaze can claim the city as seamless with the natural, 'open unto the fields, and to the sky' and articulate a holy calm over the shrouded metropolis.

The 1808 poem, 'St Paul's', works more problematically *inside* the city. However, the straying of 'feet masterless' (*TP* 59; line 4) is absorbed into a kind of semi-conscious and barely sensate *flânerie*, allowing a sudden moment of stability to be crystallized as epiphany. Again, it is a certain kind of gazing which becomes possible:

. . . I raised up
 My heavy eyes and instantly beheld
 Saw at a glance in that familiar spot,
 A visionary scene . . .

(lines 12–15)

The characteristic effect of the final lines is again of a city seen, by a sacramental gaze and suffused with ethereal stillness, 'In awful sequestration, through a veil' (line 27). Barely anyone moves among sepulchral white streetscapes, there is no noise; while lines 17, 22 and 25 pile up single adjectives ('Deep, hollow, unobstructed, vacant, smooth', 'Slow, shadowy,

silent, dusky', 'Pure, silent, solemn, beautiful'), the effect is not to create energy or pulsation (as in Book 7 of *The Prelude*), but to deepen and redouble a majesty of sublime. The closing image of falling snow is both transformative and once more connects the city to a purified nature. In short, both lyrics share the same strategy: cease movement, hush sensation, and above all allow the gaze to grip its object and transmute it towards the disembodied, the detached and spiritual.

A similar strategy is at work at two particular moments in Book 7 of *The Prelude*. The first is the encounter with the blind beggar when, 'lost / Amid the moving pageant' of the streets of London (Book 7, lines 609–10), Wordsworth is suddenly struck by the sight of a lone figure, a beggar who 'with upright face, / Stood propp'd against a Wall' (Book 7, lines 612–13). Somewhat reminiscent of the epiphanic moment in 'St Paul's', Wordsworth's mind, previously carried chaotically in the 'second-sight procession' (line 602) of the city crowds, is made to turn 'with the might of waters' (line 617). The beggar wears a 'written paper' on his chest telling his story (line 614). For Wordsworth, this notice is 'a type / Or emblem, of the utmost that we know, / Both of ourselves and of the universe' (lines 618–20). In contrast to the mysterious and dreamlike faces that earlier tortured Wordsworth with 'thoughts of what, and whither, and when and how' (line 600), here there is a forceful clarity of meaning, a conclusive admonition as if 'from another world' (line 623). The second moment is at Saint Bartholomew's Fair, and while this is in many ways the apogee of urban chaos, the poem invokes the muse to imagine an aerial perspective, 'above the press and danger of the Crowd' (line 658). This lays the ground for a final, synthesizing statement:

But though the picture weary out of the eye,
By nature an unmanageable sight,
It is not wholly so to him who looks
In steadiness, who hath among the least things
An under sense of greatest; sees the parts
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole. (Book 7, lines 708–13)

Both episodes, tellingly, impose a redemptive gaze. Such a rhetorical manoeuvre is seductive – here and in the lyrics – precisely because it provides a way to reverse the problems of the urban. The blind beggar symbolically transcends the visual in his blindness, and his label is lifted clear of urban textuality in becoming a prophetic emblem, a kind of sibylline leaf read by Wordsworth. The human is restored in a dehumanizing city since, even in his suffering, 'this unmoving Man' (lines 621) becomes a paradigm of human self-knowledge and a surprisingly or paradoxically

typological body. Similarly, although a sense of visual spectacle is prominent in St Bartholomew's Fair – the invocation of 'slaves unrespected of low pursuits, / Living amid the same perpetual flow / Of trivial objects' (lines 701–3) as they watch the prodigies and showmanship echoes the terms of the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* – the poem counsels us to look again, and to look deeper, at such a picture. Conspicuously, the deeper look is organic in the sense of carefully distributing parts and wholes. Yet both strategies depend on grounding the gaze: turning *against* the crowd or rising *above* it, seeing typologically (for the beggar) or with deep attention (at the fair).

The Prelude returns to London at the end of Book 8.⁷ In reflective mood and having traced more familiar rural scenes, Wordsworth is able to claim that even the metropolis may express 'the unity of man' in which 'One spirit over ignorance and vice' is 'Predominant' (Book 8, lines 827–9). The reader is left with an individual vignette: an 'Artificer' in a quiet London square tenderly nurses his 'sickly babe', eying it 'with unutterable love' (lines 845, 849, 859). Deliberately offset or suspended from the city, the image sums up exactly what Wordsworth wants to recover from London: individuality, genuine emotion, moments of quiet intimacy. It is certainly the aim of the stabilizing gaze, which aims to still the movement of the city and translate it into something manageable, natural and even spiritual. All this makes Wordsworth an unusual poet of the urban, makes him an urban poet despite himself. The central tropes of modernity as they will be developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are here: speed, force, disorientation, kinaesthesia. Wordsworth registered all this in the first modern city to pass a million inhabitants. But for him, London in itself was a nothing or negation: an ideological, poetic and physiological aberration. What he wanted to do was bring it under the auspices of a structure greater than it, to absorb its contingency and disorder into a more permanent and slow-running ground of human life. To do this, he needed the same kind of vision he rhetorically enforced with regard to nature: a gaze articulated from a secure ground, clear and meditative, and able to grasp its object. The attempt, at least, makes Wordsworth's London poetry some of his most involved and involving writing.

Notes

1. James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin, eds., *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Larry Peer, ed., *Romanticism and the City* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

2. Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 54–5; see also Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), ch. 11.
3. Gill, *Wordsworth*, 249.
4. Chandler and Gilmartin, eds., *Romantic Metropolis*, 15.
5. E. W. Stoddard, “‘All Freaks of Nature’: The Human Grotesque in Wordsworth’s City”, *Philological Quarterly* 67 (1988), 37–6.
6. See Geraldine Friedman, ‘History in the Background of Wordsworth’s “Blind Beggar”’, *ELH* 56 (1989), 125–48.
7. In the 1850 version some of this passage is relocated to Book 7.

Family and friendship

Anne D. Wallace

William Wordsworth wrote during a period when the meaning of ‘family’, and of many familial relationships (notably ‘brother’ and ‘sister’), were actively debated and variously practised. These multiple, shifting meanings inflected ideas of ‘friendship’, which was often understood to encompass intense emotion and intimate domestic associations, and was not infrequently characterized as metaphorical siblinghood. *Home at Grasmere* vividly sets out the primary concerns of the early nineteenth century English as they enacted these notions: how does one recognize and establish ‘home’ in an era of increasing mobility? What sources of ‘wealth’ are needed for a stable family as people detach their identity from the land? Who lives in the ideal household, and how is their mutual affection and material support secured? Should the individual remain in the cradle of the birth family or strike out on his own? In its movement from a founding brother–sister dyad to a home inclusive of ‘Strangers and pilgrims’ who may be friends instead of blood relations, and to a brother taking flight as a solitary artist, *Home at Grasmere* traces what will unfold across the nineteenth century: the gradual ascendance of what came to be known as the ‘nuclear family’ and the eclipse of what had been an equally important type of family anchored by siblings and friends. The dramatic poem ‘The Brothers’ and other early poems, including ‘When first I journeyed hither’, ‘Michael’ and the ‘Poems on the Naming of Places’, amplify our sense of Wordsworth’s own deliberations on these issues.

All of these poems were composed in 1800, the first year that Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy lived in Dove Cottage in Grasmere. Dove Cottage was not Dorothy and William’s first shared household – their long-desired reunion under one roof began in 1795 at Racedown in Dorset and continued at Alfoxden in Somerset, where Dorothy kept the first (so far as we know) of her evocative journals – nor was it their last or longest residence together (that would be Rydal Mount from 1813 to 1850). The cottage has become the iconic Wordsworth residence, the symbolic locus of Wordsworth’s

flowering talents, the historical site of a literary ‘cottage industry’ fuelled by the domestic and intellectual contributions of siblings and friends, and the emotional and material ground upon which Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson added the new dimension of their marriage to the anchoring ties among the household’s stationary and transient residents. But when Wordsworth wrote these poems, all this lay in prospect: the ‘home’ he represents in *Home at Grasmere* is a collection of potentialities, an articulation of values as yet untested by their long eventual trajectory.

Home at Grasmere opens with the speaker recalling his boyhood revelation that ‘here / Should be my home, this Valley be my World’ (MS B, lines 42–3). Exulting in ‘the thought / Of my possessions, of my genuine wealth / Inward and outward’, the speaker immediately rests this claim on the ‘proof’ of ‘Yon Cottage, where with me my Emma dwells’ (lines 82, 89–91, 97–8). ‘Emma’ is a name Wordsworth often uses for the sister-figure in his early poems and as in many of these poems the speaker here describes Emma as an intimate, constant presence:

... an unseen companionship, a breath
 Or fragrance independent of the wind;
 In all my goings, in the new and old
 Of all my meditations ... (lines 112–15)

Physically rejoined in Grasmere Vale, these ‘Two of a scattered brood’ now ‘found means / To walk abreast ... / With undivided steps. Our home was sweet’ (lines 175, 177–9).

For the speaker, Grasmere Vale embodies ‘The true community, the noblest Frame / Of many into one incorporate ... / One Household’ fostering ‘humbler sympathies’ with the animals, birds, and trees of the valley (lines 819–20, 822, 721). Within this frame, the speaker’s human household incorporates still more:

Our beautiful and quiet home [is] enriched
 Already with a Stranger whom we love
 Deeply, a Stranger of our Father’s house,
 A never-resting Pilgrim of the Sea
 ...
 ... and others whom we love
 Will seek us also, Sisters of our hearts,
 And one, like them, a Brother of our hearts,
 Philosopher and Poet ... (lines 863–6, 868–71)

‘Such is our wealth’, the speaker continues, concluding that ‘we are / And must be, with God’s will, a happy band!’ (lines 873–4). ‘Home’ at Grasmere

is established and secured by a band of brothers and sisters and friends, a cohort of blood and metaphorical siblings whose warm affections and material labours are both necessary to their familial identities.

These confluences of blood relatives and friends, and of emotional and material security, were the subjects of ongoing cultural negotiations, in discourse and in practice, about the ideal configuration of 'family' in the early nineteenth century in England. At a general level, of course, the idea of multiple idealized models of family simultaneously operative in human cultures is well known. Decades of scholarship in the social sciences and humanities have explored 'family' as a collection of changing, culturally contingent ideas and practices, and literary studies has by no means been absent from this discussion.¹ Readers outside the academy, too, are well aware of our own ongoing cultural debates about whether 'family' should have a single universal definition, or may encompass a wide variety of sizes and shapes. What may be less apparent are the specific contingencies of 'family' in Wordsworth's time and place, especially the common expectation that sibling relationships would be no less important than spousal relationships as anchors of a family's emotional and material security.² Aunts and uncles fostering, educating, supporting, and when necessary outright adopting their nieces and nephews was the rule rather than the exception; when grown, these children quite often returned the 'investment' as companions or care-givers to their older relatives. First-cousin marriages were neither illegal nor unusual, and a set of brothers not infrequently married a set of sisters, doubling or tripling the familial knot. When adult siblings were not married, they very frequently kept house together and, if one of them did marry, the unmarried sibling (most often a sister) commonly stayed on in the household. Clearly, too, the friend held as dear as a sibling might readily be admitted to the domestic circle and might, in time, add yet another spousal bond to that circle.

These family and household configurations, so common in Wordsworth's time, suggest that sibling and spousal relationships were often understood as being more like than unlike, and as being not mutually exclusive (in a house-holding sense) but mutually supportive. Adult siblings, whether house-holding together, living in a married sibling's household or living each in a spousal household of their own, were expected to contribute labour and love to the 'family enterprise'.³ The economic advantages of such a family structure have been well explored, as has the gradual historical transition away from a culture in which these arrangements appear to be as common, if not more so, than households structured solely by spousal and parent-child relations. Yet it has remained surprisingly difficult for scholars

and general readers of our own time to perceive those economic advantages as potentially integrated with, rather than separate from, the emotional stability of the household. Modern historical, sociological and literary studies still generally present conjugal and sibling relations as competing, one necessarily displacing the other for what are taken to be fundamental emotional reasons. As a corollary, such studies also tend to present sibling-anchored households as 'unusual', temporary arrangements eventually replaced by the spousal household.

John Worthen's *The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons & the Wordsworths in 1802* (2001) offers a proximate example of these somewhat paradoxical currents of thought. As he works his way through the many texts and documents written by or associated with Dove Cottage's everyday and frequent residents, Worthen explores their interlocking relationships in beautiful detail, noting the interactions among blood siblings, affines (or those who will become, or wish to become, affines) and metaphorical siblings/friends, and investigating the ways in which terms like 'sister' and 'friend' may shade into each other. As he considers Coleridge's membership in this 'gang' – or 'Concern', as its members also sometimes called it – Worthen says that Coleridge 'would end by in effect sacrificing his marriage for the unconventional family grouping offered by the Wordsworths and the Hutchinsons'.⁴ Yet at the time there was nothing 'unconventional' about this family grouping, as the immediate examples of the inhabitants of Dove Cottage demonstrate. Coleridge's marriage to Sara Fricker was itself part of a similar scheme in which he and Robert Southey, having married sisters, would emigrate to the United States and establish a utopian community 'on the banks of the Susquehanna'.⁵ This idealistic plan came to nothing, but it incorporated the same model of 'family' operative in Dove Cottage: a band of brothers and sisters establishing a household secured by mutual bonds of affection and common economic endeavour. Mary Hutchinson was Dorothy's friend before she was William's wife and, like Dorothy and her brothers, Mary and her siblings spent much of their youth in the households of aunts and uncles, cousins or family friends. The adult Hutchinsons who did not marry not only resided at times at Dove Cottage and Rydal Mount (Sara lived entirely with the Wordsworths for almost thirty years), but established households of their own. In later years these families continued to provide mutual support through their entwined sibling networks. In 1827, for instance, Dorothy spent most of the winter in Rydal Mount with her two nephews, John, who had just taken his Oxford degree and would shortly become a curate, and Willy, whose course was still undecided. As they entered the adult world in the months that

followed, both young men continued house-holding with aunts and uncles: Willy lived in the Isle of Man with Henry and Joanna Hutchinson (Mary Wordsworth's unmarried siblings) while he prepared to go abroad to learn languages; Dorothy kept house for John through his first winter at his parish in Whitwick.

These are not isolated or idiosyncratic examples: the family histories of the Austens, the Lambs, the Shelleys, provide a variety of similar examples, as do the historical records of families of the time not directly associated with literary endeavour. Such histories, as well as the literary texts embedded in them, suggest the presence of competing functional versions of domesticity, and family, in early nineteenth-century England. In this view of things the historical transition away from sibling-anchored households is not predicated on a belief in the inherent conflict between sibling and spousal affections. Rather, two different 'domestic ideologies' appear as competing cultural formations. In *Home at Grasmere* we may then read the articulation of an ongoing cultural negotiation between a domesticity in which siblings and friends are highly valued, members of a common 'natural' household secured by their mutual affections and (implicitly) material wealth, and another domesticity structured by spousal and parent-child relations that implicitly excludes adults outside the vertical line of blood descent.

The first nine hundred lines of the poem celebrate the first of these domesticities, sketching the alternative in its embedded tales of broken or lost spousal households and mated pairs, the losses lessened only in the household where six sisters (not yet adult) still ensure prosperity and happiness. But the last hundred and fifty lines take a sudden turn as the speaker announces his detachment from the idealized household he has constructed to claim 'Possessions . . . wholly, solely, mine, / Something within, which yet is shared by none – / Not even the nearest to me and most dear' (lines 897–9). These 'possessions' are the speaker's poetic powers, which he will use to 'sing in solitude the spousal verse / Of this great consummation' in which the human mind is 'wedded . . . / In love' to the natural world (lines 1000–4). The stable, rich home the speaker has been building for nine hundred lines is now deemed inadequate, its 'wealth' insufficient without the speaker's sole possession of internal capacities unshared – indeed, unshareable – with his housemates. The potential consequences of the speaker's failure to stake his independent claim to these poetic powers are no less than cultural and spiritual death, 'I and the modest partners of my days / Making a silent company in death' (lines 905–6).

The speaker here asserts a necessary departure of the adult sibling from the birth-home, and from his siblings (blood and metaphorical) to achieve the apparently higher goals of art. Because we know what we know of Wordsworth, it is tempting to take this turn as a decisive change from one set of values to another, from one ideal domesticity to the gradually ascendant version we know as the 'nuclear' family. This may indeed be the impact when this last section of the poem migrates to *The Excursion* as its 'Prospectus'. But the manuscript of the poem as a whole seems to describe not a conclusive turn but a negotiation, a dialogue between two versions of familial security and happiness.

A similar dialogue works out quite differently in Wordsworth's 'When first I journey'd hither', in which the poet-speaker describes his effort to find, in a grove near his house, 'A length of open space where I might walk . . . / In easy and mechanic thoughtlessness' while he composes (lines 36, 38).⁶ Then, after a visit from his seafaring brother, the long-desired path appears, 'winding on with such an easy line / Along a natural opening' that the speaker marvels at his own previous inability to find 'what was now so obvious' (lines 58–9, 62). Recognizing 'at once' that the path had been made 'by my Brother's steps', the speaker also recognizes in this long-absent brother 'A silent Poet', tutored equally by his boyhood in the Lakes and by his sojourns on 'the vast Sea' (lines 64–5, 88, 89). Naming the path for his brother, the speaker imagines him 'Muttering the verses which I mutter'd first / Among the mountains' as the brother walks the decks of his ship; the 'fir-grove murmurs with a sea-like sound' as the speaker walks and composes, 'for aught I know / Timing my steps to thine' (lines 106–7, 111, 112–13). In this poem, although the speaker lives alone, his art is enabled by the brother's return, while the brother then imports the speaker's poetry to his own travelling home on board ship. The mountains and the sea, the speaker and the fir-grove, are not that 'many into one incorporate' celebrated in *Home at Grasmere* until the departed brother returns, performing the work of making the path; and the actions of the siblings together are required to make both home and art. Yet again the dialogue remains a dialogue rather than a conclusion, for the brother did depart, and a choice between the departure and the return to brief residence is not a choice the poem enables.

As the nineteenth century unfolds so the dialogue between these two versions of ideal domesticity appears in innumerable variations in literary and historical texts, and in what we know of the practices of English families of the day. Gradually, as wealth and material production moved away from the home-place, the countryside and the land, the domestic model, which

was later deemed 'natural', became dominant: the departure of the adult sibling from the birth-family signals the cultural ascendance of the 'nuclear' family, characterized by the tight blood cohort of an espoused couple and their children, and by the exclusion both of other adults (grown siblings, blood and metaphorical), and of productive paid labour (or at least its visible appearance) from the family and household. To William Wordsworth, though, these developments were unknown. His early poetry opens to us a world in which an ideal 'home' may still be illuminated with the enriching love and labour of brothers and sisters and friends, 'Strangers and pilgrims' gathering in a common household, 'many into one incorporate'. In *Home at Grasmere*, the poet's solitary song requires an imaginary departure from such a household, but it was a departure Wordsworth himself never enacted. When he died at Rydal Mount on 23 April 1850, Dorothy and Mary were together at his bedside, Dorothy emerging from her long illness into temporary lucidity in William's last hours. Dorothy lived on with Mary at Rydal Mount until 25 January 1855, still cared for by the friend she called 'my Sister'.

Notes

1. For instance, Dorothy Crozier's 'Kinship and Occupational Succession' (*Sociological Review* 13 [n.s.] (1965), 15–43), Michael Anderson's *Family Structure in Nineteenth-Century Lancashire* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), and Barry Reay's 'Kinship and the Neighborhood in Nineteenth-Century Rural England: The Myth of the Autonomous Nuclear Family' (*Journal of Family History* 21 (1996), 87–104) all re-evaluate the roles of a wider kinship during industrialization. Recent influential literary studies by Ruth Perry (*Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture 1748–1818* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Mary Jean Corbett (*Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008) pay particular attention to the changing significance of grown siblings in the English family.
2. Substantial evidence for the primary role played by siblings in the early nineteenth-century English family can be found in Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (University of Chicago Press, 1987). See also Davidoff's 'Where the Stranger Begins: The Question of Siblings in Historical Analysis' in her *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (London: Routledge, 1995), 206–26.
3. This phrase comes from Davidoff and Hall's *Family Fortunes*. See especially part 2, 'Economic Structure and Opportunity' (193–315).
4. John Worthen, *The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons and the Wordsworths in 1802* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 14.

5. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, 2 vols., ed. Barbara E. Rooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 1: 224.
6. 'When first I journeyed hither', first composed 1800–4, became 'When to the attractions of the busy world' (published 1815) and was added to the 'Poems on the Naming of Places' in Wordsworth's later collected editions; see *PTV* 563–70.

enlightened social progress – and to forget the bitter controversies that had sometimes attended the question of the education of the children of the people whom Joseph Lancaster referred to as members of ‘the industrious classes’, the labouring people who had little time or money to devote to their children’s education. The passage of the National Education Act brought an end to what had once been an exceedingly vitriolic debate that had raged between supporters of Lancaster and of the Reverend Andrew Bell. The controversy had, as Mary Moorman says, ‘epitomized the conflict between Church and Dissent’ and ‘effectually delayed any promotion of education by the State for two generations’ as partisans wrangled over whether ‘the Church [should] have control, as in Bell’s “Madras System”, or, as Lancaster the Quaker advocated’, the country should adopt ‘free education on “general Christian principles”’.²

To anyone surveying economic and social conditions in England as Wordsworth did in *The Excursion*, education seemed increasingly necessary for survival. The dire economic conditions of the late 1790s and the 1800s – two years of bad harvests and a dearth of jobs – made it abundantly clear that people needed what twenty-first-century writers call ‘retraining’. Wordsworth’s wise itinerant – once a pedlar, now a wanderer – opens the poem by relating the story of Margaret and her ruined cottage – a story that proceeds with all the implacability of economic necessity. When Margaret’s husband Robert falls ill and must deplete his modest savings, when his crops fail year after year, he can only earn money by enlisting in the army, a virtual slavery so humiliating to him and to Margaret that he cannot bear to report it to her. (He surreptitiously returns home and leaves her the money he’s gotten without ever alerting her to his presence.) Wordsworth’s Wanderer tells the story as a moving personal tale. Yet Wordsworth also suggests that when an industrious young man must leave his wife, children and home to earn the means of subsistence, risking his life in the process, his situation has implications that reach well beyond his particular case. The first and most obvious victims are his wife and children, but their decline and deaths are emblematic of the situations of many. As the Vicar in the poem later describes various persons who have been buried in the churchyard in the mountains, we see lives upended by the loss of rural employment and lives of tragic backwardness. By the end of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth sees their cases as representative, not personal but national. He had stated in his Preface to the poem that he was publishing it in 1814 without waiting to complete the portion that would later be called the *Prelude* because this ‘second division of the work [*The Excursion*] was designed to refer . . . to passing events, and to an existing state of things’ (*Excursion* 38). In his advocacy of universal education

as a national responsibility, he aimed to speak to existing conditions and engage poetry in the service of public policy.

The general views that Wordsworth expressed in *The Excursion* were, in some sense, widely shared. The Wanderer, who had been a pedlar carrying small goods to people spread around the countryside, speaks of himself as someone whose former profession is now obsolete. He, like many others, has found that his livelihood is gone. Unlike most others, however, he is fortunate in having been able to retire so that he can simply walk the mountains of the Lake District and observe conditions there without needing to earn a living. Wordsworth prefaces the poem by saying that he would himself probably have been an itinerant pedlar if he hadn't had the benefit of 'what is called a higher education', but he recognizes that the Wanderer's former profession is less and less viable under the current economic conditions. There are fewer people in the country; the ones who remain have little money with which to purchase anything from the pedlars, whom the poems styles as travelling knights. Education seems desirable, indeed necessary, for people living in an age of scientific agriculture and a massive redistribution of the population from the country to the city.

Yet while education seemed important for an increasingly large segment of the population, its cost presented a virtually insurmountable problem. Even those who advocated universal education recognized that philosophers like Locke, Rousseau and Kant had not offered any suggestions for delivering it at less expense when they developed their views on education. Thus it was that the schemes of the Reverend Bell and of Joseph Lancaster found a ready audience with the British public. Both Bell and Lancaster presented educational plans that promised great efficiencies and cost savings. Bell, who as chaplain to various British regiments in India had initially developed his schemes to benefit the orphaned children of European soldiers and Indian or European women, published his first report on his experiment in education at Madras in 1797, and later sought to promulgate his educational techniques in England by republishing it with minor emendations and new titles and by establishing and blessing various schools. Lancaster opened his first school for the children of the labouring poor in London on New Year's Day 1798 and published his *Improvements in Education, as it respects the Industrious Classes of the Community* in 1803. Theirs were early efforts to systematize schooling and develop educational franchises. Both men went into considerable detail about classroom management and produced an extraordinary number of calculations in support of their claims to provide education in reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic at very modest expense.

The chief cost-saving technique that Bell's and Lancaster's systems employed was what Robert Southey termed 'self-tuition'.³ For neither of them, however, did the term translate into what might plausibly be called independent learning; in neither system was a student ever alone. Bell economized by eliminating wage-earning adult ushers for his school and putting each student into overlapping chains of learners and instructors, with each student being both a tutor to a less accomplished student and a scholar answering to a more accomplished student. Lancaster similarly – and even more radically – eliminated positions for most adult teachers and established a system in which the performance of each student was continually referred to and correlated with the work of the entire group of students in a particular class. The Bell method was minimally public and conversational; the Lancaster method, maximally public and unreliant on direct exchange between students. Bell came to append to his title the boast that his method was suitable for schools and for families – as well he should have, because his model, relying as it did on overlapping groups of three (a pupil, that pupil's student, and a more advanced student), could accommodate large numbers of students but could also easily be scaled down. Lancaster's method, however, continually assumed a substantial number of students, and the whole process of creating a constantly changing series of rank orders through the oral examination process would have looked ridiculous in a tiny school or a family. Like Jeremy Bentham's later application of generally Lancastrian techniques in *Chrestomathia* in 1817, it did not merely teach logical operations like mathematics; it treated the class as a serially unfolding game in which students' performances were continually evaluated in relation to the entire group.

This very real difference between the two methods, however, receded into the background – as did what might seem to have been their common aim to educate the children of the poor. Lancaster favourably acknowledged Bell in *Improvements* in 1803, but their cordial relations soon ended. In 1805 the two men became rivals and enemies. Sarah Trimmer, the self-appointed Guardian of Education, contacted Bell in that year to alert him to the fact that she was publishing an essay entitled 'A Comparative View of the New Plan of Education promulgated by Mr Joseph Lancaster, in his Tracts concerning the instruction of the Children of the Labouring part of the Community'. Explaining to Bell that she opened her essay with praise of Lancaster, she described the praise as a merely strategic gesture, a way of making her subsequent criticisms of Lancaster and his system that much more stinging.⁴ She particularly encouraged Bell to think that Lancaster was taking credit for work he had himself done and urged him to become

active in disseminating his method so as to check the spread of Lancaster's influence. Lancaster had built a remarkably large and powerful base of subscribers – including George III, who had publicly stated that it was his 'wish that every poor child in [his] dominions should be taught to read the Bible'⁵. Lancaster's detractors were, then, eager to suggest that he was principally interested in making himself 'conspicuous'⁶ and that he was disingenuous when he claimed that his methods were non-sectarian. Lancaster was, Trimmer thought, a "Goliath of Schismatics", bearing down all before him, and engrossing the instruction of the common people'.⁷ Commentators like Robert Southey echoed Coleridge, who had delivered a supernumerary lecture on education at the Royal Institution in May 1808, claiming that the two systems resembled one another so closely that it was clear that Lancaster had copied Bell, and also that the two differed wildly from one another. Bell's system was said to be compatible with English custom, English liberty and the virtues of the established church; Lancaster's, perilously close to the models of Abbe Barruel and Professor Robinson – in short, with all that was French and radical.⁸

Supporters of the two men formed competing organizations. In 1811 the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor disseminated Bell's principles to counter the Royal Lancastrian Society, which had been instituted in 1808. In the Royal Institution lectures Coleridge praised Bell extravagantly, coupling him with the abolitionist Clarkson as one of the two men 'who had done most for humanity' in Coleridge's time.⁹ But he did not stop there, and went on to criticize Lancaster's system of punishments, saying they violated a basic sense of justice in deploying shame as an instrument. Southey, who heard those lectures and sympathized with them, then published *The Origin, Nature, and Object of the New System of Education* in 1812, with a minute, if misleading, account of the relation between the two systems. He offered a series of jibes at Lancaster's calculations. He mocked Lancaster's crediting his students with doing more spelling by participating in spelling competitions than they would have done if they had waited for a teacher's corrections, and ridiculed Lancaster's talk of creating a natural aristocracy of students when he ought, if he were the Quaker he said he was, to believe in equality above all else.¹⁰ Lancaster's attempt to be non-sectarian, Southey claimed in echo of Trimmer, was in fact the height of sectarianism. Lancaster was a Quaker, Quakers are sectarians, and they succeed because 'Sectarians have more zeal than the members of an established church', he insisted.¹¹ Samuel Bentham's plan for a panopticon received a brief mention as the sort of thing one would expect from Lancaster and his sympathizers. It was

branded yet another attempt to multiply the number of gimmicks in an already gimmicky system.¹²

Wordsworth joined with Coleridge and Southey in thinking that Bell should get the lion's share of the credit for what had come to be seen as one new system. Yet all three seem to have arrived at their convictions on this score by beginning their reading of Bell only with the 1808 version of his report – the first occasion on which Bell adopted the key Lancastrian term 'monitor' and various Lancastrian techniques. By silently incorporating various elements of Lancaster's work at this point, Bell seems to have made it easy for people to conclude that Lancaster was aping him whenever he retained terms he had been using from his first publication in 1803.

Although Wordsworth seems not to have taken an active role in the controversy itself and did not seek to discredit Lancaster, his response to Bell's system was generally enthusiastic. He described it in terms much like those Bell employed of himself when he opined that Bell's Madras system was 'next to the art of Printing . . . the noblest invention for the improvement of the human species' (*MY* II: 210). Unlike Coleridge and Southey, however, Wordsworth wrote neither essays nor volumes in defence of Bell and his scheme. As Alison Hickey observes, Wordsworth manifested 'increasing wariness about Bell'.¹³ In May 1812 Wordsworth wrote from London to his wife Mary to say that he was sending her the expanded edition of Bell's exposition of his system and also that he had 'undertaken a disagreeable employment for Dr Bell, viz. to select and compose with Mr [William] Johnson's assistance 20 pages of monosyllabic lessons for Children' (*LS* 65, 83). Bell at one point clearly felt close enough to Wordsworth to designate both Southey and Wordsworth as his literary executors and biographers. Yet there seems little evidence that Wordsworth retained an interest in either project. If Wordsworth fulfilled the assignment of preparing monosyllabic lessons, the exercises have not survived. Wordsworth appears to have no part at all in the *Life of the Rev. Andrew Bell*, a three-volume work, one of which Robert Southey prepared before his death in 1843, and two of which his son, the Reverend Charles Cuthbert Southey, completed in 1844.

It appears that both Bell and Lancaster managed to fulfil a law of reception that Wordsworth laid out in his 'Reply to Mathetes' of 1809 – namely, that people will frequently overestimate particular individuals and will come to revise those overestimations. Lancaster turns out to have been financially reckless and to have only barely avoided imprisonment for unpaid debts before he decided to leave England for America in 1818. Bell seems to have prompted complaints of rigidity and the suggestion that he could only work with children because children were not in a position to

oppose him. Letters among various members of the Wordsworth circle portray Bell as at best odd and at worst highly difficult.

Wordsworth's enthusiasm for Bell's educational system was perhaps at its peak in late 1811. As he was completing *The Excursion*, Mary, Dorothy and he were establishing a Madras-styled school in Grasmere in which William taught 'regularly for 2 or 3 hours every morning and evening' for some months and in which Dorothy and Mary taught for a longer time.¹⁴ This interest in the Madras system has long puzzled readers who are familiar with Wordsworth's account of the advantages of his having been 'Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear' in *The Prelude* (1805 *Prelude* Book 1, line 307). In an important discussion, R. A. Foakes captures this puzzlement well when he calls attention to the discrepancy between Wordsworth's remarks on education in Book 5 of *The Prelude* and his enthusiasm for Bell's Madras system. Foakes rightly points out that teachers, systems and schedules seem practically irrelevant or odious when Wordsworth describes education in *The Prelude*, whereas Bell's system was nothing if not regimented (with hours of waking, eating, doing lessons and sleeping spelled out).¹⁵ The 'thriving Prisoners' of Book 9 of *The Excursion* (line 259) are young boys who appear to be on a highly modified version of the Madras plan. Prisoners of both their native mountains and of their village school, they are under so little restraint as to fish on their own and to show up triumphantly bearing the rewards of their efforts. They might spend some hours every day in a schoolroom, but they are also free to teach themselves in their interactions with the world.

Yet Wordsworth's attitude towards Bell's system may present less of a conundrum than has sometimes been thought. What Wordsworth emphasized in Bell's methods was not their regimentation but the importance of that term 'self-tuition'. Bell's system, in continually making individual students both scholars (of the person immediately above them in knowledge) and teachers (of the person immediately below them), represented the closest approximation to self-tuition that Wordsworth knew anything about. And it was readily adaptable to the Wordsworth family's own situation when Wordsworth the family man needed to worry about the education of his own children. Unlike Lancaster's system, which worked with more substantial numbers of students simultaneously, Bell's system held out the promise of scaling down effectively. It could accommodate a large number of students because of its low cost, but it also seemed well suited to a small school like the one at Grasmere or, as Bell insisted in his swollen title of 1808, to a family.

It seems that Wordsworth always operated with a relatively loose version of the Bell system. Having students learn from other students virtually

equivalent to them in age and understanding must have seemed as close as one might come to the ideal of masterless education that Wordsworth laid out in the 'Reply to Mathetes' (1809). The problem that he identified there was that a teacher may be played false – and may thus play his pupil false – by his own experience: 'in spite of all his caution, remarks may drop insensibly from him which shall wither in the mind of his pupil a generous sympathy, destroy a sentiment of approbation or dislike not merely innocent but salutary' (*Prose* 11: 23). Part of the appeal of Bell's and Lancaster's systems alike was that they explicitly objected to the idea that learning could be drummed into students by the application of blows. Yet corporal punishment was by no means the only version of mastery and personal tyranny that Wordsworth repudiated. He went much farther than either Bell or Lancaster in his vigilance for even the most benign of influences, since he thought that they might cause children to mistrust their own experience out of excessive alertness to their teachers.

Any school that had fewer teachers must therefore have seemed desirable to Wordsworth, because it did not force children to misrepresent their observations in the way that the child in 'Anecdote for Fathers' feels obliged to do out of a concern for other, older people and their views. The father of that poem is perfectly good-hearted, but even his enquiries about his son's reactions go awry, through no fault of his own other than that he is an adult and cannot ask an innocent question even when he simply says: Which place do you prefer, the farm at Liswyn or the beach at Kilve? The child can hardly bring himself to reply to this apparently simple solicitation of his opinion, because he is exquisitely conscious of his father's opinion of his opinion, fearful of confessing his fear of the weathercock on the roof of the barn at Liswyn Farm.

The boy of 'Anecdote for Fathers' is fearful of being seen to be fearful. Wordsworth's remarks on education in his poetry, his letters and his 'Reply to Mathetes' highlight a distinction between an instructive and natural fear and what we might call social fear. The terrifying sounds that the young boy Wordsworth heard or thought he heard when he had stolen woodcocks from someone else's snare represented fear exercising a kind of ministry within his own mind, and Wordsworth foregrounded fearful lessons at least as much as those of beauty in talking about his own development. He saw social fear, by contrast, as being just as pernicious as Rousseau depicted it to be in *Emile*. Not only should parents and teachers spare the rod, he thought, they should be so patient as never to hint at their own views to their children and students, lest they teach children not to trust their own experience. The ideal education is one in which the 'mind hath look'd / Upon the speaking

face of earth and heaven / As her prime Teacher' (1805 *Prelude* Book 5, lines 11–13) and in which it is best to have a mother who is blessed (as Wordsworth's mother was) 'in being pure / From feverish dread or error and mishap' (lines 276–7). Such lack of fearfulness enables a child to learn from fear, and not to impersonate fearlessness in the way a child being rationally encouraged to act like a big boy must do. As a family man, Wordsworth accepted Bell's loose version of self-tuition, but it represented a severe compromise of Rousseauvean tendencies in Wordsworth that were perhaps even stronger than Rousseau's. In emphatic statements about self-tuition in *The Prelude* and the 'Immortality Ode', he insists that adults should get out of the way of children, so that their efforts to advance children's education will not compromise children's aptitude at teaching themselves through their encounter with the natural world.

Notes

1. Andrew James Symington, quoted in Alison Hickey, *Impure Conceits: Rhetorical Ideology in Wordsworth's Excursion* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 129.
2. Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography: The Later Years, 1803–50* (Oxford University Press, 1965), 178.
3. Robert Southey, *The Origin, Nature, and Object of the New System of Education* (London, 1812).
4. Charles Cuthbert Southey, *The Life of the Rev. Andrew Bell*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1844), 11: 131.
5. David Salmon, ed., *The Practical Arts of Lancaster's 'Improvements' and Bell's 'Experiment'* (Cambridge University Press, 1932), ix.
6. Southey, *Origin*, 28.
7. Salmon, *Practical Arts*, xxv.
8. Southey, *Life*, 11:152–3.
9. Neither Coleridge's text nor his notes survive, but Henry Crabb Robinson included a fairly extensive summary in a letter to Mrs Clarkson. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. v, *Lectures 1808–1819*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Princeton University Press, 1987), 1: 96–102.
10. Southey, *Origin*, 81.
11. *Ibid.*, 44–5.
12. *Ibid.*, 152.
13. Hickey, *Impure Conceits*, 115.
14. Moorman, *William Wordsworth*, 178–9. Moorman calls attention to letters written between 27 October 1811 and 27 December 1811.
15. R. A. Foakes, "Thriving Prisoners": Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Child at School', *Studies in Romanticism* 28 (2) (1989), 187–206.

*Animals**Kurt Fosso*

Much as in John Constable's *The Hay Wain* and other Romantic-era landscape paintings, animals conspicuously populate imagined terrains in Wordsworth's poetry. They do so more than readers might expect given the poet's sometimes creatureless, 'rocks and stones and trees' descriptions of nature – descriptions that likely led one ecology-oriented critic to conclude that Wordsworth 'didn't seem to have a particular affection for animals'.¹ And yet, affection or no, wild and domesticated animals feature significantly in his writings, most notably in many of the poems he wrote around the turn of the century. Near the opening of the *Two-Part Prelude*, for instance, we espy young Wordsworth risking life and limb as he hangs 'by knots of grass, / Or . . . [rocky] fissures' to steal from a raven's nest its clutch of eggs: rare animal prizes and among the hardest won of wild-bird eggs, to be collected, traded or perhaps painted (*1799 Prelude* Part 1, lines 58–9). The poet recalls also scampering 'where the woodcocks ran / Along the moonlight turf, his 'shoulder all with springes hung' to capture these woodland birds (deemed a delicacy) and no doubt other native and migratory species as well, and sometimes even to poach the 'captive of another's toils' (lines 32–4, 44).

In such *contact zones*,² for Wordsworth the 'mind of man' is 'fashioned and built up / Even as a strain of music', guided by the natural environment's mysterious 'spirits' (*1799 Prelude* Part 1, 67–9). Indeed, his poetical self-formation as one of nature's 'favored being[s]' (line 70) had, he believed, been prompted in part by his early interactions with animals and by those actions' moral or other consequences – among the Lake District hills and elsewhere. So it is, too, that at Wordsworth's suggestion his *Lyrical Ballads* co-author, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, famously depicts the moral schooling of an albatross-shooting mariner (*FN* 2). For animals *matter* to Wordsworth's self-described moral and poetic education, and not simply because they can be another person's (or spirit's) property. They matter because they hold in themselves some kind of property or propriety

of *being*, to judge at least from this poet's *oeuvre*, where animal representations form a veritable Lakeland or broader bestiary, composed at a cultural moment of emerging questions and ideas concerning the condition and treatment of animals.

Although no vegetarian like his scion Percy Bysshe Shelley, Wordsworth did venture into the field of debate about non-human creatures' sufferings and rights, itself a less prominent aspect of the revolutionary discourses on the rights of man and of women. He does so most explicitly, albeit briefly, in *The Excursion*, where the Wanderer is said not only to love animals but also to believe in their 'rights' (Book 2, line 50) – by no means a common English sentiment. *The Excursion* does not address the complicated moral and social connections of such rights, 'acknowledg[ed] . . . for all' (line 50), to the material use of domestic and wild creatures, but elsewhere, in 'Hart-Leap Well' as well as in *Home at Grasmere* and *Peter Bell*, Wordsworth does pointedly depict animal sufferings and in turn queries the morality of cruelty and killing. Moreover, *The Prelude* tellingly describes its poet's own long-developed feeling of compassion, even of affection, towards animals: 'minute obeisances / Of tenderness' (1805 *Prelude* Book 8, lines 493–4). Onno Oerlemans argues that Wordsworth's mention of animal rights (and here also of tender feelings), in any way, in fact 'ought to alert us to the possibility that his love of nature includes a specific concern for animals, and is not immediately or primarily an abstraction'.³ For that matter, Wordsworth rarely employs the abstract noun *animal* to designate non-human creatures, enlisting instead their common names or such generic terms as bird, brute and beast.⁴

Viewed from the relatively recent ecocritical vantage of Karl Kroeber's *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (1994), Christine Kenyon-Jones's *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing* (2001) and David Perkins's *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (2003), we glimpse Wordsworth representing 'a life that human beings, with their passions and actions and words, share almost as equals with other thinking things and indeed with all things', ecologically and metaphysically 'participating in a life of things that is *nowise reducible to a story we can tell about it*'.⁵ And there's the rub. For what is less conspicuous even in much recent ecocriticism is precisely the complicated, intrusive place in Wordsworth of narrative: of a given narrative's relationship to a particular perspective and, more broadly, to an informing cultural frame and ideology, 'what man has made of man' (*LB* 76; line 7). In this sense, the poet's representations are inheritors of Enlightenment scepticism, notably that of David Hume and Bishop Berkeley, and of the eighteenth century's emphasis,

from the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury to those of John Locke and David Hartley, upon human perception and sensation in the formation of ideas, including, it turns out, developing ideas of the human as an animal among animals.

Although from Aristotle a long yet discontinuous philosophical tradition had viewed humankind as possessing higher reason but a lower, animal body, 'a beast within',⁶ it was in the eighteenth century that Carl Linnaeus's revolutionary taxonomy, *Systema Naturae* (1735), placed humans more fully among the animals (*Animalia*), the tenth edition situating *Homo sapiens* in the order of primates.⁷ Even were Wordsworth unfamiliar with that major work, reading Erasmus Darwin's *Zoönomia* (1794) would have led him to its similar view that the 'Creator of all things' has manifestly 'stamped a certain similitude on the features of nature, that demonstrate to us, that the whole is *one family* of one parent'.⁸ As Keith Thomas states, the long-standing anthropocentric view of 'the world as made for man and [of] all other species as subordinate to his wishes' was, in these and other ways, being 'gradually eroded by a combination of developments, some of them already in operation when the period started, others emerging as time went on'.⁹

England in this period was becoming 'collectively emotional about animals', a shift attributable not only to taxonomic and other scientific advances but also, Paul Johnson holds, to a new fondness for dogs and horses and to the popularity of such zoos as the Exeter Exchange,¹⁰ not to mention the age's growing fascination with rural life. Change was in the air; hence the licensing of London's slaughterhouses in 1786, the formation of the RSPCA in 1824, new rules in some grammar schools against mistreating animals, and appeals such as that of Francis Hutcheson that animals have 'a *right* that no useless pain or misery should be inflicted on them'.¹¹ Most famously, Jeremy Bentham argued, 'The question is not, can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*, but, Can they *suffer*?'¹² With a more political outlook, in 1798, the same year *Lyrical Ballads* was published, John Lawrence proposed that animal rights be state-sanctioned. For its part, Darwin's *Zoönomia* proclaims the very 'source' of virtue to be 'our intellectual sympathies with . . . the miseries, or with the joys, of our fellow creatures'.¹³

Wordsworth's poetic depictions of animals thus appeared in a culturally charged context of debates about animal rights and of new theories of the natural world and humankind. In this regard there are three major facets to the poet's representations of animals: moral, social and epistemological. Correspondingly, Wordsworth's poetry on each side of the century presents a series of abused creatures: the poor vanishing sheep in the *Lyrical Ballads*' 'The Last of the Flock', the hunted stag of 'Hart-Leap Well' and *Home at*

Grasmere, the latter of which also anxiously reflects on the death of a pair of swans, the half-starved beaten donkey in *Peter Bell*, and the *Lyrical Ballads*' caged bird in 'Poor Susan' as well as the dead dogs and horses of 'Simon Lee, The Old Huntsman'. As for the poet's social versions of the pastoral, most of these predictably mention sheep, from *The Vale of Esthwaite*'s 'poor flocks all pinch'd with cold' (*EPF* 446; section 1, line 276) to the *Lyrical Ballads*' 'The Pet-Lamb', 'The Brothers' and 'Michael', and the bounding lambs of the 'Immortality Ode'. We read of companionable pets in the Miltonic exercise 'The Dog – An Idyllium' (1787–88), in 'Fidelity' (1805) and in 'The Kitten and the Falling Leaves' (1804–6). *The Prelude* in turn recalls a circus-like 'company of dancing Dogs' along with a 'Dromedary, with an antic pair / Of Monkeys on his back' (1805 *Prelude* Book 7, lines 192–4). Also from *The Prelude*, horses convey young Wordsworth close to the desolate site of a hanged man (1799 *Prelude* Part 1, lines 302–13) and home with his brothers to what will be their father's funeral (lines 330–53). In the *Lyrical Ballads*' 'Idiot Boy' a good-natured pony conducts the innocent child on a moonlight ride, while the second volume's 'Strange fits of passion' details a lover's horse ride towards Lucy's moonlit cottage. The eight horses of *Benjamin the Waggoner* (1806) wisely 'know full well' their driver's skill, loving him 'despite . . . his faults' (*BW* 80, 98; lines 445, 643–4).

Recalling her early life of rustic subsistence and animal companions, the eponymous female vagrant highlights the gamboling sheep at 'shearing time', her egg-laying hen and the sycamore's bees, the 'watchful' family dog and a wild 'red-breast known for years', as well as white swans that met her at 'the water-side' ('The Female Vagrant', *LB* 50–8; lines 23–7, 34, 36). In 'Lines Written at a small distance from my House' another red-breast pleasingly 'sings from the tall larch / That stands beside our door' (*LB* 63; lines 3–4), while in 'The Tables Turned' a thistle (thrush), 'no mean preacher', is part of a surrounding nature that should 'be your teacher' (*LB* 109; lines 14, 16). And in 'Old Man Travelling', although the pecking 'hedge-row birds' disregard the traveller, his physical *tranquillity* may nonetheless be something shared (*LB* 110; lines 1–2). Representations of wild birds also stand out in *Poems, in Two Volumes*' 'The Redbreast and the Butterfly', 'The Sailor's Mother', 'To a Sky-Lark' and 'The Green Linnet' (1802, 1806), and in the opening lines of *Benjamin the Waggoner*, where a night-hawk sings 'his frog-like tune' (*BW* 42; line 3). In keeping with the espousal in 'Lines Written in Early Spring' of a soul linking human beings to nature, construed in the midst of hopping birds' immeasurable 'thoughts' and seeming pleasures (*LB* 76; line 14), Wordsworth's 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' declares that even in 'the meanest of created things . . . / A life and

soul to every mode of being [are] / Inseparably link'd' (*LB* 231; lines 74, 78–9). Of the poet's various animal-related tropes, among the better known are in 'Tintern Abbey', whose speaker recalls running along the landscape 'like a roe' (*LB* 118; line 68), a simile suggestive both of identification and of difference, and in 'Resolution and Independence', its aged leech gatherer appearing as 'a Sea-beast crawl'd forth' (*PTV* 126; line 69). This cursory catalogue conveys some sense of the diversity of Wordsworth's animal depictions, from rhetorical figures to detailed descriptions, many of which point not just to the enigmatic status of animals but also to our relative means of knowing them and, vis-à-vis that knowledge, of knowing ourselves.

To take a well-known example, the elegiac 'There was a boy' from *Lyrical Ballads* (1800; also included in the 1805 *Prelude*) recalls a Lake District child's skilful bird-calling to unseen owls and his ensuing, occasionally sublime, perceptions of the environs. Specifically, the poem depicts human–animal interaction while at the same time raising questions about the status of such interspecies connection. Together, the boy and the owls produce 'a wild scene' of call and response along Windermere's lakeshore, with the birds responding and he again answering them (*LB* 140; line 15). Amid this imitative 'redoubl[ing]' of sound (line 15), one could not tell whose *hoo* was who(se), and the narrator's figurative chiasmus, crossing human 'hootings' and avian 'halloos' and 'screams', suggests this blurring of origins (lines 10, 14). Yet, for all that intermingled hooting, the owls retain their apparent distance and otherness, the poet's account withdrawing any clear sense of their 'immediacy even as he appears to offer it'.¹⁴

That distance was especially noticeable, we are told, when it 'chanced' that those birds' 'pauses of deep silence mock'd' the lad's imitative 'skill' (lines 16–17). Then, while he 'hung',

Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents, or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, receiv'd
Into the bosom of the steady lake. (lines 19–25)

The boy becomes dislocated in the midst of a visual 'scene' whose imagery of the 'uncertain heaven' reflects not inside but outside his passively receptive mind. And yet, although it may have been the owls' pauses that

instilled the scene's sublimity, what we know of this result is owed entirely to the narrator, calling to mind the Ancient Mariner's own post hoc (*ergo propter hoc*) speculations about his 'unawares' blessing of the water snakes. In fact, the narrator has himself at times stood entranced and notably '[m]ute' beside the boy's grave (line 32). Although initially drafted as autobiographical (see *LB* 379), the poem foregrounds this issue of cognitive access and, by so doing, highlights the interpretive distance both between the boy and the owls and between the narrative construction of human-animal interaction and whatever phenomenon occurred. In short, we come to discern the *teller* in this telling, whose mute acts have paid, and still pay, tribute to that child's animal pauses and to the avian sounds preceding them, even as the poet's tribute reproduces muteness in its postulations and inventions. Windermere's owls remain 'nowise reducible to a story', depicted as unpresentable save as unknown forces, with their own *being* left closed and silent.

Likewise, the first poem from the *Lyrical Ballads*' second volume focuses less upon the nature of an animal, in this case a deer, than upon our stories and interpretations of its meaning. 'Hart-Leap Well' describes a medieval knight's hunt in Yorkshire, culminating in the pursued stag's death in the last of three desperate leaps. Or so the knight, Sir Walter, deduced from examining the 'several marks which with his hoofs the beast / Had left imprinted on the verdant ground' (*LB* 135; lines 51–2). Sir Walter reasons from those 'marks' what 'was never seen by living eyes' including his own: that 'Three leaps ha[d] borne' the hart 'from this lofty brow, / Down to the very fountain where he lies' (lines 54–6). Given that feat, Walter decides to memorialize the leaps with, oddly enough, a pleasure-house to seduce 'coy' maids, an arbor and basin, and, to make the 'praises known' of that 'gallant brute', three pillars, 'each a rough-hewn stone, / And planted where th[ose] hoofs the turf have graz'd' (lines 65, 67–8). But since that time the ground has become strangely barren, the cause reckoned to be Walter's wrongful killing or memorializing of that deer.

'Hart-Leap Well' here enters the forum of animal rights, particularly concerning the morality of blood sport. The hunted hart's death or, as '[s]ome say', its 'murder' (line 137), has, for the narrator, two 'lesson[s]' to teach: that we should 'Never . . . blend our pleasure or our pride / With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels' (lines 179–80), and, recalling Coleridge's sea ballad, that the 'Being' of nature '[m]aintains a deep and reverential care' for all 'the quiet creatures whom he loves' (lines 165, 167–8). Much as in that sea tale, animal death in 'Hart-Leap Well' leads a man, in this case a visiting poet, to recognize the holiness or at least worthiness

of sentient life. But such conclusions are framed as those of three or more persons and their particular, rather peculiar vantages: of Walter's monumentalizing, self-centred epiphany, of the superstitious rustic whose history 'incorporates the speeches of several others' as well as his sentimental, 'hypothetical reconstruction of the [h]art's dying consciousness',¹⁵ and of a poet-narrator's metaphysical notions and subsequent rendering of the tale.

The poem depicts a speculative 'divide' where opinions do not converge but stand at a distance, a not-so '[s]mall difference' (line 162), between one interlocutor's superstitious localism and the other's universalizing quasi-religious theory, with little clarity in terms of what men should or shouldn't do, even concerning their feelings about Walter's actions. The narrator's moral conclusion certainly is not a call, like John Oswald's or Joseph Ritson's appeals, for non-violence.¹⁶ It is a call not to take 'pleasure' in the sorrows of an animal, or at least (the syntax is unclear) not to mix sorrow with pleasure or pride. What an animal's life or death means is left largely unresolved. We read the rehearsal of a tale *about* a hart, enlisted as etiological evidence to diagnose what ails a landscape within which the poem stages several men's different conclusions about 'Nature', 'sympathy divine', and miasma (lines 163–4). The ballad doesn't preach moral relativism so much as it engages us, then, in moral debate. We wrestle with interpretations, perhaps seeing that our perceptions and ideas are also tellings and that, Perkins argues, as humans we're not so different from Sir Walter in some of our attitudes and reckonings.¹⁷

Throughout Wordsworth's works 'the natural world and the person experiencing it are understood as quite separate and as inseparable'.¹⁸ Depicted in tales told by tellers, the poet's animals advance a challenge to the autonomous human and the objectified animal, in acts of representation 'whose complications we [too] readily ignore'.¹⁹ As with Constable's *Hay Wain*, where a spaniel attentively watches the horse-drawn wagon, Wordsworth's depictions of animals lead us to confront the matter of perspective: that perception is all, but all is not as it is or was perceived, let alone as it is told and retold. The poet's depicted creatures thereby potentially challenge our notions of seamless animal representation and, especially, of objective (Cartesian) knowledge. In other words, animals in Wordsworth question the *human* itself – 'Whence come ye? To what end . . . through my dark domain?' (*HG* 50; lines 231, 233).²⁰ Echoing the philosopher Jacques Derrida, Cary Wolfe argues that indeed if the field of animal studies is to become more 'than a mere thematics', simplistically focused, for instance, upon portrayals of animals, it must acknowledge and

examine precisely ‘the schema of the knowing subject and its anthropocentric underpinnings’.²¹ In Wordsworth’s tales and tellings, animals beckon as hauntingly unknowable objects of ‘what man has made’ them: leaping, shouting, singing and dying on the thresholds of understanding and, always, representation.²²

Notes

1. Jonathan Bate, *Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 186.
2. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 6–7.
3. Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (University of Toronto Press, 2002), 88.
4. Typical of Wordsworth’s use of the collective noun *animal* is his remembrance of boyish ‘glad animal movements all gone by’, in ‘Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey’ (*LB* 118; line 75); compare *1805 Prelude* Book 8, line 478 and *The Excursion*, Book 1, line 230.
5. Adam Portkay, *Wordsworth’s Ethics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 85; emphasis added.
6. Mary Midgley, ‘The Concept of Beastliness: Philosophy, Ethics and Animal Behaviour’, *Philosophy* 48 (1973), 118.
7. Carl Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae Per Regna Tria Naturae . . .*, 10th edn, 2 vols. (Stockholm: Laurentius Salvius, 1758), vol. 1.
8. Erasmus Darwin, *Zoönomia; or, The Laws of Organic Life*, 2 vols. (1794–6; New York: AMS Press, 1974), 1: 1.
9. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500–1800* (1983; Oxford University Press, 1996), 51.
10. Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern: World Society, 1815–1830* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 718–19.
11. Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755), 1: 314; cited in Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 179.
12. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, A New Edition* (1789, 1823; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 311, n. 1 to the 1823 edition.
13. Darwin, *Zoönomia*, 255.
14. Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 76.
15. Christine Kenyon-Jones, *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 155.
16. John Oswald, *The Cry of Nature* (1791); Joseph Ritson, *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food as a Moral Duty* (1802). Compare Humphrey Primatt, *A Dissertation on the Duty of Mercy and Sin of Cruelty to Brute Animals* (1776), and Thomas Young, *An Essay on Humanity to Animals* (1798).

17. David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003) 87.
18. Ralph Pite, 'Wordsworth and the Natural World', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 194.
19. Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature*, 68.
20. Compare Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, 99.
21. Cary Wolfe, 'Human, All Too Human: "Animal Studies" and the Humanities', *PMLA* 124 (2009), 568.
22. See *1805 Prelude* Book 2, lines 425–6: '... all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings, or beats the gladsome air ...'

CHAPTER 29

Philosophy

Stuart Allen

His friendship with the notoriously garrulous and erudite Coleridge has given critics carte blanche to align Wordsworth with virtually any philosophical influence they choose. For post-war Wordsworth criticism, the most important of these influences is Hegel, as mediated by M. H. Abrams, who observes that 'in general content and overall design' *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is 'a work notably parallel to Wordsworth's exactly contemporary poem on the growth of his own mind'.¹

Partly in an attempt to rescue the poet from his reduction to a verse mirror of the Romantic idealist zeitgeist, critics like Geoffrey Hartman and Paul de Man embraced the powerful anti-Hegelianism that started coming out of Paris in the late 1960s. Against Abrams's reading of Wordsworth's work as a humanist reconciliation of subject and object, de Man describes a poet who discloses that the self's 'analogical correspondence with nature no longer asserts itself . . . that the earth under our feet is not the stable base in which we can believe ourselves to be anchored'.²

In his high-Nietzschean late career, de Man produces a Wordsworth who finds that words are fundamentally privative: the more the poet attempts to represent his self in *The Prelude*, the more he reveals that language 'deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores'.³ Gone is the poet-sage who helped John Stuart Mill recover from a nervous breakdown. For all its brilliance and originality, de Man's reading of Wordsworth, like Abrams's, ultimately confines the poet to an already elaborated set of philosophical beliefs. Perhaps in a tacit admission of uneasiness with Wordsworth's apparent lack of discursive 'rigour', gone also is everything in the poetry that does not lend itself to de Man's thematics. As Thomas Greene notes, bent on establishing the poet's impeccable modernity (that is, his anticipation of *soixante-huitard* Nietzscheanism), de Man 'ignores the possibility Wordsworth opens of *incarnational* words'.⁴ Committed to his anti-humanist Wordsworth, de Man opts for blindness to the poet's reflective alternation between two linguistic models: language as 'organically of a

piece with thought and language [as] disjoined from thought'.⁵ It is not wholly an exaggeration to say that, by conceiving of poetry as the mere bearer of inert philosophical ornamentation, de Man's 'philosophical' criticism, no less than Abrams's, loses touch with the living impulse of thinking in Wordsworth's art.

Convinced that the fixation on Hegel in Abrams, de Man and others had grossly understated Wordsworth's more obvious, if less glamorous, philosophical – and political – origins, historicist critics turned to the British thinkers whose names actually appear in his writing. For James Chandler, Wordsworth is a disciple of Edmund Burke, his poetry a systematically Burkean effort to persuade himself 'that tradition has survived despite suspicions to the contrary'.⁶ Chris Jones, an equally significant historicist, turned to earlier figures in the Whig, 'moral sense', tradition to argue that Wordsworth 'echoed the efforts of philosophers such as Shaftesbury and Hume to describe the workings of the social passions . . . [and] to empower natural feeling as the basis of progressive civil society'.⁷ While Chandler sinks Wordsworth into Burke, Jones stresses that Wordsworth transforms the ideas he inherits and develops 'a far more extended idea of Sensibility than any other author' of the period.⁸

* * *

Shaftesbury was a major force behind the development of the 'Man of Feeling', popularized by Laurence Sterne's novels, in eighteenth-century Britain.⁹ Wordsworth and Coleridge, however, would have been exposed to the philosopher through the work of James Thomson and Mark Akenside, precursor poets belonging to 'the school of Shaftesbury'.¹⁰ According to Jones, Wordsworth demonstrates an awareness of Shaftesbury as early as 1794's *An Evening Walk*.¹¹ But it is the poetics of 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' of the Preface (*Prose* 1: 148) that most strikingly evoke Shaftesbury's views on the necessity of regulating those transports that threaten to annihilate the self. In 'Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author' (1710), Shaftesbury recommends that at the onset of enthusiasm the gentleman 'retire into some thick Wood, or rather take the Point of some high Hill', and urges his reader to recall occasions upon which he has 'address'd the Woods and Rocks in audible articulate Sounds, and seemingly expostulated with himself'.¹² By this method, 'how thorowly he carries on the Business of *Self-Dissection*. By virtue of this SOLILOQUY he becomes two distinct *Persons*. He is Pupil and Preceptor. He teaches, and he learns'. His unruly passions mollified, the gentleman is preserved 'in the same Mind, from one day to the next'. For Shaftesbury, then, harmonious feelings

stabilize, whereas ‘unnatural and vicious’ passions undermine the self. ‘[N]atural and kind Affection’ thus acts as a critique of its ‘dangerous’ other.¹³

Despite implicitly allocating to feeling a cognitive component, Shaftesbury’s promotion of the ‘polite’ feelings of his sex and class – embodied in the person of the Whig, civic humanist gentleman – diminishes the philosophical standing of his work on affect. Rather than search for truth, he remains tied to his political motivations. Some commentators have argued that by inviting ‘vulgar’ enthusiasm into his poetry in order to demonstrate his gentlemanly command over passion, Wordsworth is also philosophically compromised.¹⁴ This fails to take into account, however, the sheer complexity of the poet’s thinking on the role of feeling in verse.

In the Preface Wordsworth states that *Lyrical Ballads* ‘was published as an experiment . . . to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart’ (*Prose* 1: 118). Fitting pleasure strictly to metre, and placing it under keen observation, Wordsworth certainly looks Shaftesburean. But pleasure in the Preface is a far more peculiar phenomenon:

We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone . . . However painful may be the objects with which the Anatomist’s knowledge is connected, he feels that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge. (140)

Here, Wordsworth defines pleasure as that quality of attention which makes knowledge possible. To look at a thing, even with disgust, is to admit a fascination with it, or at least some attachment. For example, a cadaver might appal most people, but it draws the Anatomist’s eye, and its study provides him with the numerous rewards of intellectual life. Poetry, for Wordsworth, opens a portal to these otherwise inaccessible pleasures:

the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre . . . imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling, which will always be found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. (150)

Although this passage consents to Shaftesbury’s demands for the regulation of strong feeling, Wordsworth understands poetry not as a means to exorcise pain, but as a way to *temper* it. Rather than conjure pleasure from

pain, metre enables the reader to endure all feelings – including distressing ones – and makes of verse a guaranteed promise that feelings will become pleasurable emissaries of knowledge. Wordsworth thus justifies his claim that poetry is ‘the most philosophic of all writing: . . . its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion’ (139).

If Shaftesbury declares that there is a moral difference between feelings that threaten to subvert the self (bad, false, enthusiastic) and those that support the self (good, true, harmonious), Wordsworth insists that feelings escape rigid categorization, and that all affect contains a ‘truth-content’. Two poems from 1798’s *Lyrical Ballads* show how radically Wordsworth modifies Shaftesbury in his undogmatic and, consequently, truly philosophical art. In ‘Expostulation and Reply’, a Wordsworth surrogate is reprimanded by his friend for daydreaming instead of reading: ‘Up! Up! And drink the spirit breath’d / From dead men to their kind’ (*LB* 108; lines 7–8). The poet is quietly firm in his superficially harmonizing reply. Books are unnecessary, he argues, because Nature is a teacher:

Think you, mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking? (lines 25–8)

However, ending here, the exchange cannot pass as polite. Although the friend’s enthusiasm for learning borders on the belligerent, the poet’s theory of ‘wise passiveness’ silences his friend rather than makes peace with him.

‘The Tables Turned’ reverses the earlier difference between the interlocutors. This time, ‘Wordsworth’ cajoles his companion: ‘Up! up! My Friend, and quit your books, / Or surely you’ll grow double’ (lines 3–4). The once mild poet is now relentless:

Books! ’tis a dull and endless strife,
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music; on my life
There’s more of wisdom in it. (lines 9–12)

It is tempting to assume that the author of the poem would endorse this comment, but the trite rhyme of ‘linnet’ with ‘in it’ undercuts its gravitas. For all the apparent sincerity and animation of everything that follows, an awareness of Wordsworth’s interest in Shaftesbury galvanizes the poem’s accumulating irony. The description of the throstle as ‘no mean preacher’ (line 14) is too clichéd to be a lapse in artistry; and when the poet makes his

most hyperbolic pronouncement, the reader cannot help but grasp the drama the poem stages:

One impulse from a vernal wood
Can teach you more of man;
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can. (lines 21–4)

At once inspiring and over-inflated, this statement retroactively exposes the relationship between the speakers across the two poems as an infinitely shifting distribution of enthusiasm and regulation that is incomprehensible to Shaftesbury's tidy moral distinctions. To give blanket condemnation or praise to either intellect or the natural heart would amount to ungentlemanly zeal. Nevertheless, the poems do not, in the end, advocate polite compromise. 'The Tables Turned' images poetic harmony's attempt to regulate rationalist enthusiasm in 'Expostulation and Reply' as itself enthusiasm in disguise; yet, despite this, 'The Tables Turned' still maintains that regulation has value. The poems' demonstration that it is simultaneously necessary and impossible to assess the vices and virtues of feeling liberates affect to be fully *critical* in Wordsworth. Suspending any preordained – that is, complacent – judgments, Wordsworth pays attention to feeling, thereby rendering all affect precipitant of thought.

This perhaps overly neat construction of Wordsworth's 'Shaftesbureanism' might be vulnerable to Simon Jarvis's claim that the philosophical capacity of Wordsworth's work arises from 'the tension between the disenchanting attempt to look steadily at a subject, and the nostalgic and utopian wish for efficacious magic, the wish actually to change this world with poetic writing'.¹⁵ To support this argument, Jarvis turns to the beginning of *The Prelude*:

Then, last wish,
My last and favorite aspiration! then
I yearn towards some philosophic Song
Of Truth that cherishes our daily life . . .
(1805 *Prelude* Book 1, lines 229–32)

What Wordsworth *might* mean by 'philosophic Song' is

that a different kind of thinking happens in verse . . . it would be philosophic *song* precisely in so far as [it is] driven – by the felt need to give utterance to non-replicable singular experiences in the collectively and historically cognitive form of verse – to obstruct, displace or otherwise change the syntax and the lexicons currently available for the articulation of such experience. Driven to truth, that is, less by top-quality ratiocination than by attention to problems of poetic *making*.¹⁶

Jarvis explains what kind of philosophy Wordsworth does by way of a fine reading of the great ‘Ode’. He discusses the following lines, which appear to tell the story of the loss, with age, of joy:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy,
 But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy;
 The Youth, who daily farther from the East
 Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended;
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day. (PTV 273; lines 66–76)

Jarvis points out that ‘the expected completion of the gradual darkening which has begun when “Shades of the prison-house begin to close” does not occur. Instead light fades into light’.¹⁷ The phrase “common day” is the meeting point of bliss and disenchantment’, Jarvis continues: ‘Beneath the easiest reading, which assimilates such moments to the later personal-developmental narrative, is another one in which what they say, however strange, is listened to: that the earth itself has lost a glory or an enchantment which it once possessed’.¹⁸ Whether the light the boy ‘sees . . . in his joy’ really is the ‘celestial light’ Wordsworth evokes in line 4 is beside the point. What matters is that the boy *feels* his joy – as he would his hunger, fear or desire – as real, and that such a feeling (regardless of the reality of the object to which it corresponds) is felt, intensely, as beyond doubt. It is a mistake, Jarvis writes, ‘if we think of this as “only a feeling” – regardless of whether that is just what the ‘easiest’ path through the poem encourages. ‘Even as it tells a story about how bliss was given up’, he contends, ‘the poem sounds longing for bliss’.¹⁹

It is impossible to do justice to Jarvis’s intricate eighteen pages on the ‘Ode’ in so little space, but a brief examination of the revised 1832 version of ‘Simon Lee’ may clarify matters. The poem tells a similar story of disenchantment, but focuses on physical, not spiritual, decline. Once ‘A running Huntsman merry’, Simon Lee has outlived the men, dogs and horses he loved, and now dwells in ‘liveried poverty’ with his wife Ruth, too sick to properly husband his small parcel of land (LB 68, 69; lines 6, 28). With only a few months to live, and struggling to unearth a root, Simon Lee is helped by Wordsworth, who reports how he ‘struck, and with a single blow / The tangled root I severed’ (lines 85–6):

The tears into his eyes were brought,
 And thanks and praises seemed to run
 So fast out of his heart, I thought
 They never would have done.
 – I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
 With coldness still returning;
 Alas! the gratitude of men
 Hath oftener left me mourning. (lines 89–96)

This passage is dense with feeling – but Wordsworth has also affectively primed it on two earlier occasions. The first is when he notes that, despite Simon's decrepitude,

... still there's something in the world
 At which his heart rejoices;
 For when the chiming hounds are out,
 He dearly loves their voices! (lines 21–4)

The second instance is Wordsworth's famous address to the reader in which he 'kindly' suggests that anyone frustrated by this seemingly inconsequential story 'should . . . *think*' and 'Perhaps a tale you'll make it' (lines 70, 71, 72) – a tale, possibly, of how decent men like Simon Lee are becoming increasingly rare in this cold world. This disenchanting conclusion, however, although anticipated and in some ways satisfying, has less the soft cadence of wisdom than the repeated thump of bitterness ('*unkind, kind deeds*'). The reader becomes more suspicious upon her realization that the basis of Wordsworth's complaint is that people sometimes neglect to make exact exchanges – a kindness for kindness, in this case. That such mean moral accounting – where the slightest deviation from parity proves its grim rule – should overshadow the first four lines of the final stanza adds insult to Simon Lee's perceived injury. Wordsworth addresses his companion with bluff familiarity: "You're overtasked, good Simon Lee, / Give me your tool," to him I said' (lines 81–2). The old man responds with tears, thanks and *praises*!, laying bare a heart that even at his late stage of life is far from empty and is in fact perfectly capable of overflowing endlessly with exorbitant feeling. The sceptical note Wordsworth strikes with 'Thanks and praises *seemed* to run' suggests his refusal – despite what his middle-class discomfort must tell him – to accept the pleasure he is seeing and his attempt to remove himself from what he must realize is happening. After all, what are the aesthetics of geriatric emotional display? How much more agreeable is it to witness the quiet and dignified sorrow of the elderly than their raucous joy?

Finally, it is Wordsworth's embarrassment that gives the moralizing conclusion of the poem a false ring, thereby saving it from becoming a mere poetic illustration of a complacent dogma. The world-weary and 'philosophic' tale of disenchantment that Wordsworth tries to pin on his encounter with Simon Lee is disrupted by the highly specific class anxiety that the poem captures. Made painfully aware, by a sick and elderly man's prolific thanks, of the condescending attitude he had assumed, the young and presumably healthy poet falls back on 'philosophy' to anaesthetize his moral shame. It is in moments like this that Wordsworth's poetry of feeling comes philosophically alive. To paraphrase Jarvis, even as the poem attempts to confirm its belief in human suffering and love's disappearance from the world, Simon Lee pours out so much happiness that Wordsworth has to renew his thinking.

Notes

1. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 236.
2. Paul de Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', *Diacritics* 7 (4) (1987), 13.
3. Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *Modern Language Notes* 94 (5) (1979), 930.
4. Thomas Greene, *Poetry, Signs and Magic* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 25.
5. *Ibid.*
6. James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), 198.
7. Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), vii.
8. *Ibid.*, 208.
9. For Shaftesbury's extraordinary role in the direction taken by eighteenth-century British and Continental aesthetics, see Philip Ayres's introduction to Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 2 vols., ed. Philip Ayres (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), I: 27.
10. See Michael Meehan, *Liberty and Poetics in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 52–63.
11. Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, 197.
12. Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, I: 88; 1.95. The phrase 'articulate sounds' appears in *The Prelude* Book 5, line 94 and *Home at Grasmere* (Ms. D), line 343, as well as in Coleridge's 1798 'The Nightingale', line 92.
13. Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, I: 87, 100, 232.
14. See Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 47, and John Mee, *Romanticism*,

Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period (Oxford University Press, 2003), 256.

15. Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 25.
16. *Ibid.*, 4.
17. *Ibid.*, 205.
18. *Ibid.*, 202.
19. *Ibid.*, 203, 213.

*Religion**Jonathan Roberts*

The relationship between Wordsworth's poetry and religion is a paradoxical one: Wordsworth was a Christian – an Anglican – by upbringing, education, and profession, and his poetry resonates with biblical echoes, yet it offers little explicit discussion of Christianity itself. In the early poetry there is scant, if any, mention of central Christian concepts such as the forgiveness of sins, incarnation, crucifixion, or resurrection – even Jesus himself is not mentioned until 1810.¹ This is why, as Simon Bainbridge puts it, 'Wordsworth's qualification for the title of "Christian poet" has occupied critics over the past two centuries'.²

So where can religion be found in Wordsworth's work? Short poems with explicitly religious images are scarce in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800): St Herbert – a hermit – kneels before his crucifix in one of the 'Inscription' poems, and 'all the congregation sing / A Christian psalm' at the end of 'Ruth', but there is no real work with religion in these stanzas.³ 'Ruth' and 'Michael' have distant biblical echoes, the former through the Hebrew book of that name, the latter through affinities with the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). Amongst Wordsworth's shorter works it is easier to find sustained religious imagery in the later collection *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), such as this well-known sonnet of 1802:

It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free;
 The holy time is quiet as a Nun
 Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
 Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
 The gentleness of heaven is on the Sea:
 Listen! the mighty Being is awake
 And doth with his eternal motion make
 A sound like thunder – everlastingly.
 Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
 If thou appear'st untouch'd by solemn thought,
 Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
 Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;

And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
 God being with thee when we know it not. (PTV 150–1)

The background to the poem is this: in 1791–2 during a visit to France, Wordsworth conceived a child (Caroline) with a French woman, Annette Vallon. Wordsworth left France before the child was born, war intervened, and he was unable to return for a decade. In 1802 he and his sister Dorothy travelled to Calais for a month to meet Annette and Caroline prior to Wordsworth's marriage to Mary Hutchinson. The sonnet presents the poet with his young daughter at sunset on the beach at Calais. In terms of imagery, vocabulary and biblical reference this is ostensibly one of the more 'religious' poems in his early collections: the evening is described as a 'holy time', for example, likened to a 'Nun / Breathless with adoration', while the 'gentleness of heaven' 'on the Sea' perhaps echoes 'the Spirit of God mov[ing] upon the face of the waters' in the opening lines of the Bible (Genesis 1:2).⁴ On a first reading, one might assume that the 'mighty Being' in 'eternal motion' making a 'sound like thunder' is also God. But no, this is actually the sea, 'awake' now, because (unlike God) asleep at other times. More puzzling however is the depiction of Wordsworth's 'dear Girl' Caroline, whom he presents as lying in 'Abraham's bosom' all the year. This is an image drawn from Luke 16:19–31,⁵ the parable in which Lazarus the beggar dies and is comforted in Abraham's bosom, while far below amid the flames of hell, Dives the rich man begs for water. It is an odd image given the context, so why use it? Perhaps Wordsworth seeks to assuage his own guilt over his paternal absence by drawing on the image of the all-comforting father in whose bosom Caroline is held 'all the year'. Even so, the allusion makes no clear religious sense here, and the poem, reciprocally, does little to illuminate the Lazarus story. The sonnet may be a successful poetic expression of paternal guilt, conflicted emotions, and perhaps even a repressed idea that Wordsworth's foreign daughter might have been safer in the grave, but there is little internal coherence to its religious imagery. A chalice, lectern, crucifix and altar do not of themselves make a religion, and although this sonnet has religious trappings, its elements are immiscible – they will not coalesce – and in consequence the poem has no meaningful religious life. As I will argue in more detail below, it is the reciprocal interaction ('linking', in Wordsworth's phrase) of such elements that constitutes the religious life of Wordsworth's poetry.

One example of the more meaningful integration of such elements can be found in a sonnet written about three months previously. It is evening

perhaps, or night, and we are to imagine Wordsworth standing in a pleasant meadow, looking out over the sea at the moon:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
 Little we see in nature that is ours;
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
 This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
 The Winds that will be howling at all hours
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
 For this, for every thing, we are out of tune;
 It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus coming from the sea;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn. (PTV 150)

What goes on here? The sonnet offers some conventional religious sentiments: an apostrophe to God, a lament over our corporate worldliness ('Getting and spending'), and a yearning for a vision that would lift the poet (and by extension us, his readers) out of this 'forlorn' materialism. The poem, like the sonnet discussed earlier, also contains some unexpected imagery. Perhaps thinking forward to his imminent trip to France to meet the child he has never seen, Wordsworth suffuses his sonnet with metaphors of infancy and nursing: the sea 'bares her bosom' to the moon; the pagan is 'suckled'; and the winds that will be 'howling at all hours' now seem comforted ('up-gathered' like 'sleeping flowers'). These images of maternal care have distant, mythic, paternal counterparts in God, Proteus and Triton. In the aforementioned poem, Abraham functioned as a surrogate father-figure, but in this poem it is as if Wordsworth exchanges this paternal viewpoint for an imaginative engagement with his daughter's perspective, longing for a glimpse of the father from over the sea who will bring a spiritual fullness to her life. Whether conscious on Wordsworth's part or not, these resonances (unlike those of the previous sonnet) strengthen and consolidate the religious element of the poem, offering earlier ages (whether of infancy or paganism) as an imaginative space outside the universal getting and spending that the poem deplors. While 'It is a beauteous Evening' sought compensation for Wordsworth's disappointment that Caroline appears 'untouched by solemn thought', 'The world is too much with us', by contrast, does not externalize or project the poet's own sense of loss on to another but instead makes it the source of personal reflection. The

materialism that the poem bemoans is thereby presented not as an ideological error but as a deeply felt and inextricably linked concatenation of losses: the loss of feeling ('We have given our hearts away'); of relationship to the natural world ('Little we see in nature that is ours'); and of creative agency ('we lay waste our powers'). From a religious perspective, the sonnet addresses these losses through an unconventional suggestion, as Wordsworth argues that it would be better to be a spiritually in-tune pagan (albeit 'suckled in a creed outworn') than to be a spiritually out-of-touch Christian. The sentiment is characteristically Wordsworthian: 'religion' is meaningful just to the extent that it corresponds to the emotional and intellectual experiences of individual and corporate life; its truth is proved, in Keats's phrase, upon our pulses.

To make fuller sense of this religious perspective, it is helpful at this point to turn back to the *Lyrical Ballads* in order to consider some of the sorts of statements of faith that are made there. The most famous of these are of course found in 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' (*LB* 116–20), but those lines have been so widely discussed that I have chosen here to look at three different, shorter examples instead. First, a lyric in which Wordsworth depicts a moment in a sequestered grove of withered foliage as hailstones pelt the dead leaves making them jump and spring. After describing this phenomenon, Wordsworth concludes his poem with this apostrophe:

Oh! grant me Heaven a heart at ease
That I may never cease to find,
Even in appearances like these
Enough to nourish and to stir my mind!

('A whirl-blast from behind the hill', *LB* 189; lines 24–7)

Wordsworth's prayer to Heaven for a heart 'at ease', which will remain open to the nourishment of the natural world, is a sentiment found throughout the collection in poems including 'The Tables Turned', which similarly endorses 'a heart / That watches and receives' (*LB* 109; lines 31–2). The linking of 'heart' and 'mind' is also found in 'Lines Written in Early Spring', a poem in which Wordsworth recounts further vernal lounging, this time in a grove amid primrose tufts, budding twigs and periwinkles. While Wordsworth invoked 'Heaven' in the previous poem, it is the 'human soul' that he appeals to in these stanzas:

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did nature link
 The human soul that through me ran;
 And much it griev'd my heart to think
 What man has made of man. (LB 76; lines 1–8)

This 'link' between souls and hearts is another common theme in *Lyrical Ballads*, binding us together through the understanding that 'we have all of us one human heart' ('The Old Cumberland Beggar. A Description', LB 233; line 146).

'Lines Written at a small distance from my House' is an extempore effusion celebrating the arrival of early spring, as Wordsworth invites Dorothy to join him outdoors for a day of idleness as hearts and souls are again linked by nature:

One moment now may give us more
 Than fifty years of reason;
 Our minds shall drink at every pore
 The spirit of the season.

Some silent laws our hearts may make,
 Which they shall long obey;
 We for the year to come may take
 Our temper from to-day.

And from the blessed power that rolls
 About, below, above;
 We'll frame the measure of our souls,
 They shall be tuned to love. (LB 64; lines 25–36)

Here the 'blessed power that rolls about' already anticipates the description in 'Tintern Abbey' of a 'motion and . . . spirit, that impels . . . And rolls through all things' (lines 101–3). This power, Wordsworth claims here, is one of love, and one that teaches – as does religious revelation – more than 'reason'. It is also evident that the religious insights of these poems emanate from good-natured lounging, a life practice that has affinities with the meditative practices common to numerous religious traditions. This is important because it clarifies that religion here is not merely noetic or transcendent but grounded in the body, in repeated experience, in the feelings and 'the motion of our human blood' ('Tintern Abbey', line 45).

Wordsworth's poetry draws attention to its own religious character through his choice of vocabulary and metaphor, and at a broader level through the Judeo-Christian structure of his thought. Yet Wordsworth is generally not concerned with religion at the level of denomination, church

or dogma in these early poems. The consequently open character of his early religious poetry has undoubtedly contributed to its wide appeal, and has allowed readers to link it fruitfully to different religious traditions. On occasion, this has led to the 'religious' Wordsworth being depicted as a Westmorland recluse delivering private mystical insights from a rural solitude. Yet this is a misleading image, as his poetry is unequivocally relational: *Lyrical Ballads* shares with *The Prelude* a deep sense that attentive empathetic relationships to the natural world are inseparable from attentive empathetic relationships to other people. First-person statements of faith such as the poems quoted above describe the narrator's solidarity of being with the natural world, and are continuous with the many poems in the collection depicting the narrator's solidarity of being with the dispossessed and marginalized (among them, 'The Female Vagrant', 'The Last of the Flock' and 'Old Man Travelling'). The antithesis of this solidarity is found in the numerous ballads depicting wilful and often wealthy men who are ready to mix their pleasures with the suffering of other creatures or people, or who simply show a disregard for nature – individuals such as 'the master' of 'The Female Vagrant', Harry Gill, Andrew Jones, the narrator of 'The Thorn', Stephen Hill, Sir Walter of 'Hart-Leap Well', Sir William of 'Lines Written with a Slate pencil', and Ruth's 'Youth of green-Savannas'.

What, then, is 'religion' in Wordsworth's poetry? I would suggest that it is a relational mode of understanding in which natural, moral, social, political and other aspects of life are grasped not as separate phenomena, but as different aspects of a continuum of being. The list here could be extended indefinitely because it is not that religion synthesizes previously unrelated phenomena, but rather that it constitutes a rediscovery or revelation of the existing continuities of being that have, according to Wordsworth, come to appear disconnected through egotism, selfhood, the corruptions of culture and the taxonomical analysis of experience that Wordsworth calls 'reason' or 'judgment'. On occasion, Wordsworth presents the erosion of this continuity in the context of an individual's life through his myth of childhood and growth: we are born into a world of unity ('trailing clouds of glory'), but that unity falls away as we age ('Shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing Boy'), until we find ourselves as adults in a fragmented world of seemingly irreconcilable antagonisms (*PTV* 273; 'Ode', lines 64, 67–8). The challenge of the poetry, perhaps particularly in an academic context, lies in accepting that this continuum is not just about the intellectual integration of concepts (as one might find in philosophy or science), but also the integration of our

emotional, bodily, environmental and interpersonal lives. Wordsworth's poetry asks us not only to think, but also to feel and to relate.

It is at this point that the connection between this model of religious understanding and the nature of poetry itself can be better seen. The affinity of poetry to religion is that poetry provides a linguistic means whereby the continuity of the different aspects of being can be adequately expressed through their unification in an artistic whole. Poetry fuses and thereby brings life back to aspects of being that have been split apart. The elements recombine as do notes in a melody, or colours on a canvas, making new wholes, and in encountering them we are changed in some way, however small; we are remade by the experience. The encounter may be likened to Catherine Earnshaw's fittingly Eucharistic metaphor in *Wuthering Heights*: 'I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind.'⁶

One way to tackle the question of Wordsworth and religion is to attempt to net the subject with terms such as 'pantheism' (the doctrine that 'God is everything and everything is God' (*OED* s.v. 'pantheism')) or 'Anglicanism'. This sort of taxonomic assessment is essential to understanding Wordsworth's doctrinal beliefs as well as his historical and cultural situation. Yet it is also important to bear in mind that poetry is not rhyming dogma, and Wordsworth's importance is as a poet, not as a theologian. His verse does not invite us to engage as disinterested observers, nor to displace the psychic and somatic experiences it offers us with a rationalized conceptual understanding of a kind that his writing militates against. We are asked to engage with our own selves, with others and with the world, not in terms of rational generalities, but in the felt specificities of locale and personhood. Hence Wordsworth, in his letter of 14 January 1801, directly praises the politician Charles James Fox for these very qualities, for having an open heart and an ability to see humans as individuals rather than as a faceless mass (*EY* 313–14).

Wordsworth's religion – the felt continuity between personal identity, the natural world and fellow human beings – is not a cultural relic. It is a valuable vantage point on a modern world picture of overpopulation and environmental apocalypse in which human and 'natural' sympathies are pushed apart, and reason appears as the sole beacon of hope. His poetry offers no assessment of the truth or otherwise of such matters, but it does offer the means to explore how our feelings about such concepts are interrelated. To see how, we need look no further than our own popular representations of nature today. In *The Prelude*, 'love of nature'

leads to the 'love of mankind' (as the title to Book 8 has it), but in the modern world, love of nature often leads instead to the loathing of mankind. The retributive apocalypticism of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis is one example of this, but other examples may be found even closer to home. Do our feelings of awe when watching a David Attenborough documentary, for example, unfold into a deep solidarity with the modern (and perhaps faraway) counterparts of Wordsworth's dispossessed: a blind beggar, a leech gatherer, a discharged soldier, a forsaken Indian woman or an idiot boy? Or do they, as for Attenborough himself, more easily unfold into a profound dismay at the faceless plague of humans destroying the planet?⁷

The religion of Wordsworth's poetry cannot be grasped by separating it out from the verse itself, because the life of that religion is embodied in the sense and feelings of the poetry. But it can be grasped by attending to the sorts of questions that the poems generate in us: whether we seek to deepen our experience of the material world through reflective idleness – or through getting and spending; whether we seek answers to existential questions through reason alone – or through quiet attention to our feelings; whether our understanding of religion (whether for or against it) amounts to intellectual assent to a list of propositions – or to a profound sense of solidarity with the individual lives of our fellow creatures.

Notes

1. See 'In due observance of an ancient rite' in *SP* 69–70.
2. Simon Bainbridge, 'Wordsworth and Coleridge', in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. Andrew Hass et al. (Oxford University Press, 2009), 474.
3. 'Inscription for the Spot where the Hermitage stood on St Herbert's Island, Derwent-water', *LB* 179; lines 11–12; 'Ruth', *LB* 200; lines 227–8.
4. All biblical quotations are from the Authorized Version.
5. This (Luke 16:22) is the only occurrence of the phrase in the Bible. The 'Temple's inner shrine' corresponds to the holy of holies ('Most Holy Place' in the Authorized Version), where the Ark of the Covenant was housed.
6. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, new edn, ed. Ian Jack (Oxford University Press, 2009), 70.
7. For Attenborough, humans 'are a plague on the Earth' (*Telegraph*, 22 January 2013, www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthnews/9815862/Humans-are-plague-on-Earth-Attenborough.html).

CHAPTER 3 I

The senses

Noel Jackson

Few poets before or since Wordsworth have made sensation and the bodily senses more central to their poetic theory and practice. Wordsworth's famous 'experiment' in literary language, as articulated at the outset of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, is conceived as a venture to impart pleasure 'by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation' (*LB* 741). From the beginning of this programmatic document, Wordsworth makes the representation and/or evocation of sense experience central to his poetic project in at least three related ways. He asserts, first, that the poetry concerns itself with particularly elevated expressions of passion or feeling ('vivid sensation'), either on the part of the lyric speaker or of the characters depicted, or both. Second, this experiment in poetic representation is principally designed to produce pleasure; as Lionel Trilling observed years ago, Wordsworth's commitment to what he calls the 'grand elementary principle of pleasure' (*LB* 752) and to the centrality of pleasure to poetry is virtually unprecedented in literary history.¹ Finally, Wordsworth designates poetic meter as a privileged medium for the communication of vivid sensation, either raising passion or lowering it as required for the poet's specific purposes.

With such statements, Wordsworth establishes the dependence of poetry, as much as the poet, on the senses, and on the 'elementary feelings' that follow from them (*LB* 743). In some of the most characteristically Wordsworthian lyrics – 'The Solitary Reaper' or 'I wandered lonely as a Cloud', for instance – the physical and cognitive activity of sensing takes centre stage, to become the focus of representation as much almost as the perceived object itself. Seemingly simple impressions of seeing or hearing reverberate in the speaker's mind long after its passing: 'The music in my heart I bore, / Long after it was heard no more' ('The Solitary Reaper', *PTV* 185; lines 31–2). The senses are thus directly connected to poetic inspiration, and serve as vehicles of self-expression; in Wordsworth's famous formula, 'Poetry . . . takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity' (*LB*

756), which in representing also recreates the 'powerful feelings' that lay at its source. But Wordsworth makes it clear too that both poet and poetry are dependent on a generalized 'atmosphere' of feeling, and on sensations that may be singular in nature but are attached to no determinate subject position. Of the poet, Wordsworth writes: 'though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favorite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings' (*LB* 753). This 'atmosphere' belongs to no single person, or belongs to all: '... this whole Vale, / Home of untutored Shepherds as it is, / Swarms with sensation' (*HG* 78; lines 664–6). The poet endowed, as Wordsworth asserts in the Preface, with a greater than usual proportion of 'organic sensibility' (*LB* 745) is the one who detects this atmosphere most keenly and is most responsive to changes within it.

Wordsworth's conception of poetry as an art of sensation brings that art into conversation with the contemporary sciences of the senses, the science of physiology principal among them. Although Wordsworth is remembered for having famously decried the scientific rationalist as one who 'murder[s] to dissect' ('The Tables Turned', *LB* 109; line 28), he was in fact deeply invested in the scientific topics and debates of the day. The Wordsworths were acquainted with several leading scientific figures, including Humphry Davy and Thomas Beddoes. David Hartley's neuro-physiological account of mind has long been recognized as a durable influence in Wordsworth's work. More recently, literary historians have perceived links between Wordsworth's poetic theory and practice and a number of contemporary physiologists and medical theorists, including Erasmus Darwin, physician, poet and figurehead of the Midlands Enlightenment; William Cullen, one of the leading figures of the prestigious Edinburgh medical school; and the Scottish physician John Brown, the controversial and influential opponent of Scottish medical orthodoxy. In early 1798, Wordsworth wrote to the publisher Joseph Cottle to request a copy of Darwin's '*Zoönomia by the first carrier*', citing 'very particular reasons for doing' so (*EY* 199). The poem 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', which Wordsworth describes in the 1798 'Advertisement' to *Lyrical Ballads* as based on 'well-authenticated fact' (*LB* 739), was almost certainly drawn from a medical anecdote included in Darwin's influential book.

Wordsworth's poetic theory and practice is closely informed by these contemporary medical contexts, and more generally by a deep vein of empiricist thought that had flourished in Great Britain from the late seventeenth century onwards. Of Romantic poets, perhaps only Keats insists more strongly on the power of the bodily senses to do the work

otherwise charged to forms of abstract ratiocination. In 'Expostulation and Reply', for instance, the poet addresses an interlocutor 'who was somewhat unreasonably attached to modern books of moral philosophy' (*LB* 355–6):

The eye it cannot chuse but see,
 We cannot bid the ear be still;
 Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
 Against, or with our will. (*LB* 108; lines 17–20)

In the jocular debate that the poet conducts with his friend, the ceaselessness of bodily feeling is taken as an argument against the necessity of book learning. Wordsworth's preference for truths immediately and vividly disclosed by the body and its senses informs his critique of abstract systems of moral philosophy (see the 'Essay on Morals', *Prose*, 1: 103–4) and of poetic personification in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

As committed as Wordsworth obviously is to the primacy of the senses, the poet's powerful apprehension of the limitations of 'mere' bodily experience is equally notable. Wordsworth and Coleridge both write of the 'despotic' character of the eye (*1805 Prelude* Book II, line 174; *BL* II: 107); the suspicion that Wordsworth bears towards the conventionally most privileged of the senses applies, albeit to a lesser degree, to all of them, at least so far as they are capable of achieving 'dominion' over the mind (*1805 Prelude* Book II, line 176). The poet is similarly critical of literary genres, notably that of Gothic fiction, which in relying for their considerable popularity on the production of violent readerly effects seem to pander to what Wordsworth unsparingly refers to a 'degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation' (*LB* 747). Wordsworth's great poetic narratives of intellectual and imaginative development, *The Prelude* and 'Tintern Abbey' especially, associate maturation with an access of visionary power accompanied by the suspension or momentary dimming of the physical senses. As William Empson demonstrated, 'sense' is an extraordinarily polyvalent term in Wordsworth's poetry, signifying either a primitive excitement of the physical senses or the highest intellectual exercise, or often both at the same time.² Wordsworth's poetry frequently expresses considerable ambivalence as to whether vivid sense experiences are valuable in themselves or only valuable insofar as they serve as a prompt or foundation to thoughts of a higher order.

These equivocations may not ultimately be hedges against unbridled materialism (and the associated taint of immorality or irreligion) so much as reflections of the indeterminate status of aesthetic experience as at once physical and cognitive in its origin. In contrast to 'sense', 'sensation' in

Wordsworth generally refers to experiences that combine the intellectual and bodily affection. Proceeding from the 'feeling intellect' (1805 *Prelude* Book 13, line 205), they count among that class of experiences that a later generation than Wordsworth's will call 'aesthetic'. Aesthetics, the branch of philosophical enquiry concerned with the nature of the beautiful and of art, took its name in eighteenth-century German philosophy from the Greek term for sense-perception; from its inception this field was concerned with forms of physical and psychological response. In the first of his influential *Spectator* essays on the subject, Joseph Addison situated 'the pleasures of the imagination' in an intermediary zone between sensations and ideas. In the same way that the bodily senses are a necessary but not sufficient condition of aesthetic perception, so aesthetic perceptions belong to the class of experience that the poet calls '[t]hose hallowed and pure motions of the sense / Which seem in their simplicity to own / An intellectual charm' (1799 *Prelude* Part 1, lines 383–5). 'Poetry, the history or science of feelings', as Wordsworth defines it in his 1800 note to 'The Thorn' (*LB* 351), is the paradigmatic aesthetic form of Romanticism in furnishing at once an effusion of powerful feeling and a form of sophisticated reflection on it.

Wordsworth understands the two principal categories of aesthetic response, the beautiful and the sublime, as modes of affect above all. They are states alike producing embodied response and catering to 'the grand elementary principle of pleasure' in human beings. The formative power of these experiences is the central subject of the poem that Wordsworth consistently refers to as 'the Poem on my own life' (e.g. *EY* 447), whose purpose is to trace

How Nature by extrinsic passion first
 Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand
 And made me love them . . . (1805 *Prelude* Book 1, lines 572–4)

As aesthetic experience is irreducibly subjective, the poet who wishes to treat these themes risks charges of egotism, even solipsism; this is a risk that Wordsworth seems actively to court in describing beautiful and sublime forms as 'peopling' the mind. In a letter to his friend George Beaumont, Wordsworth comments on the poem that it is 'a thing unprecedented in Literary history that a man should talk so much about himself'. The full-length *Prelude* was conceived from the beginning as an exercise in which, as the poet writes to Beaumont, 'I had nothing to do but describe what I had felt and thought' (*EY* 586). Both in letters and in the first book of the poem, Wordsworth records how he turned to autobiography as relief from the necessity of pursuing any more ambitious poetic task. However simple and

confined in its purpose, the task touches on some of the most intractable problems of representation. Every reader of *The Prelude* knows how insistently that poem, especially in its early books, questions the possibility of imaginatively reconstructing the past: 'How shall I trace the history, where seek / The origin of what I then have felt?' (1799 *Prelude* Part 2, lines 395–6).

Wordsworth responds to this challenge by mapping various forms of cognitive, psychic and historical experience on to the twin aesthetic categories of the beautiful and sublime. In Book 1 of *The Prelude* he writes: 'Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up / Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear' (1805 *Prelude* Book 1, lines 306–7). With this account, and in much of the poem to follow, Wordsworth adapts the narrative of his life to the twin aesthetic categories, and thus too to an eighteenth-century tradition of aesthetic thought in Britain including work by Joseph Addison, Mark Akenside, Edmund Burke and Archibald Alison, among many others. Beauty and sublimity are the agents of the poet's maturation, nurturing the young poet and cultivating his imagination from an early age. The poet ascribes his imaginative maturation 'to early intercourse, / In presence of sublime and lovely Forms, / With the adverse principles of pain and joy' (1805 *Prelude* Book 13, lines 143–7). Wordsworth expands on the opposing character of these 'adverse principles' in a manuscript essay on the sublime and beautiful, meant to be appended to *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes*. The beautiful and the sublime are 'sensations . . . not only different from, but opposite to, each other' which, while they may co-exist in the same object, may never co-exist simultaneously (*Prose* 11: 349). The poet insists that disparate and even conflicting sensations are capable of finding a place in the mature mind of the adult; but the agency that thus 'reconciles / Discordant elements' is necessarily obscure (1805 *Prelude* Book 1, lines 354–5).

Sublime experiences impress the developing poet with a sense of awe and majesty latent in the material world, and (by extension) in the mind that perceives it. Wordsworth's prose notes on the sublime emphasize the singleness of the sensation associated with the experience: 'whatever suspends the comparing power of the mind & possesses it with a feeling or image of intense unity, without a conscious contemplation of parts, has produced that state of the mind which is the consummation of the sublime' (*Prose* 11: 353–4). The famous boat-stealing episode of Book 1 is paradigmatic in its presentation of vivid sense experience as possessing the mind entirely, leaving the poet with 'a dim and undetermined sense / Of unknown modes of being' (1805 *Prelude* Book 1, lines 420–1). As in the other passages explicitly conceived as sublime episodes of the 1805 *Prelude* (the Simplon Pass episode of Book 6, the ascent of Mount Snowdon in the

culminating Book 13), the grandeur of external objects stirs the mind to intimations of greatness with a force that seems to owe its existence to something beyond the physical senses. What Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey', the other great poem of retrospection, calls a 'sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused' (*LB* 118–19; lines 96–7) involves the cancellation of senses as much as their fulfilment.

The attainment of such poise (or indetermination) between the intense gratification of the senses and the pleasure of their transcendence depends on sublime objects not pressing too near. Like many aesthetic thinkers of the long eighteenth century, Wordsworth maintained that the sense of majesty and grandeur associated with the sublime could not tilt too far into fear lest the mind be overcome: 'no species of Power that was absolute over the mind could beget a sublime sensation' (*Prose* 11: 355). Wordsworth finds an exemplary instance of power overwhelming the possibility of aesthetic sensibility in the events of the French Revolution. Nor was he alone in doing so: as historians have demonstrated, Great Britain's 'culture of sensibility' comes under suspicion in the 1790s as too closely identified with the excesses of the revolutionary mob.³ The years of the revolution and the Terror are for Wordsworth characterized by an excess of sensory stimulation, a 'transport of the outward sense' (*1805 Prelude* Book 11, line 188), marked at once by the domination of the eye and the impossibility of touch: 'The soil of common life was at that time / Too hot to tread upon' (*1805 Prelude* Book 9, lines 169–70). At a time in which the senses were engaged to excess and 'even thinking minds / Forgot at seasons whence they had their being' (*1805 Prelude* Book 10, lines 346–7), the challenge for the developing poet is to retain the 'organic sensibility' essential to poetry without yielding either to crippling fear and anxiety or to idle hedonism.

Of the two major categories of aesthetic response, the sublime has received much of the attention in modern Wordsworth scholarship. Wordsworth's investment in the beautiful and in the pleasurable affects associated with beauty has only recently emerged as a topic of sustained critical analysis. Critics have attended to the Wordsworthian sublime as the apotheosis of imagination and privileged site of authorial self-fashioning; as a figure for the occlusion of historical context, symptomatic of the poet's political quietism and marking a corresponding turn to (and possibly deluded faith in) the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the individual; and in relation to the challenges of representing traumatic experiences that are fundamentally unrepresentable, resisting formal or narrative containment. Wordsworth himself grants temporal priority to the sublime: in cases 'where

the beautiful & the sublime co-exist in the same object, the sublime always precedes the beautiful in making us conscious of its presence' (*Prose* II: 350).

Lacking the dramatic content of sublime experiences, the beautiful is in Wordsworth also less capable of being described as a single punctual event in time. The experience of the sublime is dependent on the effect of unity; sublime experiences are characterized by the strong single impression that they make. In contrast, as Wordsworth notes in the essay on the sublime and beautiful, 'The primary element in the sense of beauty is a distinct perception of parts' (*Prose* II: 349n). Accordingly, Wordsworth describes the experience of beauty as having an indeterminate location in time and an ambiguously eventful status. A representative passage from Book I of *The Prelude*, following on from the sublime account of boat-stealing and representing a clear counterpart to this episode, describes how the young poet 'held unconscious intercourse / With the eternal Beauty' (1805 *Prelude* Book I, lines 590–1):

The Sands of Westmoreland, the Creeks and Bays
Of Cumbria's rocky limits, they can tell
How when the Sea threw off his evening shade
And to the Shepherd's hut beneath the crags
Did send sweet notice of the rising moon,
How I have stood to fancies such as these,
Engrafted in the tenderness of thought,
A stranger, linking with the spectacle
No conscious memory of a kindred sight,
And bringing with me no peculiar sense
Of quietness or peace, yet have I stood,
Even while mine eye has mov'd o'er three long leagues
Of shining water, gathering, as it seem'd,
Through every hair-breadth of that field of light,
New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers. (lines 595–609)

The sands, creeks, and bays 'can tell' of the speaker's presence among them. But this act of imagined ventriloquism does not take place in the manner of the elegiac poet who makes the hills and groves speak in mournful tones. Instead, experiences of the beautiful impress on the poet an apprehension of the sufficiency of the natural world to form the mind without any apparent exertion on the speaker's part. Wordsworth's use of the present perfect tense communicates something of the ongoingness of such experiences, which seem to be issued from no distinct temporal location, having no apparent neither beginning or end. Yet Wordsworth asserts that sensations of the beautiful are more essential to the mind's 'daily well-being' than those of the

sublime; the mind depends more on the 'love & gentleness which accompany the one, than upon the exaltation or awe which are created by the other' (*Prose* II: 349). Experiences of elementary pleasure make the poet what he is, though how exactly he is changed by such experiences remains (deliberately) indistinct. The beautiful is no more easily assimilated to a developmental narrative than are experiences of the sublime; it may indeed be less so. Yet Wordsworth's poetry repeatedly attests to the vital presence of affects that resist formal or narrative containment. Indeed, Wordsworth affirms that such sensations nourish the mind only to the extent that they slip into the background of consciousness, to become 'invisible links / Allied to the affections' (1805 *Prelude* Book 1, lines 640–1).

One does not find in Wordsworth, as one does (for instance) in his contemporary William Blake, a clear programme for sociopolitical emancipation to be achieved through the renovation of the bodily senses. Wordsworth's image of gathering pleasure 'like a bee among the flowers' suggests an acquisitive character to such experiences as constitute the poetic mind. By the same token, however, pleasure in Wordsworth's poetry is a shared and common property, felt subjectively but located in no single individual. The poet tells us that the experience is accompanied by 'no peculiar sense / Of quietness or peace', a phrase that suggests in part that what 'sense' the speaker does enjoy does not belong to himself alone.⁴ Wordsworth's account of a mind 'engrafted in the tenderness of thought' presents an image of thought itself made sensate and integrated with the external world, suggesting how the pleasure associated with beauty involves the percipient in complex relations of interdependency with others as well as with natural objects. In this respect, sensations of pleasure present not solely a kind of nourishment for the developing poet, but furnish as well the model for an improved community.

Notes

1. Lionel Trilling, 'The Fate of Pleasure', in *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent: Selected Essays*, ed. Leon Wieseltier (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000), 427–49.
2. William Empson, 'Sense in *the Prelude*', in *The Structure of Complex Words* (New York: New Directions, 1951), 289–305.
3. G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).
4. Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) defines 'peculiar' (adj.) thus: 'Appropriate; belonging to any one with exclusion of others'.

*Language**Alexander Regier*

Out of the many remarkable direct pronouncements on the topic of language in Wordsworth's *oeuvre*, his prose writings associated with *Lyrical Ballads* offer us the most sustained and significant engagement. Together with the brief 'Advertisement' to the first edition of the poems (1798), the Preface to subsequent editions (1800, 1802 and 1805) has not only shaped the reception of Wordsworth but also remains one of the most important documents on the language of poetry, which he claims to be 'the first and the last of all knowledge' (*Prose* 1: 141). His evocative formulations on the nature and origin of poetry ('poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'; poetry 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity' (*Prose* 1: 127, 149)) and on the poet ('What is a Poet? . . . He is a man speaking to men' (*Prose* 1: 138)) have become critical reference points well beyond Romanticist scholarship. Wordsworth's pronouncements on language form the background to this powerful intervention.

* * *

In the very first paragraph of the Preface, Wordsworth describes how he hopes to ascertain through the 'experiment' (*Prose* 1: 119) of publishing the *Lyrical Ballads* (themselves poetic 'experiments' (*Prose* 1: 116)) 'how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart' (*Prose* 1: 119). The phrase 'the real language of men' has become a cornerstone of our understanding of Wordsworth's work. Francis Jeffrey, the fiercest nineteenth-century critic of Wordsworth's project, and one who had a keen eye for its radical potential, diagnosed this aspect of his proposals as an 'alarming innovation' (*CH* 186). Wordsworth's phrase is often cited as an illustration of his departure from Augustan poetical conventions, especially with regard to its 'poetic diction'. Turning our attention to 'the real language of men' allows us to gauge the tremendous innovative power and

radicalness of Wordsworth's attempt to create a poetry of the immediate and, as Stanley Cavell puts it, the 'ordinary'.¹ It means turning away from what Wordsworth terms the 'gaudiness and inane phraseology' (*Prose* 1: 116) of his contemporaries and altering completely the parameters of what makes for poetry, including what language might be used to produce it.

Many readers link Wordsworth's stake in the 'real language of men' to his earlier statement in the 'Advertisement', that the poems of *Lyrical Ballads* 'were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure' (*Prose* 1: 116). The political and poetical dimensions of these claims are as evident as they are pertinent. The 'lower classes' Wordsworth refers to are both socially and geographically marked. He insists that in choosing 'rustic' life he has primarily decided to represent 'the essential passions of the heart', which 'speak a plainer and more emphatic language' (125). The comparison, we assume, is with the empty phraseology of urban life to which this 'more emphatic language' is to be preferred. Wordsworth, then, wants to 'adopt' this language for his own poetry. Thus, the status of language becomes not only a matter of what might be a worthy poetic subject, but also a question of how such an engagement can be reflected formally in poetry, making it possible for these 'lower classes of society' themselves to find a voice in the *Ballads*.

Wordsworth's position on the 'real language of men' has not been without its critics, especially when it comes to his qualifications of the initial statement. The most influential criticism comes from his friend and co-author Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who objects 'in the very first instance, to an equivocation in the use of the word "real"'. Coleridge does not believe that Wordsworth's formulation allows for these 'equivocations' to be covered adequately and thus states that 'for "real" therefore, we must substitute *ordinary*, or *lingua communis*' (*BL* 11: 56). For Coleridge, to limit such a *lingua communis*, and, with it, poetry, to a singular type of language that is defined through class is a clear mistake. As Don Bialostosky points out, many scholars have questioned whether Coleridge's reading of Wordsworth, especially what he means by 'the real language of men', is accurate or fair.² Coleridge seems to suggest that the word 'real' needs to be substituted by an unambiguous alternative that, coincidentally, will also allow him to detect a problem in Wordsworth's initial approach.

What is certain is that Coleridge's 'substitution' has defined much of what we take Wordsworth to mean by the 'real language of men'. In fact, it includes a strand of criticism whose motivations are quite different from Coleridge's. This is the view that Wordsworth is appropriating rustic

language, or an idea thereof, to produce poetry that, despite his stated intentions, can be conceived of as a specifically *urban* commodity. Such criticism might point to Wordsworth's parenthetical comment that the language of 'low and rustic life' would be 'purified indeed from what appear its real defects' (*Prose* 1: 124). This small yet meaningful qualification can be read as a sign of Wordsworth's anxiety about how the 'real language' of men might intrinsically have 'real defects'. Wordsworth's 'purification' or 'improvement' ends up, as William Keach so eloquently reminds us, as coercion, since language will be purified according to ideological principles that feign to be natural.³

It is worth noting that, for all their differences, these two broad strands of criticisms nevertheless share M. H. Abrams's assertion that "The total context makes it plain (despite some wavering because of the ambiguity of the word "real") that Wordsworth's statement describes the language of the everyday spoken by a certain class of the rural population."⁴ Yet the language of Abrams's slightly awkward parenthetical qualification reveals that the meaning is not as 'plain' as this standard interpretation assumes. When we read about the 'real language of men', we begin to 'waver' because we cannot fully contain the 'ambiguity', or what Coleridge calls the 'equivocation', of the word 'real'. 'Real' is not an easy adjective, neither historically nor conceptually, and Wordsworth's idea of a 'real language' is more complicated than it might initially seem.

In fact, the multiplicity and complexity of the claims associated with a 'real' language might explain why it is such an evocative phrase. What kind of claim upon reality does 'real' make here? If the 'real language of men' is the same as the 'true' language of men, then we are left with the question of what kind of truth-claims this encompasses, especially since this truth is not simply descriptive but seeks to claim a level of authenticity or illumination. The connotations of the 'real' as 'honest', 'loyal', 'genuine' and 'down-to earth' all play into our interpretation here, implying that there is a deeply ethical dimension to the 'real' and its language.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to follow, or even answer, all of these questions and queries about Wordsworth's theories of language. What I want to point to is that it is productive to ask what kind of claim on reality Wordsworth makes when he speaks of the 'real language of men'. This is not just a question of paying close, and even excessively close, attention to Wordsworth's formulation. The Preface as a whole shows that Wordsworth is fully aware of the complexity of his claim, and that he modulates the vocabulary associated with the 'real' accordingly. To pick two of the most important instances from the Preface: there is evidently an important

difference between speaking about the language ‘really spoken by men’, on the one hand (‘the language of such Poetry as is here recommended is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men’ (*Prose* 1: 137)), and the ‘real language’ or ‘real life’ on the other (‘the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation’ (119); ‘language . . . uttered by men in real life’ (138); ‘language closely resembling that of real life’ (151)). While the first claim is not completely unambiguous, most readings would suggest that it urges the correlation between ‘really’ and ‘in fact’. This corresponds to our common reading of Wordsworth mentioned earlier and his use of the adverbial form elsewhere in the Preface (‘we discover what is really important to men’ (127)). To speak of a ‘real language’, however, is to make a different kind of claim. It is almost to suggest that there can be languages that are not ‘real’, that language might be a medium that reveals and instantiates a scale of reality, or that there are different languages of the real. Wordsworth’s Preface further complicates these dimensions in a variety of ways, not least by claiming that there is not only a ‘real language of men’ but also a ‘real language of nature’ (142), which relates directly to poetic representation.

Wordsworth is no doubt aware of the complex and polyvalent nature of his central formulation. That does not, of course, mean that he endorses all the possible readings that ‘real language’ might open up. However, it does mean that we have good reason to pay renewed attention to the phrase, and to see how its contextualization yields specific insights into Wordsworth’s critical idiom that may be lost to many of us today. For instance, a historical survey of the literature of the time reveals that the way in which Wordsworth uses the phrase ‘real language’ is highly unusual, even radical. The formulation, in contrast to its use in the Preface, almost always appears in a religious context. It is significant that Wordsworth chooses to present a central formulation in a completely unfamiliar way. Consider that he is troubled over whether or not the public will be able to recognize the *Lyrical Ballads* as poetry (the reader will ‘look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title’ (*Prose* 1: 116)). It is worth enquiring, then, how the idea of a ‘real language of *men*’, which is to compose this poetry, is a formulation that would have sounded, in this context, highly unusual or even jarring with more common uses of the phrase ‘real language’. If Wordsworth is challenging us to a new understanding of what makes for poetic language, knowledge and poetic subjects, his push for the conjunction between poetry and the ‘real’ in language (especially of men) is significant.

In the eighteenth century, when authors speak of 'real language', they most commonly use the phrase 'real language of the heart',⁵ a formulation that almost always occurs in a religious context. Many Christian sermons, religious treatises or moral tracts mention a 'real language of the heart' that is distinctly ethical. The tone involves authenticity and confession. Either 'real language' is the language that ought to be spoken, or the phrase is used to identify and criticize a former language of pretence. A 1794 sermon by Thomas Webster provides a representative example of the first version: 'Are you hypocrites before him [God] only, or is this the real language of your hearts?'⁶ The distinction is between hypocritical behaviour and the 'real', authentic inner language. Another sermon, published anonymously in 1795, closes with the distinction that 'His prayer is now the real language of his heart, not the former unmeaning service it was before'.⁷ We can see in these examples (and there are many more) that 'real language' invokes religious authenticity, both ethical and spiritual. Truthfulness here is not of rustic physicality or actuality. The 'real language of the heart' in this case seems much closer to Wordsworth's 'Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears' than to his rural dream of a 'real language of men'. The prevalence of the phrase in late eighteenth-century religious discourse suggests a spiritual dimension and a focus on an inner, non-verbalized, Christian version of language, which forms a specific context that Wordsworth would have been aware of and would certainly have considered when writing the Preface.

Apart from this religiously inflected background, Wordsworth encounters the phrase 'real language' in other areas as well. Two of the most relevant contexts can be found in James Beattie and the Marquis de Condorcet, both of whose work Wordsworth certainly knew. While it is unclear whether he had read specifically Beattie's essay 'On Poetry and Music' (1776), this text resonates with Wordsworth's views on real language. Discussing simplicity of style in poetry, Beattie states: 'Let it be observed further, that poetical language is an imitation of real language improved to a state of perfection'.⁸ This sounds very much like Wordsworth's notion of poetry as a 'purifying' of rural language, though Beattie turns out to be far more guarded in his final proposals (along the lines later echoed by Coleridge). Condorcet's *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795) provides Wordsworth with a very different 'real language'. As Leslie Chard and Nicholas Roe have suggested, Condorcet's work was important to Wordsworth, and we certainly know that he owned a copy of the *Outlines*.⁹ In contrast to Beattie, Condorcet thinks highly of 'real language' as helping him to understand natural science and taxonomy. The methods that 'Naturalists' invent to accurately describe the natural world amount to a

'real language': 'These methods are, indeed, a real language, wherein each object is denoted by some of its most constant qualities'.¹⁰ In this case, Condorcet privileges methodology with the status of a 'real language' that will allow us to proceed with accuracy in the description of our natural world. Oddly, only a page later he scolds scientists for overemphasizing their methodology and for a pride that 'mistakes for science itself that which is nothing more than the dictionary and grammar of its real language'.¹¹ In this case, the 'real language' is nature herself, rather than the taxonomy describing nature. While Condorcet champions an understanding of a 'real language' that is not religious, he is not clear on whether, in this new form, real language consists in our methods of describing nature or whether it is nature itself. This ambiguity provides further evidences for our sense of Condorcet's importance to Wordsworth.

It is instructive to look at these broader contexts for Wordsworth's use of the phrase 'real language of men' since doing so makes it clear that his championing of a 'real language of men' is more radical and unusual than we might realize. This is not only a point about literary history, however. It connects back to the 'equivocation' of the 'real'. The suggestiveness of Wordsworth's formulation regarding language's claim on reality is powerful, and it is certainly not an accident. As we know, for Wordsworth, reality is itself produced to a high degree through and in language. In the 'Note to *The Thorn*', he famously states that 'words are *things*, active and efficient' (LB 351). These '*things*' have a claim on the real that goes beyond their status as linguistic signs. They have a material presence and a power that contributes to the shaping of our reality. This ontological force is a crucial dimension of language for Wordsworth. While he does not believe that language makes up all of reality, he does insist that language is immensely important in the process of shaping what counts as real.

Wordsworth's view of the importance of language in shaping the type of reality we live (and speak) is a concern that goes beyond the programmatic interests of the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. One of his most memorable pronouncements is his reflection on the nature of language in the *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810). Here he gives a stark warning against the dangers of a primarily functional view of language, and what kind of reality it might produce: 'If words be not . . . an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift' (*Prose* II: 84). Wordsworth's anti-Lockean stance powerfully suggests that we should not think of language as a dress for already existing concepts. By focusing on the 'real language of men', he attempts to provide an alternative, a meaningful language that will produce an 'incarnation of the thought'. Such language

avoids being an 'ill gift' and, instead, produces an 'incarnation of thought and sign. We can read those two models of language as versions of the 'real', only one of which is authentic and true for Wordsworth. It is of considerable importance which type of language (and reality) we construct, since 'Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve' (85). Language upholds our sense of reality, it feeds us in our encounter with it, if only we hold on to its real, its authentic, version. If we do not, it will turn into a 'counter-spirit' that will 'dissolve' our understanding and produce a mistaken sense of the real altogether.

* * *

We can read this passage in parallel to the versions of poetic diction and language Wordsworth outlines in the Preface. The 'inane phraseologies' (*Prose* 1: 116) are linked to the dangers of accepting an account of language that dominates much eighteenth-century linguistic thought. Wordsworth wants to resist a poetics that is connected to a view of the word that, he believes, will ultimately lead to a reality dominated by a 'counter-spirit'. One form this resistance takes is to challenge the poetical norms of Augustan poetry and to promote a 'real language of men'. While this 'real language' is certainly a challenge to poetical norms in the language of social class, diction and political dimensions, it also suggests a vision of language that puts at its centre the construction of reality and what counts as 'real' (in its many different senses). For Wordsworth, this is a difficult and contradictory process. We cannot ignore the idea that, as Mary Jacobus puts it, Wordsworth's poetry represents 'the real as a destabilizing meaning of things', thus illustrating the difficulty of situating oneself completely in reality.¹²

* * *

Towards the end of the Preface, Wordsworth states that in giving 'a few of my reasons . . . why I . . . endeavoured to bring my language near to the real language of men, . . . I have . . . been treating a subject of general interest' (*Prose* 1: 151). Wordsworth's formulation is, once more, twofold. The interest is 'general' not just in that it goes beyond the specialized reader. It is also 'general' in that it refers to a subject that concerns us all. It connects with his aim, no doubt realized by now, that he has assisted 'the Reader . . . in perceiving that the powers of language are not so limited as he may suppose' (*Prose* 1: 157). The 'powers of language' are much more extensive

than we often assume, especially when it comes to deciding what counts as 'real'. Wordsworth's commitment to the 'real language of men' is also a commitment to discover, through poetry and thought, how language can form the reality that we inhabit.

Notes

1. See Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 41.
2. See Don Bialostosky, 'Coleridge's Interpretation of Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*', *PMLA* 93 (5) (1978), 917.
3. William Keach, *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 14.
4. M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1953), 110.
5. See Robert A. Erickson, *The Language of the Heart, 1600–1750* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).
6. Thomas Webster, *Fourteen evangelical sermons, preached in the Church of the United Parishes of St Margaret Pattens, and St Gabriel Fenchurch* (Bermondsey, 1794), 150.
7. *Fifteen sermons, designed for the use of those, who have but little time or inclination to read longer discourses* (Evesham, 1795), 12. The 'real language of the heart' is relevant for literary characters too: 'Cato talks the language of the porch and the academy. Hamlet, on the other hand, speaks that of the human heart'. See William Guthrie, *An essay upon English tragedy. With remarks upon the Abbe de Blanc's Observations on the English stage* (London, 1757 [?]), 25.
8. James Beattie, *On Poetry and Music, as They Affect the Mind*, (Edinburgh, 1776), 226. Also see James A. Harris's introduction to James Beattie, *Selected Philosophical Writings* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 11.
9. Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind: Being a Posthumous Work of the Late M. de Condorcet* (London, 1795). Leslie F. Chard, *Dissenting Republican: Wordsworth's Early Life and Thought in their Political Context* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972). Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
10. Condorcet, *Outlines*, 282.
11. *Ibid.*, 283.
12. Mary Jacobus, *Romantic Things: A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 122.

*The sublime**Philip Shaw*

In a letter written in October 1818, Keats famously describes Wordsworth's 'poetical Character' as an instance of the 'egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone'.¹ Drawing on the classical understanding of sublime with its connotations of grandeur, nobility and elevation (from Longinus' first-century rhetorical treatise *Peri Hypsous* or, *On the Sublime*), but also with a sense of the word's more recent association with 'ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible'² Wordsworth emerges in Keats's account as a singular and formidable presence, the 'strong precursor' against whom the younger poet struggles to distinguish himself.³ Established as a key term in aesthetic debate in the early to mid eighteenth century, by the time Keats came to write his assessment of Wordsworth 'sublime' was routinely used to describe not only literary and artistic accomplishment but a range of extreme and often unsettling experiences: from observations of the grand and terrifying in nature (storms, volcanoes and alpine landscapes being the most popular examples) to descriptions of the power and majesty of the divine. As popularized in the early to mid eighteenth century by influential literary and cultural critics such as John Dennis, Joseph Addison, Lord Shaftesbury and Edmund Burke, and also in ambitious cosmographical poems by James Thomson and Mark Akenside, by the end of the 1790s the discourse of the sublime was in danger of becoming a hackneyed means to inflated ends.⁴ Where once Milton – for most eighteenth-century writers *the* poet of the sublime – had sought to 'raise a secret ferment in the mind of the reader, and to work, with violence, upon his passions', now poets – seeking to indulge bourgeois fantasies of ownership and command – provided readers with unintentionally bathetic descriptions of rugged and notable views.⁵

At first glance, Wordsworth's earliest published poetry appears to depart little from this prescription. Composed in London in 1792 more than a year after the poet's walking tour of France and Switzerland in the summer of 1790, *Descriptive Sketches* presents a somewhat clichéd account of

soul-stirring Alpine scenery. Echoing Burke's assessment of the limited abilities of the visual arts to capture the sublime, Wordsworth argues in a footnote to the poem that verbal description is best suited to conveying the feelings aroused by what Burke calls the 'immense forms' of nature (*DS* 72).⁶ Standing '[s]ublime upon' a 'far-surveying cone' (line 367), the observer describes 'images which disdain the pencil' and which owe their 'grandeur' chiefly to the 'unity of the impression' that words alone can lend to dizzying scenes (*DS* 72). In his descriptions of 'cloud-piercing' trees (line 63) and 'trackless bounds' (line 75), however, Wordsworth does little more than echo the conventions of mid to late eighteenth-century loco-descriptive poetry. Moreover, as Cian Duffy and Peter Howlett note, the poet's descriptions of mountainous vistas owe much to Louis Ramond Carbonnières's 'Observations on the Glaciers and Glacieres', which was included in English translation as a supplement to William Coxe's *Travels in Swisserland* (1789) but most likely known to Wordsworth in the original French.⁷ Where the poem departs from the conventions of landscape poetry and popular travel writing, however, is in its closing account of a landscape churned up by apocalyptic presumptions of death and renewal. Here, an earlier description of 'mountains, glowing hot, like coals of fire' (line 347), is elevated to a scene of millennial transformation as, with elements of Virgil's fourth eclogue, of the Gospel of St Peter (2 Peter 3:10–13) and of the Book of Revelation, the enflamed landscape gives birth to 'another earth' (line 783).⁸ Significantly, however, Wordsworth's borrowings from pagan and Judeo-Christian imaginings of the apocalypse are informed by more immediate, political concerns: chiefly by the thwarted promise of the French Revolution, which the poet had recently witnessed. Attempting to salvage some principle of restoration from the collapse of the revolution into despotism and terror, Wordsworth appeals to 'Freedom's waves to ride / Sublime o'er Conquest, Avarice, and Pride' (lines 792–3). By combining, in Burke's terms, the 'compound abstract' 'Freedom' with the simple 'aggregate word' 'waves', the poem connects an abstract idea with a particular image.⁹ The phrase is in turn modified by the adverbial 'Sublime', signifying in this case 'elevation' over martial, economic and dynastic 'Oppression' (line 795). Considered in its entirety, the line may thus be read as a demonstration of what Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla call the 'transformational' discourse of the sublime.¹⁰ With echoes of the alchemical connotations of sublimation as a means of purifying through cleansing fire, words are transformed into transcendental vectors, signifying release from the base, material accretions of the *ancien régime*. But while in these lines the poet clearly celebrates the ability of language to perform an act of

liberation from worldly orthodoxy elsewhere, as we shall see, the sense of freedom comes freighted with anxiety.

In Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', the pantheistic 'sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused' that 'impels / All thinking things, all objects of thought, / And rolls through all things' (*LB* 118–19; lines 96–103) is associated still with 'the joy / Of elevated thoughts' (lines 94–5) as, buoyed along by 'that blessed' and 'sublime' (line 38) insight 'into the life of things' (line 50), the speaker is granted relief from the delusional realm of corporeal vision. As most critics of the poem have acknowledged, 'Tintern Abbey' points to an abiding concern with the relations between 'thoughts' and 'things' and with the genesis of self-consciousness. In Wordsworth's account of the Pedlar, later incorporated into *The Ruined Cottage* (1798), for example, the recognition of 'an ebbing and a flowing mind' (*RC* 396; line 155) is derived from encounters with 'the presence and the power' of natural 'greatness' (*RC* 394; lines 131–2). The 'Power' of nature, as *The Prelude* later concludes, appears as the 'Counterpart' or 'Brother of the glorious faculty / Which higher minds bear with them as their own' (*1805 Prelude* Book 13; lines 88–9). Writing of the relations between mind and nature in 'Tintern Abbey', Albert O. Wlecke argues that 'the poet's "sense sublime" of a universally in-dwelling "something" is . . . a function of consciousness becoming reflexively aware of its own interfusing energies'.¹¹ That Wordsworth's thoughts are 'elevated' indicates the transcendental aspirations of the imaginative consciousness; that these thoughts are, at the same time, 'deeply interfused' with the forms of nature is an indicator of the extent to which the poet wishes to transform the dread power of imagination into a measurable 'thing'. In a manner analogous to the influential account of the sublime given by the German idealist philosopher Immanuel Kant, an immeasurable and overpowering force is checked by the imposition of boundaries, forms and limits so that it may be understood as an object of reason. Yet Wordsworth's poem appears to remain in thrall to the possibility of an encounter with forces that would exceed rational comprehension. With echoes of the Latin roots of the sublime (*sub* means 'up to'; *limen* refers to the threshold or lintel of a building) the 'sense sublime' in 'Tintern Abbey' derives its power not merely from the exhilarating notion of consciousness reaching the limits of what can be thought or expressed, but also from the terrifying prospect of breaching these limits.

What it might be like to go beyond the limits of thought and expression is hinted at repeatedly in Wordsworth's verse. *The Prelude* combines several accounts, dating from the 1790s, of encounters with sublimity that threaten to place the mind beside itself. In Book 12, for instance, a description of a vision

on Salisbury Plain, originally conceived in 1793, forges an association between Druidic sacrifice and the apocalyptic tendencies of the creative imagination as, in a chilling formulation, the poet announces: 'I call'd upon the darkness – and it took, / A midnight darkness seem'd to come and take – / All objects from my sight' (1805 *Prelude* Book 12, lines 327–9).¹² In this instance, in what amounts to a daemonic inversion of the *fiat lux* motif from Genesis ('let there be light'), identified by Longinus as a sublime expression of divine creativity,¹³ the mind is no longer 'interfused' with but violently removed from nature. Yet, in another sense, 'it took' suggests that something has been combined with the speaking subject in exchange for the loss of corporeal sight. Understood as a kind of horticultural graft, the incorporation of darkness provides the Wordsworthian 'I' with an unsettling insight into its own constitutional otherness. The disturbing implication is that Wordsworth and darkness have *taken* to each other. In 'The Discharged Soldier', a verse fragment from 1798 later transplanted into Book 4 of *The Prelude*, a night-time encounter with a 'ghastly' wounded veteran (*LB* 279 and 282; lines 51 and 161) provides the poet with a 'sublime' (line 139) insight into that part of himself that would exceed the limits of intelligibility. The soldier, 'cut off / From all his kind, and more than half detached / From his own nature' (lines 58–60), appears in the poem as a visitant from an alien realm, unable to dwell or converse with ordinary mortals. That Wordsworth takes it upon himself to lead this estranged being to the threshold of a cottage says much about that side of the poet that would seek to domesticate the transgressive power of the sublime. Once safely housed, the soldier speaks with 'reviving interest' (line 167) and is no longer associated with the desolation and solitude dwelling on the other side of ordinary communication.

The crossing of the Alps episode from Book 6 of *The Prelude* is without doubt one of the most frequently cited passages in Wordsworth's *oeuvre*, described by Samuel Monk as the epitome of 'a century of commentary on the religion and poetry in the sublime Alpine landscape' and by Thomas Weiskel as a 'set piece of the sublime'.¹⁴ Since Monk's assertion of the 'general similarity' between Kant's 'Analytic of the Sublime' and Wordsworth's *Prelude* critics have tended to interpret the passage as a poeticized version of the mind's triumph over the natural world.¹⁵ Stripped to its bare bones, the verse recounts the journey made by Wordsworth and his companion Robert Jones to the French and Swiss Alps in the summer of 1790, a journey initially documented in *Descriptive Sketches*. The poet's first impression of Alpine scenery is far removed from the enthusiastic response of the earlier poem as, rather than instilling awe, Mont Blanc presents a 'soulless image', usurping 'upon a living

thought / That never more could be' (1805 *Prelude* Book 6, lines 454–6). Disappointment with the inability of nature to convey a sense of the sublime is compounded further when, on reaching the other side of the Simplon Pass, the travellers realize that they 'had cross'd the Alps' (line 524) yet had failed to experience the anticipated sense of wonder. What happens next might justly be described as one of the most remarkable recoveries in the history of English verse:

Imagination! lifting up itself
 Before the eye and progress of my Song
 Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power,
 In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
 Halted without a struggle to break through,
 And now recovering to my Soul I say
 I recognize thy glory; in such strength
 Of usurpation, in such visitings
 Of awful promise, when the light of sense
 Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
 The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode,
 There harbours whether we be young or old.
 Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
 Is with infinitude, and only there;
 With hope it is, hope that can never die,
 Effort, and expectation, and desire,
 And something evermore about to be.

(1805 *Prelude* Book 6, lines 525–42)

In these lines, as Geoffrey Hartman has argued, what the poet recognizes as sublime is no longer the grandeur of nature but the 'awful Power' of Imagination.¹⁶ Those objects of sense that, in the earlier verses, had threatened to overwhelm consciousness are now themselves usurped by a force owing nothing to the natural world that rises *sui generis*, like 'an unfather'd vapour', from deep within the self. In anticipation of the Salisbury Plain passage, Imagination is presented here as a life-threatening force, strong enough to baffle the natural man's dependence on 'the light of sense'. In this case, however, the potential for excess residing within the self is contained by a decisive moment of self-reflection: 'And now recovering to my Soul I say / I recognize thy glory'. Critically, with the reimposition of temporal markers comes narrative continuity and with it the sense of the sublime as an object of reflection rather than as an unbounded and potentially harmful power. The retrospective awareness that the 'unfather'd' power is an emanation of the 'Soul', and not of some external body, enables the narrating

consciousness to perceive that the Soul's 'home' is with 'infinite' rather than with nature; moreover, where once the natural world had imposed on thoughts that 'never more could be' now the 'sense sublime' reveals in visionary flashes 'something evermore about to be'.

In recent decades it has become fashionable to reject neo-Kantian readings of the sort rehearsed above as idealist distortions of Wordsworth's poem. Beginning with Alan Liu's influential 1989 description of the Simplon Pass episode as an allegory of the poet's struggle with history rather than nature, critics have begun to place emphasis on the sublime as the product of a culturally specific, historically determined set of discourses rather than as an objective phenomenon.¹⁷ Wordsworth's sublime, on this reading, owes little to the esoteric, culturally remote philosophising of Kant, and far more to the 'complex interaction' between British aesthetic theorizing, travel writing and loco-descriptive poetry. Thus, Carbonnières's rendering, in the 'Observations', of 'Imagination seiz[ing] the reins which Reason drops' in order to transform 'finite into infinite, space into immensity' and 'time into eternity' is seen as a more 'immediately relevant antecedent' for the poet's 'apostrophe to the imagination' than Kant's 'Analytic of the Sublime'.¹⁸ Leaving aside the question of influence, what historicist readings of this kind overlook, for all their manifest good sense, is an acknowledgement of the sublime as anything more than the sum of its intertexts.

An idea of the specificity of Wordsworth's understanding of the sublime may be grasped by a close reading of the verses that follow the apostrophe to Imagination. Recounting the traveller's journey through the Gondo Gorge, the poem goes on to describe the 'immeasurable height / Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd' and the 'stationary blasts of waterfalls' (1805 *Prelude* Book 6, lines 556–7). The landscape that Wordsworth describes as 'rent' by 'thwarting winds', 'raving' streams and rocks 'that mutter'd close upon our ears' (lines 559–62), has more in common with the apocalyptic scenes depicted in the Book of Revelation, in Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681) and in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) than it does with the clichéd scenes of terror depicted in eighteenth-century travel writings and topographic poems, or, for that matter, with the abstruse reasoning of German idealist philosophy. To the poet, the 'unfettered' and seemingly contradictory elements of the Alpine landscape appear

... like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first and last, and midst, and without end. (lines 568–72)

Underpinned by memories of Revelation 22:13 ('Him first, him last, him midst, and without end') opposing images of 'Tumult and peace', 'darkness' and 'light' (line 567) are brought together, finally, in the overarching synthesis of the 'one mind' (line 568). In an unfinished and posthumously published prose fragment on 'The Sublime and the Beautiful', Wordsworth describes the sublime as 'a feeling or image of intense unity', noting further that to 'talk of an object as being sublime . . . in itself, without references to some subject by whom that sublimity . . . is perceived, is absurd' (*Prose* III: 357). What Wordsworth discovers in *The Prelude* is the inadequacy of this formulation. For as the Gondo Gorge verses reveal, the unity of the sublime and of the integrity of the perceiving subject are illusory attempts to conceal the subject's constitutional incompleteness, the fact that 'I am nothing and that the boundaries of the self are either exceeded by divine plenitude (the religious view) or undone by material or linguistic difference (the sceptic's view).¹⁹ When, later on, 'deafen'd and stunn'd' by his experience in the gorge the poet gives way to 'melancholy' (lines 578–80), he seems, with part of his being, to grasp this sense of deprivation as a fundamental truth of the sublime.

Notes

1. Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., *The Letters of John Keats*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), I: 386–7.
2. This important mid-eighteenth-century account of the sublime is taken from Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), ed. David Womersley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004), 86.
3. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1973), 5.
4. See David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century, 1700–1789* (Edinburgh: Pearson, 2003), ch. 7.
5. Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* 418 (30 June 1712); extract reprinted in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67–8. Representative examples of the late eighteenth-century topographical or loco-descriptive poem include John Bethell, *LLangunnor Hill: a Loco-Descriptive Poem* (1794) and John Gisborne, *Vales of Wever, a Loco-Descriptive Poem, Inscribed to the Reverend John Granville, of Calwich, Straffordshire* (1797).
6. Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 196–7.
7. See Cian Duffy and Peter Howlett, eds., *Cultures of the Sublime: Selected Readings, 1750–1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 11–13.
8. See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 335.

9. Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 188.
10. Ashfield and de Bolla, eds., *Sublime*, 6–7.
11. Albert O. Wlecke, *Wordsworth and the Sublime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 12.
12. Punctuation adopted from William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams and S. Gill. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 454.
13. Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. Doreen C. Innes and W.R. Roberts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 191.
14. Monk, *Sublime*, 227–32; Weiskel, *Romantic Sublime*, 196.
15. Monk, *Sublime*, 4.
16. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 39–48.
17. Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford University Press, 1989); see Cian and Howlett, eds., *Cultures of the Sublime*, 10–11.
18. Cian and Howlett, eds., *Cultures of the Sublime*, 11.
19. For a reading of the Wordsworthian sublime that advances a materialist or sceptical view of the attempt to reconcile language and subjectivity, see Paul de Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', in *Romanticism*, ed. Cynthia Chase (London: Longman, 1993), 55–77.

Walking and travel

Robin Jarvis

Wordsworth's name is closely associated with certain parts of the country – the Lake District, most obviously, and, to a lesser but still considerable extent, the West Country. His various homes are tourist attractions and make an important contribution to the cultural economy of those regions. His poetry is often demonstrably rooted in everyday incidents or observations of nature that are intimately linked to his local surroundings, many of them witnessed and alternatively recorded in his sister Dorothy's prose journals. It is therefore easy to think of Wordsworth as a writer with a geographically bounded imagination, someone who thrived on a sense of belonging and on proximity to recognizable landscapes and a knowable community.

Nevertheless, travel and touring (a term he would undoubtedly have preferred to the newly coined 'tourism', which the *OED* dates from 1811), often with a significant pedestrian element, were always important to Wordsworth, as the most casual acquaintance with his biography and poetic canon will testify. His Continental walking tour in the summer of 1790, the year's residence in France beginning in November the following year, and his walking tour of Wales and the West Country in summer 1793 have received much critical attention for their role in furnishing raw material for *The Prelude*, begun in Goslar, Germany, in 1798–9 during another extended foreign venture. A short pedestrian tour of the Wye Valley in July 1798 gave rise to his most celebrated loco-descriptive poem, popularly known as 'Tintern Abbey'. Lengthy tours of Scotland in 1803, 1814, 1831 and 1833 inspired lyric poems that appeared in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) and later poem-sequences such as *Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems* (1835). Major European expeditions in later life (each lasting several months) were the experiential hook on which Wordsworth hung his distinctive poetic itineraries, *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent* (1820) and *Memorials of a Tour in Italy* (1835). It is no surprise that this most regionally defined of writers should nevertheless have been described as having a 'gypsy in his soul'.¹

Mobility seems to have been a necessary precondition for Wordsworth's creative activity. In his *Confessions*, an autobiographical project the scale and audacity of which anticipated Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Rousseau had written: 'There is something about walking which stimulates and enlivens my thoughts. When I stay in one place I can hardly think at all; my body has to be on the move to get my mind going.'² If Wordsworth was not exaggerating when he claimed that nine tenths of his poems were composed 'out in the open air' (*FN* 43; a scenario apparently confirmed by his sister Dorothy, who wrote in 1804 that her brother 'generally composes his verses out of doors' (*EY* 477)), then it would seem that he experienced the same vital connection between physical movement and movements of the mind. Statements such as Dorothy's do not necessarily imply oral, peripatetic composition: indeed, Andrew Bennett has argued that Wordsworth's increasing tendency to highlight his 'extempore, alfresco, perambulatory' compositional habits – habits that had little to do with the 'sweaty work' of writing and revision – indicates that he had 'succumbed to his own publicity machine' as a poet of nature.³ Nevertheless, it cannot be disputed that outdoor activity – whatever the precise relationships between walking, oral composition and 'writing down' – was crucial to Wordsworth's poetic career to a degree unmatched in the life stories of his fellow Romantics.

Dorothy's correspondence from the early 1800s draws attention to a particular kind of pedestrian practice: her brother, she says, 'chuses the most sheltered spot, and there walks backwards and forwards, and though the length of his walk be sometimes a quarter or half a mile, he is as fast bound within the chosen limits as if by prison walls' (*EY* 477). Such repetitive, recursive walking was a feature of Wordsworth's compositional routine throughout his life, although in later years it was associated as much with the parterre at Rydal Mount as with long circuits of open countryside. By literally retreading the same ground, again and again, he found it easier to achieve the concentration and calm intensity that facilitated poetry, as in that process of recollecting and reproducing emotion famously described in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

From his undergraduate days, Wordsworth's pedestrianism also took the form of outward-bound, expeditionary travel. In his embrace of challenging recreational walking he was part of a larger trend. A cult of pedestrian touring developed rapidly in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, with students, writers and artists prominent among its acolytes; by the early 1800s, walking was overcoming its negative historical links with vagrancy and criminality and establishing itself as a legitimate and socially respectable travel choice. First-generation pedestrian tourists valued the independence,

flexibility and bodily freedom that walking provided. For a while, in the context of the American and especially the French revolutions, travelling on foot acquired in addition a dissident edge, since it placed the middle-class tourist on a par with poor people who could afford no other means of transport. Wordsworth's pedestrian ventures in the 1790s undoubtedly partook of the spirit of this subculture of 'radical walking'.⁴

It was a walking tour of the Wye Valley – a well-established destination for picturesque tourists, who typically went on horseback or descended the river on commercial pleasure boats – in July 1798 that gave rise to Wordsworth's canonical landscape poem. Inspired by Richard Warner's recently published *A Walk through Wales*, Wordsworth and his sister covered up to 23 miles a day in a brisk hike from Bristol to Goodrich Castle and back in four days. According to Wordsworth's Fenwick note, 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' was composed in its entirety during the expedition,⁵ although 'not any part of it' was 'written down till I reached Bristol' (*FN* 15). The opening verse paragraph adds detail to information supplied in the poem's full title, confirming that the speaker is returning to the site of an earlier visit:

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a sweet inland murmur. – Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky. (*LB* 116; lines 1–8)

The temporal and rhetorical pattern of revisitation thus introduced will become a hallmark of Wordsworth's travel- and tour-related poetry. Whereas travel is commonly identified with the pursuit of novelty and difference, for Wordsworth, even at this early stage in his writing career, the travel that makes the deepest impression is a travelling back. It was the interleaving of experience with memory – the comparison of direct sense impressions with the 'picture of the mind' – as well as with ideas derived from books that provided his most intense creative stimuli and furnished him with 'life and food / For future years' (*LB* 118; lines 65–6).

As the poem proceeds, the declarative force of its opening contemplation of the picturesque landscape (a 'way of seeing' that, as Nicholas Roe remarks, 'reconciles humankind with nature')⁶ is undercut by the 'sad perplexity' of 'dim' and perhaps discordant memories, and further complicated by reference to the speaker's emotional and mental vicissitudes in the

years since his previous visit. Wordsworth records changes in the self and affirms the diverse benefits his memories of the Wye have brought him when afflicted by the 'fever of the world' (*LB* 117; line 54). He concludes by reasserting his faith in nature – in something apparently unchanging – after years of personal and (reading between the lines) political instability. In this way, his 'material' travel (to apply terms theorized by Tzvetan Todorov), a representative performance of radical pedestrianism, is comprehensively overwritten by his 'spiritual' journey.⁷

Wordsworth's Continental walking tour, which involved covering 2,000 miles in just under three months at an average of 30 miles a day, took place eight years before the Wye excursion, but its best poetry underwent a much longer gestation. While *Descriptive Sketches* (1793) occasionally conveys the texture of tourist experience as a flow of transitory observations of places and people, it demonstrably falsifies the autobiographical record: the enthusiastic pedestrian whose spirits had been 'kept in a perpetual hurry of delight by the almost uninterrupted succession of sublime and beautiful objects which have passed before my eyes' (*EY* 32) is unrecognizable in the dejected youth who seeks in nature's 'varying charms' a cure for his 'wounded heart' (*DS* 38; lines 13–16). It was not until the thirteen-book *Prelude* of 1805 that the Continental tour was treated adequately, in terms of both the daily ebb and flow of the traveller's experience – for which the loose syntactic structures of Wordsworth's blank verse provide the perfect vehicle – and occasional moments of memorable intensity and extraordinary insight.

Wordsworth embarked on this tour with the aim of establishing a mental repository of sublime and beautiful forms – 'scarce a day of my life will pass [in] which I shall not derive some happiness from these images' (*EY* 36) – and assumed that the Alps would be the highlight of the trip. In fact, his first sighting of Europe's highest mountain is a deflating experience:

That day we first
Beheld the summit of Mount Blanc, and grieved
To have a soulless image on the eye,
Which had usurp'd upon a living thought
That never more could be: the wondrous Vale
Of Chamouny did on the following dawn,
With its dumb cataracts and streams of ice,
A motionless array of mighty waves,
Five rivers broad and vast, make rich amends,
And reconcil'd us to realities. (*1805 Prelude* Book 6, lines 452–61)

The difference between a 'living thought' and a 'soulless image' here finds an obvious visual corollary in the contrast between the mountain (vast,

static and mind-deadening) and the glaciers – frozen seas conveying a powerful sense of arrested or potential motion and hence energizing the imagination. This passage, so evocative of the poet's unease at the sheer inertia of physical reality, serves as a preamble to the poem's gripping performative crisis. In this episode, a wrong turning and a chance encounter with a local 'Peasant' lead the tourists to the realization that they have missed their much anticipated sublime mountain-top experience because they have, unwittingly, already 'cross'd the Alps' (line 524). Recalling the shock and disappointment that this occasioned results in a profounder (self-)recognition in the textual present:

Imagination! lifting up itself
 Before the eye and progress of my Song
 Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power,
 In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
 Halted without a struggle to break through,
 And now recovering to my Soul I say
 I recognize thy glory

...

Our destiny, our nature, and our home
 Is with infinitude, and only there;
 With hope it is, hope that can never die,
 Effort, and expectation, and desire,
 And something evermore about to be.

(1805 Prelude Book 6, lines 525–32, 538–42)

Wordsworth had expected his imagination to be 'fathered' by nature; instead he discovers that it is essentially self-begotten. 'Consciousness of self raised to apocalyptic pitch' is precisely the underlying meaning Geoffrey Hartman ascribes to the 'halted traveller' scenario in Wordsworth's poetry,⁸ of which this passage offers the iconic instance. As Hartman further argues, this temporary separation of mind from external reality is overcome in the Gondo Gorge section that follows, in which the poet's imagination reattaches itself to nature and the different elements of the scene resemble the workings of one *heavenly* mind, supplanting those 'thoughts / That are their own perfection and reward' (lines 545–6) which had dominated in his moment of paralyzing self-awareness. The Gondo Gorge passage, in which both poet and poem resume their pedestrian progress, functions in a similar way to the 'Vale / Of Chamouny' in the Mont Blanc episode, reconciling the speaker to realities and reacquainting nature and humanity as companionable 'fellow-travellers' (line 554).

The crossing of the Alps therefore combines several themes and motifs central to Wordsworth's peripatetic and tour poetry: the halted traveller, the rhetorical pattern of expectation–disappointment–reconciliation, and revisitation (he had such high hopes of the Alps because he had read so much about them beforehand, and it is revisiting the scene in memory, during composition, that precipitates his moment of revelation). Wordsworth literally revisited the landscape of his thwarted apocalypse during the Continental tour of 1820, when he retraced in reverse his route of 1790. This time he and his companions took the new Napoleonic road through the Simplon Pass (on foot); the poems he wrote about the tour engage very little with Alpine settings, but Dorothy's journal leaves no doubt that he was deeply affected. In particular, he was overwhelmed on discovering the very track that had previously led him astray: 'The feelings of that time came back with the freshness of yesterday, accompanied with a dim vision of thirty years of life between.'⁹

The traits identified so far persist in Wordsworth's later poetry, where they accrue further significance in the context of his deepening preoccupation with time and personal mortality. The trilogy of Yarrow poems, written over a thirty-year period, provides an intriguing case study. 'Yarrow Unvisited', a product of the Scottish tour of 1803, is, unsurprisingly, a poem about not seeing this poetically celebrated river. Perhaps recalling his Mont Blanc experience as much as William Hamilton's 'exquisite' ballad, 'The Braes of Yarrow' (1730),¹⁰ Wordsworth declines to replace his imaginary Yarrow with a disenchanting, soulless image:

Be Yarrow Stream unseen, unknown!
 It must, or we shall rue it:
 We have a vision of our own;
 Ah! why should we undo it?
 The treasured dreams of times long past
 We'll keep them, *winsome Marrow!*
 For when we're there although 'tis fair
 'Twill be another Yarrow! (PTV 200; lines 49–56)

In 1814, however, Wordsworth broke his resolution and visited a landscape encrusted with ballads and folk-tales and associated especially with Scott, who lived nearby. 'Yarrow Visited' begins by apparently confirming his fears, finding that his 'waking dream' has 'perish'd' in face of material reality (*SP* 137; lines 3–4). However, as he contemplates the actual beauties of the Yarrow and speculates on likely locations for incidents in the ballads, the speaker finds a balance between imagination and reality. The river rivals 'in the light of day' imagination's 'delicate creation' (lines 43–4), while his own

poetic faculty is not completely deadened: 'A ray of Fancy still survives', and his lips breathe 'gladsome notes' in harmony with the fluvial rhythm of the Yarrow (lines 75–80). What he now calls the Yarrow's 'genuine image' (line 86) will live in his mind to sustain him in old age.

Or at least until his next Scottish tour, for Wordsworth's demise proved not as imminent as his concluding reference to evaporating early morning mists intimates. In 1835 he returned to the Yarrow in the company of the ailing Scott – then on the verge of departing for Italy in a vain attempt to recover his health. 'Yarrow Revisited', which envisions Scott's encounters with foreign rivers equally 'Renowned in song and story', is much more confident about the alliance of nature with the imagination:

And what, for this frail world, were all
That mortals do or suffer,
Did no responsive harp, no pen,
Memorial tribute offer?
Yea, what were mighty Nature's self?
Her features, could they win us,
Unhelped by the poetic voice
That hourly speaks within us? (SSIP 492–3; lines 81–8)

The Yarrow now occupies a similar position to that of the Wye in 1798, confronting the 'changed and changing' tourist with a seemingly 'unaltered face' and provoking a melancholy 'inward prospect' (lines 35–8). And like 'Tintern Abbey', the final Yarrow poem draws together past, present and future, recalling his two previous visits and poems and gesturing towards the ministrations of 'future Bards' (line 107) who will assume the burden of tribute. The Yarrow, Wordsworth states in his concluding lines, was 'To dream-light dear while yet unseen', proved 'Dear to the common sunshine' when eventually visited, and will be 'dearer still', as age (presumably) restricts the range and frequency of his travels, to 'memory's shadowy moonshine' (lines 107–12).

The Yarrow triptych therefore encapsulates many key aspects of Wordsworth's travel experience and travel poetry: the tension between imagination and reality, the filtering of experience through ever-deepening layers of personal and literary recollections, and the temptation to become his own most significant precursor. The final Yarrow poem was published in *Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems*, or more specifically in one of its component series, 'Poems Composed during a Tour in Scotland, and on the English Border, in the Autumn of 1831'. The compilation of poetic records of his journeys and excursions in the form of sonnet series or sequences of memorial verses in a variety of genres is a striking and innovative feature of Wordsworth's poetic

production in the second half of his life. These productions, which have no meaningful precedent in English poetry, typically take the form of loosely connected descriptions, observations and reflections, some tightly linked to topographical data, others inspired more by historical or literary associations. In the domestic context, the *River Duddon* series, *Yarrow Revisited*, and *Other Poems* and *Sonnets Composed or Suggested during a Tour in Scotland, in the Summer of 1833* lament the decay of traditional rural cultures and the advent of modernity, as well as addressing universal themes such as mutability and the ageing process. A prominent new strand in the Scottish itinerary poems is a strong vein of anti-touristic sentiment, as in the speaker's feelings on visiting the Isle of Staffa (site of Fingal's Cave) in the company of a boatload of day-trippers:

We saw, but surely, in the motley crowd,
Not One of us has *felt*, the far-famed sight;
How *could* we feel it? each the other's blight,
Hurried and hurrying, volatile and loud.

('Cave of Staffa'; *SSIP* 592; lines 1–4)

A tourist raging in time-honoured fashion against other tourists, Wordsworth longs to be a lone 'Votary' able to contemplate the handiwork of the 'sovereign Architect' with 'undistracted reverence'. It was the ironic consequence of so often following a well-beaten track that such privileged spectatorship was rarely possible, either at home or abroad.

Wordsworth's later years encompassed both the post-war British 'invasion' of a continent transformed by decades of war and the establishment of a new international balance of power. The memorial verses arising from his European tours in 1820 and 1835 typically draw moral and political lessons out of the places and landscapes visited, and display, in John Wyatt's words, 'a powerful surge of confidence in the role, not only of his country in Europe, but also in that country's ecclesiastical leadership of Christianity'.¹¹ This patriotic resumption of the traditional bardic role undoubtedly signals a new departure in Wordsworth's poems of travel: while embedded in the intersubjective context of family or friends, the later poems are less claustrophobically self-oriented than the work of the 'Great Decade'. It is the direction of travel of his country, and indeed of the whole of Europe, that now absorbs Wordsworth's writing to the relative neglect of personal experience or the misadventures of his spiritual journey.

Notes

1. David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (London: Methuen, 1987), 44.

2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), 157–8.
3. Andrew Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36, 41.
4. Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 33–9.
5. ‘Written’ was later altered to ‘Composed’, fuelling the myth of spontaneous poetic utterance and perceptions of writing’s secondary status.
6. Nicholas Roe, *The Politics of Nature: Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 120.
7. Tzvetan Todorov, ‘The Journey and its Narratives’, in Chloe Chard and Helen Langdon, eds., *Transports: Travel, Pleasure, and Imaginative Geography, 1600–1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 288–9.
8. Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787–1814*, rev. edn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), 17.
9. *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1952), II: 260–1.
10. Wordsworth describes Hamilton’s ballad thus in his headnote to ‘Yarrow Unvisited’, singling it out among ‘various Poems the scene of which is laid upon the Banks of the Yarrow’ (PTV 198).
11. John Wyatt, *Wordsworth’s Poems of Travel, 1819–42: ‘Such Sweet Wayfaring’* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 63.

*Spectacle, painting and the visual**Sophie Thomas*

From the introduction of the Eidophusikon in 1781 to the invention of the Daguerreotype in 1839, Wordsworth's long life coincided with a remarkable expansion in visual technologies, in the scope and popularity of visual entertainments, and in public access to the visual arts. It has been customary, however, to view Wordsworth as a poet who descried the 'despotism of the eye' and emphasized the powers, and the independence, of the imagination. This view has been interrogated and broadly rethought in recent scholarship, which has attended more closely to Wordsworth's lifelong interest in the visual arts, and to the complex location of the visual in his poetry and poetic theory. A more nuanced picture of Wordsworth has emerged, as a poet committed to understanding, and benefitting from, the philosophical and imaginative nourishment provided by a wide variety of visual forms, while using these insights to better define the nature and importance of the poet's task.

Wordsworth's often noted suspicion of the visual is, at least in sensory terms, related to his polemic against the picturesque, which he famously characterized in *The Prelude* as 'a strong infection of the age' (1805 *Prelude* Book II, line 156). With its formalization and pictorial codification of the scenes of nature, the picturesque was viewed by many as a 'mimic' art that left little room for the agency of the imagination. In a book of *The Prelude* appropriately devoted to the 'Imagination, How Impaired and Restored', Wordsworth relates how, for his maturation as a poet, it had been necessary for him to overcome a largely superficial dependence on the senses, particularly sight. He reproaches his younger self with attending too closely to the aesthetic appearances of nature, to transient visible effects, and with 'craving combinations of new forms, / New pleasure, wider empire for the sight' (Book II, lines 192–3). Reflecting on this immature state, in which the eye – 'The most despotic of our senses' – had mastered his heart and held his mind 'In absolute dominion' (lines 172–6), Wordsworth laments the associated neglect of the imagination. Distracted by the 'meager

novelties / Of colour or proportion', he found himself to be 'to the moods / Of time or season, . . . and the spirit of the place / Less sensible' (lines 160–4). In response, Wordsworth evokes a counter-narrative in which the forces of nature 'thwart' the tyranny of the bodily eye, and call upon the senses 'each / To counteract the other' in the higher service of 'Liberty and Power' (but this, he admits, 'is matter for another Song') (lines 179–85).

Our assessment of Wordsworth's view of visual media, and visual experience, has been shaped, again disproportionately, by another prominent set piece in *The Prelude*. His account in Book 7 of the 'unmanageable sight' (line 709) that was contemporary London is largely based on his experiences during his first extended stay in 1791, although also informed by subsequent visits. Taken together, the details of Wordsworth's account paint a rich picture of the 'shows' of London. These include shows 'within doors', such as the exotic displays of 'birds and beasts / Of every nature, from all Climes convened', that might be encountered at the Tower of London's menagerie, or William Bullock's museum (lines 246–7). Other spectacles of note are displays of exact models, and miniatures, of 'famous spots and things, / Domestic, or the boast of foreign Realms'; these clever replications of 'All that the Traveller sees when he is there' include 'St Peter's Church, or more aspiring aim, / In microscopic vision, Rome itself' (lines 265–80). Much of the spectacle Wordsworth describes, however, takes place simply in the street, or in the dedicated haunts of the pleasure-seeking masses – the boisterous crowds, the ritual parades of the fashionable, travelling entertainers, 'raree shows' (lines 190) and popular theatrical entertainments, such as those at Sadler's Wells, with their 'Giants and Dwarfs, / Clowns, Conjurers, Posture-masters, Harlequins' (lines 294–5). The lines devoted to Bartholomew Fair (to which Charles Lamb took Wordsworth in 1802) similarly catalogue the diverse elements of that 'Parliament of Monsters', with its acrobats and ventriloquists, waxworks and clockworks, albinos and other 'freaks of Nature' (lines 649–95). Some fifty lines are taken to capture the experience of this anarchic spectacle, 'a hell / For eyes and ears!' which Wordsworth claims thoroughly stupefies 'the whole creative powers of man' (lines 659–60, 655).

Among the sights of London to which Wordsworth so memorably responded, the panorama has attracted considerable commentary. Panoramic paintings – first patented by Robert Barker in 1787 – offered a 360-degree view of their subjects, fully immersed the spectator, and used every means possible to convey the illusion of being 'on the very spot'. The panorama's initial rise to prominence, from the 1790s to the mid 1800s, coincides broadly with Wordsworth's poetic career. During his visits to London it is

thought he may have seen Barker's view of Edinburgh from Calton Hill (on show in 1791), or his *London from the Roof of Albion Mills*, which burned down in March of that year; another possibility is Thomas Girtin's *Eidometropolis*, on show at Spring Gardens in 1802–3. Wordsworth's second extended visit to London, in 1792–3, ended shortly after Barker opened his purpose-built panorama rotunda in Leicester Square, where the first major work on display was the *Grand Fleet at Spithead*.

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth characterizes the panorama as a 'mimic' sight 'that ape[s] / The absolute presence of reality, / Expressing, as in mirror, sea and land' (Book 7, lines 248–50). The panorama engages in a form of aesthetic imitation 'fondly made in plain / Confession of man's weakness and his loves' (lines 254–5). The pleasure we take in mimetic visual displays, and their sensational effects, is exploited by the panorama painter and his 'greedy pencil', which takes in 'A whole horizon on all sides', and plants us

. . . upon some lofty Pinnacle
Or in a Ship, on Waters, with a World
Of life, and life-like mockery, to East,
To West, beneath, behind us, and before (lines 258–64)

Panoramas offered a 'wider empire for the sight' (Book 11, line 193) in geo-political as well as aesthetic terms, and Wordsworth's account is as sensitive to their charms as it is critical of their empty simulations of a fundamentally surrogate reality. Yet in Book 7, a sweeping word-painting of London, Wordsworth experiments with viewing positions that panoramas tend variously to employ, such as panoptic, prospect and immersive views, and it has been suggested that Wordsworth's project in *The Prelude*, with its exploration of the horizons of his poetic formation, shares some of the medium's totalizing impulses.

Although Wordsworth's efforts to distance himself from the potentially superficial temptations of the visual were central to the development (and articulation) of his own poetic powers, it would be wrong to regard this struggle as straightforwardly agonistic. One place where a more complex picture forms is in his attitude to pictorial illustration. On the one hand, we find emphatic denunciations such as those conveyed in a late sonnet, 'Illustrated Books and Newspapers' (1846), where the public's love of pictures, in an age of their increased incidence and circulation, is presented as deeply regressive:

A backward movement surely have we here,
From manhood – back to childhood; for the age –
Back towards caverned life's first rude career. (SP 406; lines 9–11)

Illustrations (the 'vile abuse of pictured page' (line 12)) speak to the eye rather than the understanding, which results in a worrying debasement of text: 'Must eyes be all in all, the tongue and ear / Nothing?' (lines 13–14). On the other hand, however, Wordsworth contributed to the very print media that fed the public appetite for images, such as literary annuals: for the legendary 1829 volume of the *Keepsake*, he composed 'The Country Girl' to accompany a picture by James Holmes. He also pursued the possibility of publishing his own work with illustrations, particularly once illustrated volumes of poetry, such as those of Samuel Rogers, had proved popular with the reading public. In 1815 two of his publications included engravings (from paintings by George Beaumont), yet because of the costs involved the first extensively illustrated volume of Wordsworth's poems, *Select Pieces from the Poems of William Wordsworth*, did not appear until 1843.

Wordsworth's lifelong interest in painters and paintings provides a broader context for understanding these apparent contradictions. While it is tempting to think about the poet as seeking experience primarily in natural environments, recent scholarship has emphasized how viewing and discussing paintings was always an important part of his domestic life. Among the most important artworks on display at Dove Cottage, for example, were two drawings sent by George Beaumont, of Applethwaite Dell and Conway Castle, and the pleasure and occasion for study these works provided is abundantly clear in Dorothy's effusive letter of thanks (*EY* 483; 20 June 1804; see also 517). The Wordsworths made contacts with several local painters, who were part of their broader social circle and whose work they often bought, such as Julius Ibbetson, William Green and the Reverend Joseph Wilkinson. Wilkinson's views of Lake District scenery were published in 1810 as a series of picturesque landscape engravings with an (anonymous) introductory essay by Wordsworth. That Wordsworth would later distance himself from this joint venture is less important than the way this commission allowed him to develop the masterful pictorial descriptions of the landscape that would become his own *Guide to the Lakes*, first printed on its own, in enlarged form, in 1820 (without illustrations).

Wordsworth's growing interest in, and knowledge of, the visual arts was largely cemented by his relationship with George Beaumont, a distinguished painter, collector and patron of the arts. This friendship has been described by many as being among the most important in Wordsworth's creative life, for it fostered a long period of fruitful collaboration. In addition to gifting Wordsworth a parcel of land, Beaumont presented him with a copy of Reynolds's *Discourses on Art*, which stimulated in Wordsworth a

powerful desire to have Beaumont point out to him 'some of those finer and peculiar beauties of Painting which I am afraid I shall never have an occasion of becoming sufficiently familiar with pictures to discover myself' (*EY* 517). Of a relatively small number of paintings inspired by Wordsworth's poems, five were by Beaumont, including a painting illustrating 'The Thorn' which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1806.¹ In 1815 Wordsworth used three of Beaumont's paintings as illustrations in the form of engraved frontispieces: one for *The White Doe of Rylstone* and one for each of the two volumes of his *Poems* also published that year – *Peele Castle in a Storm* and a scene illustrating a stanza of 'Lucy Gray'. Their friendship was mutually enriching: as Beaumont once wrote to Wordsworth, 'I never see you or read you but I am the better for it' (*MY* 1: 92n). In turn, Wordsworth was a sympathetic student of the poetic dimensions of Beaumont's paintings. In his ekphrastic sonnet 'Upon the Sight of a Beautiful Picture' (1811), Wordsworth praises a work of Beaumont's explicitly for its 'subtle' and 'Soul-soothing' power, its capacity to convey in 'one brief moment caught from fleeting time / The appropriate calm of best eternity' (*SP* 76–7; lines 1, 9, 13–14).

Visiting the Beaumonts in London in 1806, Wordsworth took advantage of the opportunity to study the painter's extensive collection of pictures, as well as those of others; he visited the collections of John Julius Angerstein and Lord Stafford, and attended exhibitions at the British Institution and the Royal Academy. Later visits produced further contacts with painters, such as James Northcote, David Wilkie and Benjamin Robert Haydon, to whom Wordsworth addressed a sonnet in 1815 – to which Haydon replied appreciatively, praising Wordsworth as 'the first English Poet that has done compleat justice to my delightful art' (*CH* 913; 29 December 1815). Further visits were made to exhibitions and to the growing collections of antiquities at the British Museum. Indeed, Wordsworth wrote to Haydon about the Elgin Marbles, exclaiming that 'A Man must be senseless as a clod, or perverse as a Fiend, not to be enraptured with them' (*MY* 11: 257–8). These visits to London present a rather different scene to that of Book 7 of *The Prelude*, one in which Wordsworth is increasingly embedded in cultural networks, with Beaumont's house in Grosvenor Square occupying an important site for the sociable interaction of poetry and the visual arts.

The reports of Wordsworth's contemporaries largely fill out this picture. There is for example Hazlitt's portrait of Wordsworth in *The Spirit of the Age*, which emphasizes his wise and sensitive appraisals of the genius of painters such as Poussin and Rembrandt; and Crabb Robinson's proclamation, after a visit with Wordsworth to the British Institution and the



Figure 4. Sir George Beaumont, *Peele Castle in a Storm* (1805)

National Gallery in 1828, that he ‘is a fine judge of paintings and his remarks are full of feeling and truth’.² Yet Wordsworth’s interest in learning to read paintings with greater critical sophistication increased, if anything, his sense of the superiority of poetry, at least for his own purposes. A fascinating conversation between a poet, painter and painting occurs in his ‘Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont’ (1806; *PTV* 266–8). In the poem, Wordsworth effectively creates for the reader two alternative paintings – the picture of the castle that resides in memory (a revived and reviving ‘picture of the mind’), and a ‘virtual’ picture, that is, the one he *himself* would have painted – which work in the poem (alongside the ‘actual’ picture, which is never explicitly described) to develop its broader themes of mourning and abiding hope, occasioned by the death of his brother at sea. Although the beautiful, still, reflective, but also imaginary image of the castle preferred by the poet must be reconciled with the sublime register of Beaumont’s actual painting, it is the medium of the poem that makes this moment of profound transformation possible (see [Figure 4](#)).

Wordsworth’s poetry, even his ekphrastic poetry, involves an order of visual representation that exceeds any material or sensory instances, which are never an end in themselves: as Frederick Pottle has observed, the visually

'matter of fact' supplies a mental image that in turn transfigures his (and our) perception and understanding of the real.³ Moreover, what matters for Wordsworth is not the world recalled in precise visual terms, limited to the language of the senses, but rather a secondary mode of seeing that takes that world and its objects into the mind, and the imagination, and examines them anew. His poems thus probe and very often dramatize aspects of the close relationship between seeing, remembering and imagining. In his sonnet 'To A Painter' (c. 1840; *LP* 333–4), Wordsworth admits frankly what for him are the limits of painting. While the painter's skill at producing 'likenesses' is praised, the poet's world is one in which the power of time to change things, and thereby to root 'likenesses' in the time of their own creating, is countermanded by the capacity of memory: for by its 'habitual light' he sees, with eyes 'unbedimmed', blooms 'that cannot fade' or die (lines 1–7).

The visual world, then, would seem to exist most powerfully for Wordsworth in the form of 'memory' pictures, or the pictures of the mind. Nevertheless, the relationship between the visual and the visionary, the seen and the imagined, is worked through in Wordsworth's poetry in a way that reveals their deep interdependence, and indeed their inherent incommensurability. It is not simply the case that Wordsworth uses instances of the naturally visible as a springboard into the imagined; rather, these instances provide points of access into matters that can exceed or repudiate visualization altogether, and that both invite and confound the poet's efforts to penetrate them. Even if this finds more muted expression in his later work, what is at stake throughout is the interrelationship of the perceiving subject and the external object, what Wordsworth called

A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without,
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.

(1805 Prelude Book 12, lines 376–9)

Arguably, 'ennobling interchange' characterizes the relationship of Wordsworth's work to visual matters and materials throughout his long career.

In his later life, between 1820 and 1838, Wordsworth travelled extensively on the Continent. These journeys involved visits to churches, collections and galleries and inspired numerous poems; after 1806 Wordsworth was the author of at least a further two-dozen ekphrastic poems. This later turn to ekphrastic verse is apparent in *Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems* (1835) and

in poems brought together in *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*. Peter Manning has noted that 'as Wordsworth became increasingly concerned with problems of representation and cultural transmission, ekphrastic poems, rare at the outset of his career, crop up with some frequency'; consequently, 'meanings once inscribed on the natural landscape in "Poems on the Naming of Places" now shelter in art'.⁴ Arguably, in his later career Wordsworth moves away from a visionary to a more material appreciation of visual forms, which finds expression in his interest in representing, textually, the experience of looking at visual representations. It is perhaps remarkable that a poet often thought of as profoundly anti-ekphrastic in his early work could produce such a volume of material on visual objects. But clearly the *subject* of the visual and its relationship to perception, memory and the imagination, was never very far from Wordsworth's central preoccupations.

Notes

1. Richard Altick, *Paintings from Books: Art and Literature in Britain, 1760–1900* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), 422.
2. Derek Hudson, ed., *Diary of Henry Crabb Robinson: An Abridgement* (Oxford University Press, 1967), 98.
3. Frederick Pottle, 'The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth', in Harold Bloom, ed., *Romanticism and Consciousness* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), 280–1.
4. Peter Manning, 'Cleansing the Images: Wordsworth, Rome, and the Rise of Historicism', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33 (2) (1991), 293.

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