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British Romantic Poets,
1789-1832
First Series

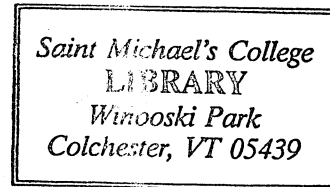
Edited by
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William Wordsworth

(7 April 1770 - 23 April 1850)

Judith W. Page

Millsaps College

- BOOKS: *An Evening Walk. An Epistle; in verse. Addressed to a young Lady, from the Lakes of the North of England* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1793);
- Descriptive Sketches. In Verse. Taken during a Pedestrian Tour in the Italian, Grison, Swiss, and Savoyard Alps* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1793);
- Lyrical Ballads, with a few other Poems* (Bristol: Printed by Biggs & Cottle for T. N. Longman, London, 1798; London: Printed for J. & A. Arch, 1798; enlarged edition, 2 volumes, London: Printed for T. N. Longman & O. Rees by Biggs & Co., Bristol, 1800; Philadelphia: Printed & sold by James Humphreys, 1802);
- Poems, in two Volumes* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1807);
- Concerning the Convention of Cintra* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme 1809);
- The Excursion, being a portion of The Recluse, a Poem* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1814; New York: C. & S. Francis, 1849);
- Poems By William Wordsworth, Including Lyrical Ballads, and the Miscellaneous Pieces of the Author*, 2 volumes (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1815);
- The White Doe of Rylstone: or The Fate of the Nortons. A Poem* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown by James Ballantyne, Edinburgh, 1815);
- Thanksgiving Ode, January 18, 1816. With Other Short Pieces, Chiefly referring to Recent Public Events* (London: Printed by Thomas Davison for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1816);
- A Letter to A Friend of Robert Burns* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1816);
- Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmoreland* (Kendal: Printed by Airey & Bellingham, 1818);
- Peter Bell, A Tale in Verse* (London: Printed by Strahan & Spottiswoode for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1819);
- The Waggoner, A Poem. To Which are added, Sonnets* (London: Printed by Strahan & Spottiswoode for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1819);
- Miscellaneous Poems of William Wordsworth*, 4 volumes (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1820);
- The River Duddon, A series of Sonnets: Vaudracour and Julia: and Other Poems. To which is annexed, A Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes, in the North of England* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1820);
- A Description of the Scenery of the Lakes in The North of England. Third Edition, (Now first published separately)* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1822; revised and enlarged, 1823); revised and enlarged again as *A Guide through the District of the Lakes in The North of England* (Kendal: Published by Hudson & Nicholson / London: Longman & Co., Moxon, and Whitaker & Co., 1835);
- Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1822);
- Ecclesiastical Sketches* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1822);
- The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 4 volumes (Boston: Published by Cummings & Hilliard, printed by Hilliard & Metcalf, 1824);
- The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (5 volumes, London: Printed for Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1827; revised edition, 4 volumes, London: Printed for Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, 1832);
- The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* [pirated edition] (Paris: A. & W. Galignani, 1828);



William Wordsworth, April 1798 (portrait by William Shuter; Cornell Wordsworth Collection, by permission of the Cornell University Library)

Selections from the Poems of William Wordsworth, Esq. Chiefly for the Use of Schools and Young Persons, edited by Joseph Hine (London: Moxon, 1831);

Yarrow Revisited, And Other Poems (London: Printed for Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman and Edward Moxon, 1835; Boston: J. Monroe & Co, 1835; New York: R. Bartlett & S. Raynor, 1835);

The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (6 volumes, London: Moxon, 1836, 1837; enlarged, 7 volumes, 1842; enlarged again, 8 volumes, 1851);

The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by Henry Reed (Philadelphia: J. Kay, Jun., and Brother / Boston: J. Munroe, 1837);

The Sonnets of William Wordsworth (London:

Edward Moxon, 1838);

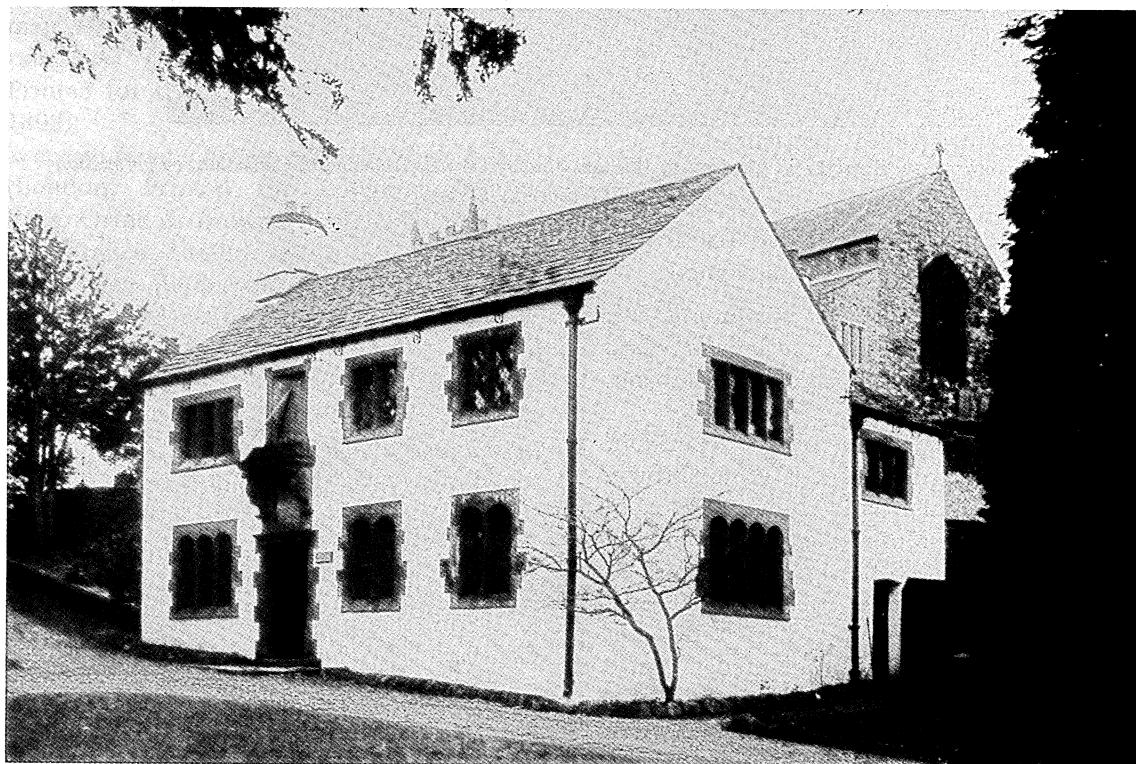
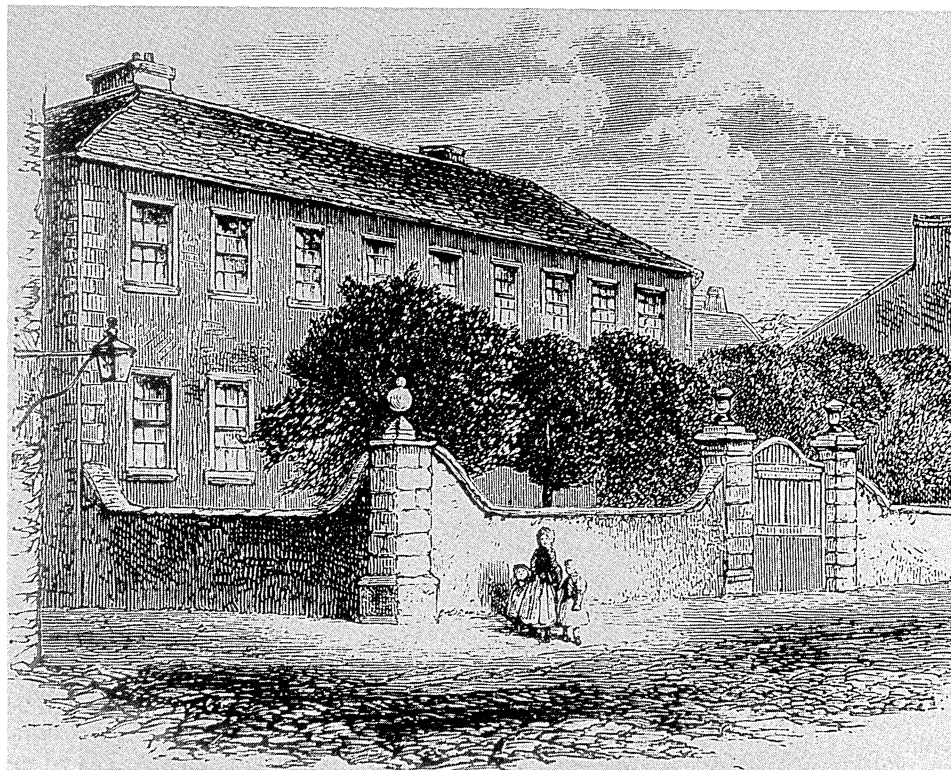
Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years; Including The Borderers, A Tragedy (London: Edward Moxon, 1842);

Kendal and Windermere Railway. Two Letters Reprinted from The Morning Post. Revised, with Additions (Kendal: Printed by Branthwaite & Son, 1845; London: Whittaker & Co. and Edward Moxon / Kendal: R. Branthwaite & Son, 1845);

The Poems of William Wordsworth, D.C.L., Poet Laureate (London: Moxon, 1845);

The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, D.C.L., Poet Laureate, 6 volumes (London: Moxon, 1849, 1850);

The Prelude, Or Growth of a Poet's Mind, An Autobiographical Poem (London: Moxon, 1850; New



Wordsworth's birthplace (top) in Cockermouth, where his father was the legal agent for Sir James Lowther (later Earl of Lonsdale), who owned the house; and Hawkshead Grammar School (bottom), where Wordsworth was a student from May 1779 until summer 1787

- York: D. Appleton / Philadelphia: Geo. S. Appleton, 1850);
- The Recluse* ["Home at Grasmere"] (London & New York: Macmillan, 1888).
- Collections:** *Poems of Wordsworth*, chosen and edited by Matthew Arnold (London & New York: Macmillan, 1879);
- The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 5 volumes, edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-1949; volumes 2 and 3 revised, 1952, 1954);
- William Wordsworth: Selected Poems and Prefaces*, edited by Jack Stillinger (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965);
- The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, 3 volumes, edited by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974);
- The Cornell Wordsworth*, 14 volumes to date, general editor, Stephen M. Parrish (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975-);
- The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979);
- William Wordsworth: The Poems*, 2 volumes, edited by John O. Hayden (Harmondsworth: Penguin / New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981);
- The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, edited by Paul D. Sheats (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982)—revision of the 1904 Cambridge Wordsworth;
- William Wordsworth*, edited by Stephen Gill, Oxford Author Series (London: Oxford University Press, 1984).

OTHER: Joseph Wilkinson, *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*, includes an introduction by Wordsworth (London: Published for Wilkinson by R. Ackermann, 1810).

Although William Wordsworth is now regarded as the central poet of his age, during his lifetime Byron or Scott, and later Tennyson, received more popular acclaim. Even readers in the nineteenth century who argued for Wordsworth's centrality did so on grounds different from those of many twentieth-century critics. For Matthew Arnold, who wanted to bolster Wordsworth's reputation late in the Victorian period, Wordsworth was the great lyrical poet of nature, spontaneity, and affirmation. Readers in this century, such as Geof-

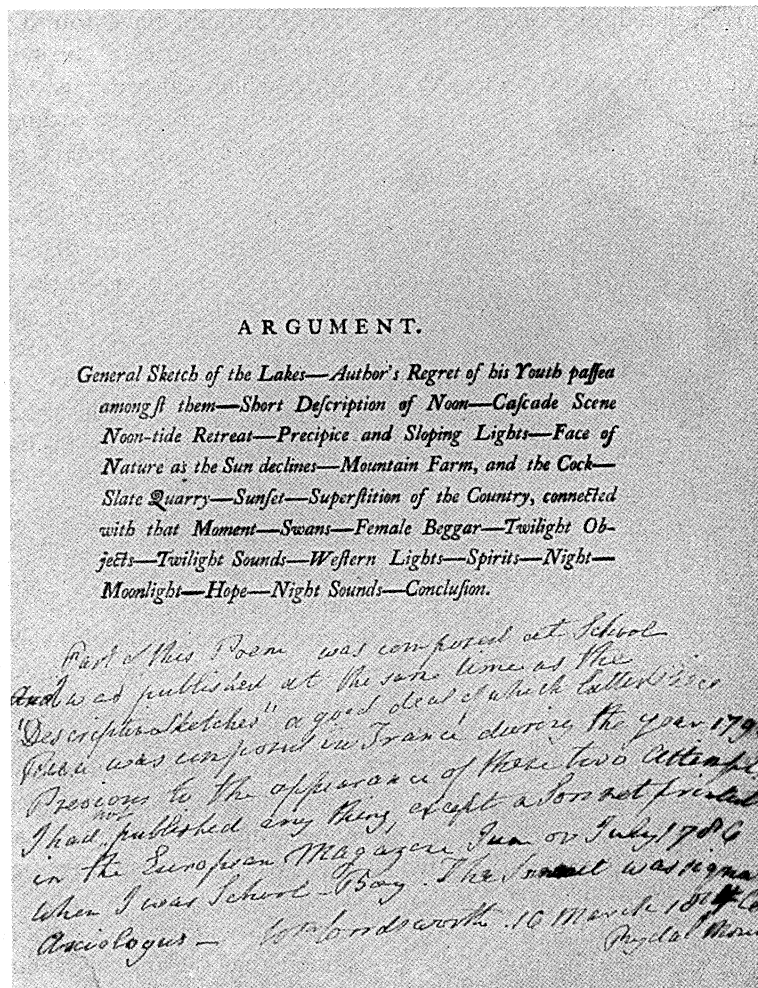
frey Hartman, have found Wordsworth's poetry powerful because of the tensions and contradictions which disturb its sometimes deceptively smooth surfaces. According to this reading of "Wordsworth," the poetry is a site of doubt and conflict, a view recently supported by critics interested in Wordsworth's ideological commitments. The view of Wordsworth as a conflicted and complicated poet whose works document the major events and concerns of his age—the French Revolution and the rise of counterrevolutionary tyranny, the effects of urbanization, mass communication, and war, the desires and limitations of the human mind—appeals particularly to late-twentieth-century readers.

William Wordsworth was born in Cocker-mouth, Cumberland, into a comfortable middle-class family with roots firmly planted in the Lake Country. His father, John Wordsworth, was legal agent to wealthy landowners, the Lowthers; his mother, Ann Cookson Wordsworth, came to the marriage from a conventionally respectable merchant family in Penrith. Wordsworth was the second child of five: Richard (who became an attorney); William; Dorothy (the poet's lifelong friend and companion); John (a sailor who drowned at sea in 1805); Christopher (who became master of Trinity College, Cambridge). Wordsworth did not leave many descriptions of his parents, but it is assumed that he and his siblings enjoyed a secure early life in Cocker-mouth, where they lived in a large, attractive house owned by the Lowthers. Although often away from home on business, John Wordsworth took time when home to introduce his children to English poetry and encouraged William to memorize long passages from the works of William Shakespeare, John Milton, and Edmund Spenser, a skill that he would treasure both as an allusive poet and as one who composed his own poetry from memory. William's young imagination was also nurtured by other readings, such as *Don Quixote* and the *Arabian Nights*, works mentioned in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's long autobiographical poem published posthumously in 1850.

In 1778 Ann Wordsworth died suddenly, and then, over the Christmas holidays of 1783-1784, John Wordsworth followed. In an early version of *The Prelude* (written in 1798-1799), Wordsworth interprets the effect of his father's death on his young consciousness:

The event

With all the sorrow which it brought appeared



Page from the copy of *An Evening Walk* (1793) that Wordsworth inscribed to his son William in 1846 (by permission of the Wordsworth Trust)

A chastisement, and when I called to mind
That day so lately passed when from the crag
I looked in such anxiety of hope,
With trite reflections of mortality
Yet with deepest passion I bowed low
To God, who thus corrected my desires.

John Wordsworth's death had material as well as spiritual consequences for William. At the time of his death, the Lowthers owed their agent well over four thousand pounds, a debt not resolved for almost twenty years, causing much financial difficulty and painful dependency for the Wordsworth children. When John Wordsworth died, the household was dispersed, with the boys sent back to school and Dorothy sent to live with relatives.

The Wordsworth boys attended Hawkshead Grammar School, known for excellent instruction

in mathematics and classics. Rather than live at the school, the Wordsworths boarded with Ann and Hugh Tyson. From Wordsworth's description in *The Prelude*, we know that Ann Tyson inspired love and gratitude in the young poet. She gave him considerable freedom to discover the power of the natural world and to begin to define himself in relation to that power. Wordsworth was also encouraged at Hawkshead by a young schoolmaster, William Taylor, whose love for poetry—particularly poets of sensibility (Mark Akenside, James Beattie, Robert Blair, Thomas Chatterton, William Collins, John Dyer, Thomas Gray, Charlotte Smith, James Thomson)—inspired him in his early years. In addition, Wordsworth read Robert Burns's *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), which initiated an admiration of Burns evident in Wordsworth's poetry and in his *A Letter to A*

Friend of Robert Burns (1816).

Wordsworth composed his first verses at Hawkshead in the fall of 1784 on the subject of summer vacation, and in 1785 he wrote verses on the bicentenary of the school. During his last year at Hawkshead, the 1786-1787 academic year, Wordsworth composed most of *The Vale of Esthwaite*, a descriptive poem with Gothic and supernatural elements, of which more than five hundred lines survive. In March of 1787 his first published poem, "Sonnet, On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress," appeared in *European Magazine*. Signing his name "Axiologus" (meaning, loosely, "worth of words"), Wordsworth revealed his witty consciousness of his surname and perhaps prefigured his faith in the worth of his own words.

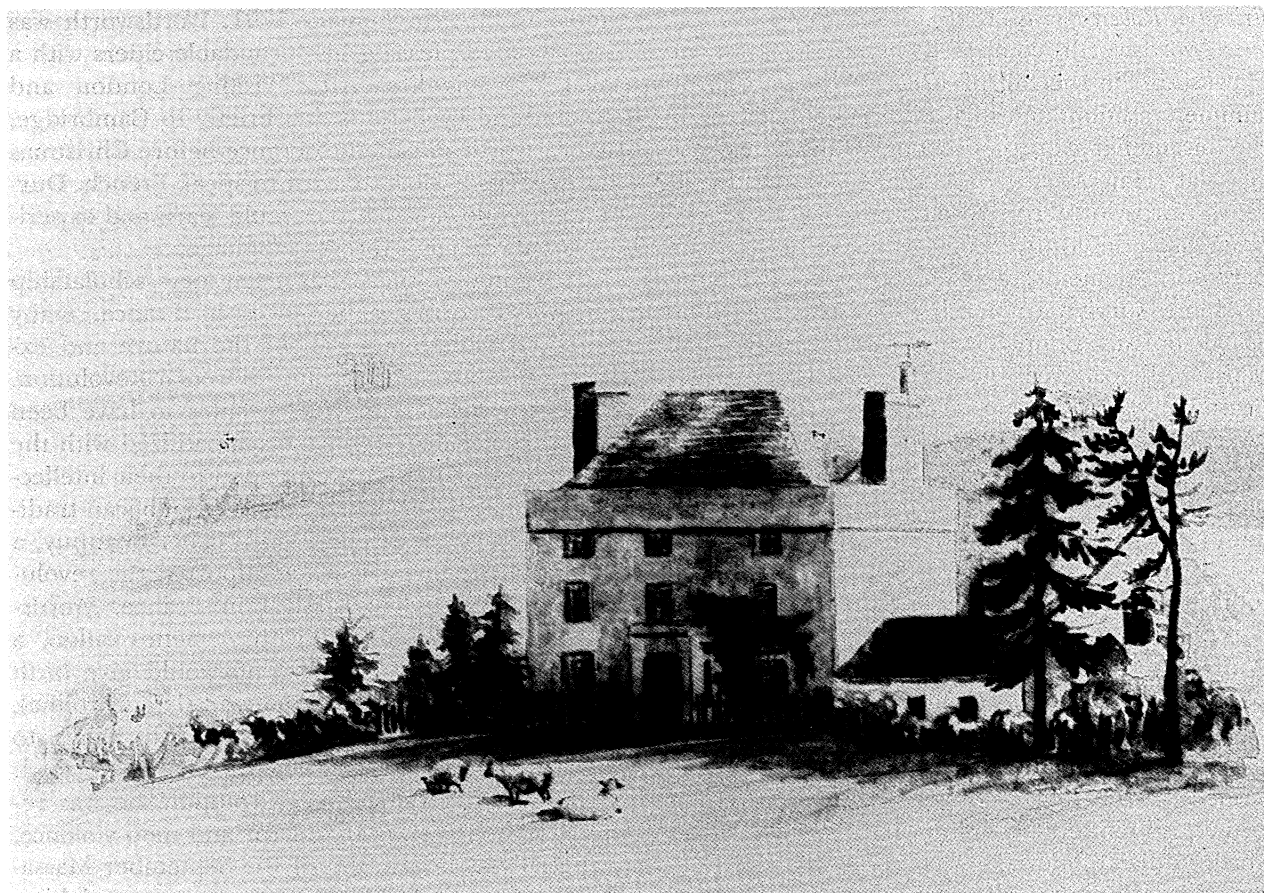
In the fall of 1787 Wordsworth went to St. John's College, Cambridge, as a sizar, a designation applied to students who paid reduced fees. With his strong background in mathematics, Wordsworth was well prepared for the curriculum, but he seems to have decided early in his university career that he would not follow the prescribed path to honors, and he did not distinguish himself at Cambridge. Instead, Wordsworth studied modern languages—particularly Italian with Agostino Isola, under whose direction he developed a lasting admiration for Italian poetry that in turn enriched his reading of Milton and Spenser. *An Evening Walk* (1793), the descriptive poem in heroic couplets that Wordsworth wrote during his Cambridge years, reveals not only his absorption in eighteenth-century descriptive poetry but also his love of and familiarity with Virgil, another lasting interest in his life.

As the end of his course at Cambridge approached, Wordsworth felt increasing pressure from older relatives to excel and to prepare for a career, presumably either in the law or clergy. Rather than commit himself, Wordsworth did what his guardians regarded as mad and dangerous: he left Cambridge from July to October 1790 and went with his Welsh friend Robert Jones on a walking tour of the Alps. The trip was "mad" because Wordsworth could use the time to study and "dangerous" because of the uncertain political climate of revolutionary France. But as Wordsworth confesses in book 6 of *The Prelude* (1805 version), "An open slight / Of college cares and study was the scheme," especially with "France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again." When he returned to Cambridge in the autumn and

took his B.A. in January 1791, Wordsworth was no closer to pleasing his formidable elders with a plan for his life. After visiting London and Wales, and even returning briefly to Cambridge, Wordsworth returned to France before Christmas in 1791, ostensibly to learn to speak French. During the following year he would learn and experience more than a foreign language.

Although there has been new scholarship on Wordsworth's experiences in France, many questions still remain about the nature and extent of his involvement in the French Revolution. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth claims to have been rather aloof at first, but he sympathized with the Girondins' values and responded to their intellectual connection with the English republican tradition. He became friends with Michel Beaupuy, a highborn Frenchman who supported the revolution. Soon after his arrival in France, Wordsworth became involved with Annette Vallon, a young woman from Blois who would give birth to their child, Anne-Caroline (called Caroline), on 15 December 1792. Wordsworth seems to have been torn by conflicts during this period: while enthusiastic for the revolution, he was repelled by the increasing terror and mob violence, especially as he learned of the September Massacres in Paris in 1792; he was also aware of himself as an Englishman from a Protestant Establishment family involved with Royalist-Catholic Annette. In the midst of these conflicts and nowhere near a resolution, Wordsworth returned to England before the birth of his daughter Caroline, presumably because he was out of money.

The following year was emotionally tumultuous. Wordsworth spent some time in London with his brother Richard, who had followed the more conventional path of establishing a legal career. Then he traveled to the Isle of Wight and back through England on foot from Salisbury to Jones's home in Wales. While wandering across Sarum Plain, Wordsworth began early versions of his Salisbury Plain poems, published in part as the bleak tale "The Female Vagrant" in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and then finally as "Guilt and Sorrow" in 1842; he also memorialized his state of mind and visionary experiences on Salisbury Plain in *The Prelude*. On his way to Bristol from Wales, Wordsworth traveled up the Wye River and visited Tintern Abbey; he later remembered himself in the poem "Tintern Abbey" acting "like a man / Flying from something that he dreads," an apt description of Wordsworth's flight in 1793 from his own inner conflicts. Wordsworth proba-



Racedown Lodge, Dorset, probably as it looked when William and Dorothy Wordsworth lived there in 1795-1797 (painting by S. L. May; by permission of the Wordsworth Trust)

bly made a brief third and dangerous trip to France in October 1793, after England and France were at war. He may have witnessed, as Thomas Carlyle later reported his saying, the execution of the Girondin Antoine Joseph Gorsas. Given the climate in France and the execution of other Girondins, Wordsworth may have left the country in fear of his life. There is no record that he saw Annette or his child.

During 1793 Wordsworth published *An Evening Walk* and the poem he wrote during his year-long stay in France, *Descriptive Sketches*, both appearing under the imprint of the radical bookseller Joseph Johnson. Wordsworth wrote to his Cambridge friend William Mathews (23 May 1794): "It was with great reluctance I huddled up those two little works and sent them into the world in so imperfect a state. But as I had done nothing by which to distinguish myself at the university, I thought these little things might shew

that I could do something." According to Wordsworth, the poems received both "unmerited contempt" and inflated praise; Wordsworth later regretted that he had not submitted them first to readers before allowing them to be published.

Wordsworth also wrote, but cautiously did not publish, "A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff," an attack on the basic conservative values of the monarchy and the aristocracy associated with Edmund Burke. During this time Wordsworth came under the spell of William Godwin's *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and its assertion that the "independent intellect" can be divorced from the feelings and affections associated with family and traditional bonds. There is evidence that he helped to plan the radical Godwinian newspaper, *The Philanthropist*, that ran for several months in 1795. Wordsworth had returned to London to earn his way as a journalist, but hopes for a career were complicated by turmoil regarding his personal and political commit-



Silhouette of Dorothy Wordsworth, circa 1806 (by permission of the Wordsworth Trust)

ments in the repressive atmosphere of the 1790s. As he remembers in book 10 of the 1805 *Prelude*:

I felt
The ravage of this most unnatural strife
In my own heart; there lay like a weight,
An enmity with all the tenderest springs
Of my enjoyments. I, who with the breeze
Had played, a green leaf on the blessed tree
Of my beloved country—nor had wished
For happier fortune than to wither there—
Now from my present station was cut off,
And tossed about in whirlwinds.

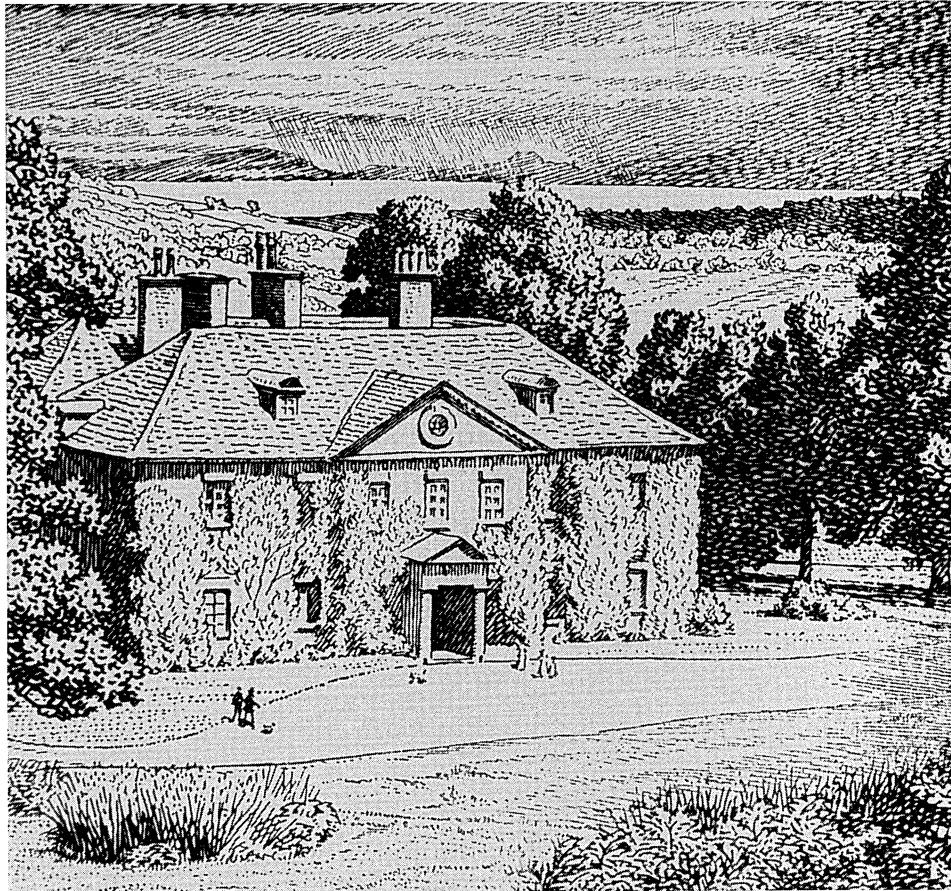
Wordsworth was still being tossed about by these winds when in 1795 he inherited nine hundred pounds from Raisley Calvert, a Lake District friend whom he had nursed in his final illness the previous year. In his generosity Calvert hoped that he might free Wordsworth to pursue the only career to which he seemed suited: that of poet. Other friends, the Pinneys, offered Wordsworth their Racedown Lodge in Dorset rent free: here Dorothy and William arrived on 26 September to reestablish their household. It is here that the Wordsworths cultivated their long relationship with Coleridge, whom Wordsworth

had met in Bristol in late summer or early fall of 1795.

Reestablishing close bonds with Dorothy was crucial to William's renewal after his experiences in France and his alienation from his native land. Dorothy is the "beloved woman" addressed in book 10 of *The Prelude* (1805 version), who "Maintained for me a saving intercourse / With my true self," and "preserved me still / A poet." His close relationship with Dorothy, who was to live as a part of William's family for the rest of her life, is the first of several relationships with supportive women who nurtured Wordsworth's career. With Dorothy keeping house and providing moral support and with his developing friendship with Coleridge, Wordsworth began to revive his hopes and ambitions in the spring of 1796.

In this year Wordsworth began composing his first major work, a tragedy in five acts (later titled *The Borderers*), which he would try unsuccessfully to have staged in London. The play was not performed, and it was not published until Wordsworth revised it in 1841 for his *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* (1842). In this work of 1796-1797 we see both Wordsworth's preoccupation with Godwinism and his growing rejection of it. Although the play does not have dramatic appeal for the stage, in it Wordsworth explores human character and relationships. Whereas in his Salisbury Plain poems he had shown how a person can be led to crime by the injustices of war and poverty, in *The Borderers* he creates the Iago-like character Rivers, who deliberately leads a companion to commit a crime and thus to destroy his own life. The innocent and well-meaning Mortimer abandons the old blind man Herbert to die after being convinced of the old man's evil nature. Without emotional attachment and respect for human affections, Rivers's "independent intellect"—the reason of Godwinian philosophy—proves a destructive and immoral force.

The Borderers, with its dense Shakespearean allusions and echoes, was Wordsworth's only attempt at drama, but it was also his first sustained attempt at blank verse, a metrical form central to his poetic program. And the writing of *The Borderers* led directly into the composition of his first "great" poem, also in blank verse, *The Ruined Cottage*, published in altered form in 1814 as book 1 of *The Excursion*. In this poem Wordsworth not only developed a magnificent blank-verse style, but he also created a narrative structure that would prove important for many later poems: that of having the poet-narrator hear a



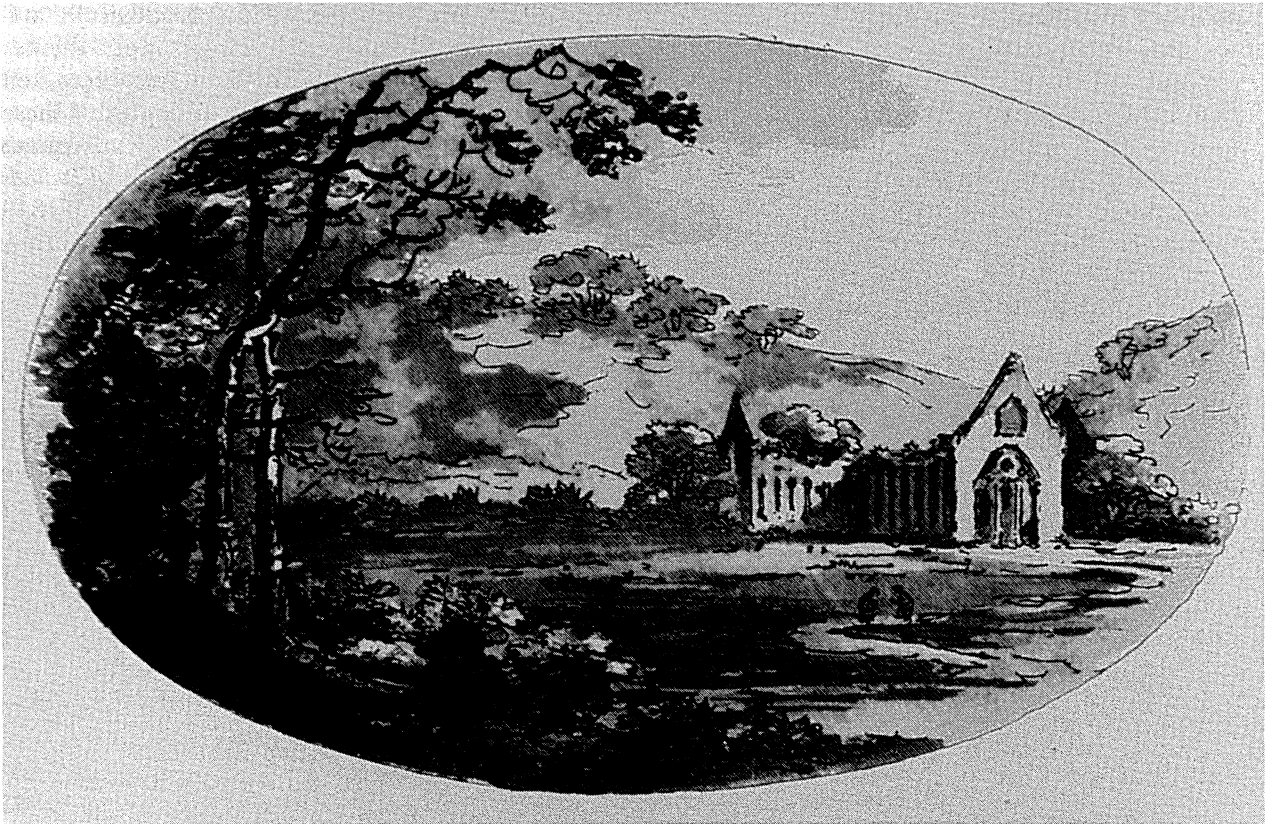
Alfoxden House, near Nether Stowey, where William and Dorothy Wordsworth lived from July 1797 until summer 1798 (illustration by Edmund H. New for William Knight's Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country, 1913)

story which changes the way he looks at the world and of having the reader and the narrator see objects in the world in a new way. In *The Ruined Cottage* the narrator records the peddler's story of Margaret, a young woman who is deserted by her husband—a victim of the pressures of war and poverty—and slowly loses her home, her children, and her desire to live. The poem begins with the image of “a ruined house, four naked walls / That stared upon each other”—a haunting description which asks the reader and the narrator to discover how and why the house became a ruin. In *The Ruined Cottage* Wordsworth tries to find meaning in human suffering and to establish the grounds for consolation. Both the narrator and the peddler seem to succeed, although Margaret never attained for herself the comfort of their higher knowledge.

To be closer to Coleridge, in July 1797 the Wordsworths moved to Alfoxden House, four miles from the little village of Nether Stowey in

Somerset where the Coleridges lived. They rented Alfoxden House, a mansion with land, including a deer park, for twenty-three pounds. Here Wordsworth continuously revised poems and composed more poetry, including several blank-verse poems that he hoped would one day become part of *The Recluse*, a projected long poem on “Man, Nature, and Society” that Wordsworth would never complete, although he was obsessed for many years by the immense challenge. Recognizing Wordsworth's poetic powers, Coleridge urged him on to this larger task, eventually in lieu of his own attempt to write the great long poem of the age. When Wordsworth published *The Excursion* in 1814, he announced to the world that it was merely part of a much longer and ambitious work yet to be written.

The Wordsworths' unconventional habits (housework on Sunday and walks at all hours of day and night), as well as their association with Coleridge's radical friend John Thelwall, led



Aquatint of Tintern Abbey by William Sawrey Gilpin, from William Gilpin's Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales &c. (1782), a book that William and Dorothy Wordsworth are likely to have taken with them when they visited the abbey in July 1798.

their neighbors to gossip that they were French spies, or worse. As a result, the Home Office sent a spy to Nether Stowey, who, as the well-known story goes, overheard Wordsworth and Coleridge whispering about "Spy Nozy" (Spinoza), only to learn to his disappointment that they were speaking of the author of an old book. Nothing came of the Spy Nozy incident. In "My First Acquaintance with Poets" (1823) William Hazlitt provides a wonderful retrospective description of Wordsworth at Alfoxden, which demonstrates how he might have aroused curiosity in the locals:

He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the *costume* of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge in his gait, not unlike his own Peter Bell. There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than outward appearances), an

intense high narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face. . . . He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern *burr*, like the crust on wine.

The Wordsworths remained at Alfoxden until the summer of 1798.

In addition to work on *The Recluse*, during the Alfoxden period Wordsworth wrote the varied poems that would be published anonymously that fall with selections from Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads*. These poems—literary renditions of folk ballads, ballad debates, and blank-verse poems—were mostly the products of Wordsworth's happy and productive spring of 1798. Wordsworth and Coleridge planned the volume to earn enough money for a projected trip to Ger-

many, where Coleridge especially wanted to go to learn German and to study German literature and philosophy—not initially to bring about a revolution in English literature. The 1798 volume sold well enough for new editions in January 1801 (with “1800” on the title page), 1802, and 1805, although Wordsworth never regarded the *Lyrical Ballads* as a great popular success. But even Francis Jeffrey, as he was about to launch into an attack of Wordsworth’s 1807 book, *Poems, in two Volumes*, sourly admitted in retrospect that “The Lyrical Ballads were unquestionably popular . . . for in spite of their occasional vulgarity, affectation, and silliness, they were undoubtedly characterised by a strong spirit of originality, of pathos, and natural feeling . . .” (*Edinburgh Review*, October 1807). And the *Lyrical Ballads* would earn Wordsworth admirers among the younger writers, including Thomas De Quincey, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, who must have been referring to *Lyrical Ballads* when he wrote of “Songs consecrate to truth and liberty” in “To Wordsworth” (1816).

Although the originality of Wordsworth’s poems is still being debated, their general artistic superiority to the magazine literature with which they shared some themes—such as celebrations of simplicity and rural life and an interest in the natural world—is beyond dispute. And in a poem such as “Tintern Abbey,” the product of Dorothy and William’s trip through the Wye Valley in the summer of 1798, Wordsworth produced a nature poem which is not really a nature poem but a profound and anxious meditation on loss and desperately sought consolation. In typical Wordsworthian fashion, the poem focuses not on the present visit of 1798 but on the memory of the 1793 visit and on all that has gone between: the poem celebrates not a visiting but a re-visiting, not vision, but re-vision. Near the end of his meditation, the poet addresses Dorothy, his silent auditor, for confirmation and consolation, a move which has recently sparked feminist critics to consider her part more closely.

Wordsworth added a now-famous preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* and revised it for the 1802 volume. Although some readers have viewed the preface as unclear or unhelpful in relation to the poems (a tradition perhaps deriving from Coleridge’s later repudiation of central ideas in his *Biographia Literaria* [1817]), Wordsworth made significant contributions to poetic theory and clarified his rhetorical strategy. Wordsworth wanted to reach a real audience who could

appreciate the subtleties of his paradoxically artful, complex poems celebrating simple themes and common people—idiot boys, forsaken women, shepherds—and to distinguish these poems from the “trash” in magazines. A frequent charge leveled at Wordsworth from *Lyrical Ballads* to the delayed publication of *Peter Bell* in 1819 was the failure of decorum. In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* he argues for the seriousness, importance, and permanence of basic human affections and for the use of nonornamental language (later explicitly linked to the King James Bible) to express these affections. Wordsworth outlines his psychological theory of the poetic composition, which reveals his perceptions of the associative processes of the mind. Situating himself in an age of crisis, Wordsworth links his poetic enterprise to the fate of the mind in the modern world:

For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting 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. . . . 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 endeavored to counteract it. . . .

Against this insatiable hunger for incident and titillation, Wordsworth sets the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Perhaps the best representative of Wordsworth’s program—for now he had one—is *Michael: A Pastoral Poem*, the last work added to the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. In *Michael*, a stately blank-verse poem, Wordsworth reinterprets the pastoral as a genre depicting a real shepherd living a life based on domestic industry and independent labor. Because of political and economic pressures, Wordsworth saw—and lamented—that the shepherd’s simple way of life was dying out. In a letter written shortly after publication, Wordsworth comments to the Whig politician Charles James Fox that he wrote *Michael* and another poem, *The Brothers*, “to shew that men who did not wear fine cloaths can feel deeply.” Using a simple, dignified language and verse form, Wordsworth conveys the simplicity and dignity of the

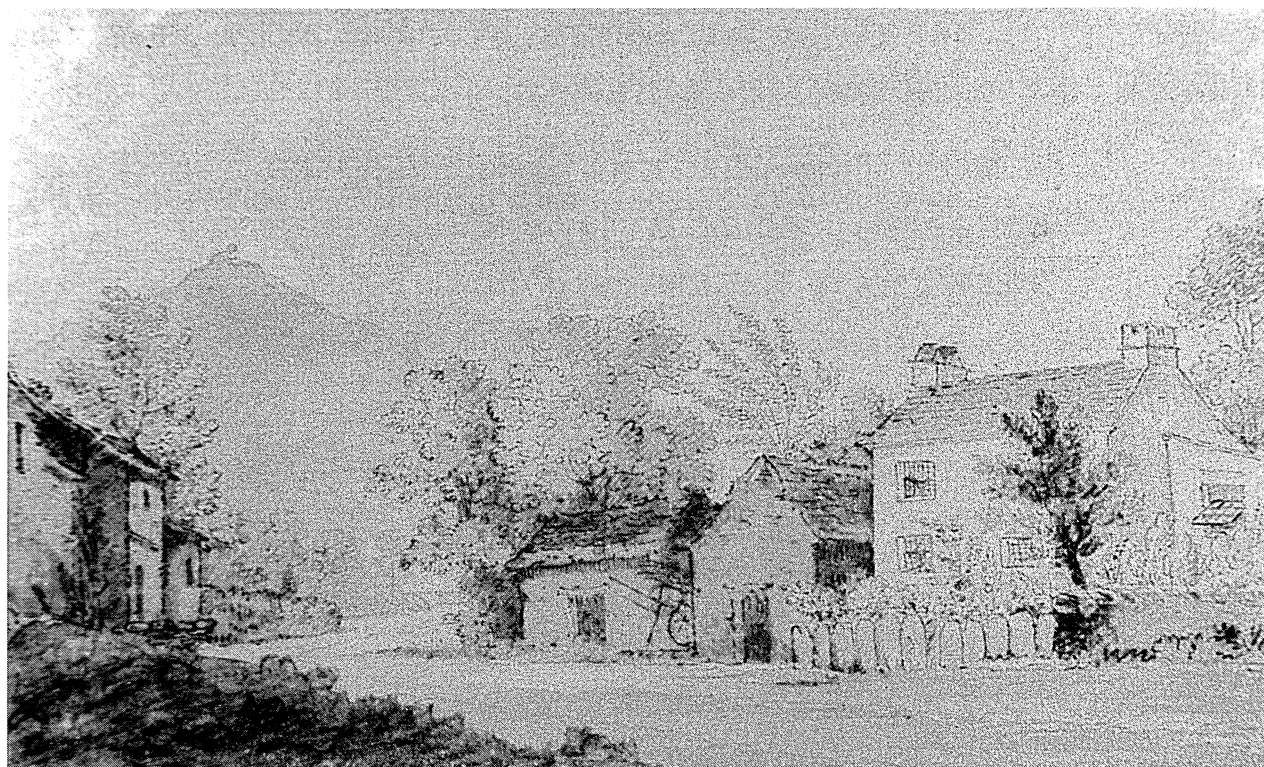
shepherd's life and the tragedy of his loss. In a typical Wordsworthian way, the narrator redeems Michael's loss by telling his story, thereby preserving the values of his culture and transmitting those values "to a few natural hearts" who hear—or read—the poem.

The years between the first and second editions of the *Lyrical Ballads* were not uneventful. William and Dorothy accompanied Coleridge to Germany, but they eventually split up, with the Wordsworths settling in the mountain village of Goslar. While Coleridge's intellectual pursuits in Germany were successful, Wordsworth withdrew into himself. He suffered from the nervous headaches that had afflicted him since boyhood and that would be one of several physical manifestations of his anxiety—what Coleridge called his "hyperchondriacal" complaints. In the bitter cold of the German winter (1798-1799), Wordsworth wrote English poetry, explaining in December that "As I had no books I have been obliged to write in self-defence." In this remarkable letter from William and Dorothy to Coleridge, with every inch of paper filled with inserted passages, Dorothy copied her brother's poems for Coleridge, including original versions of the Lucy poems "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" and "Strange fits of passion," the fragmentary "Nutting," and the recollected skating and boat-stealing episodes that would find their way into *The Prelude*. Hence, some of Wordsworth's finest poetry had its origins in this lonely but richly productive winter. Away from England in an alien culture, Wordsworth retrieved his English past and began to ask the questions about the direction of his life that would eventually lead to his central work, *The Prelude*.

The Wordsworths returned to England in May 1799 and traveled directly from Yarmouth to Sockburn-on-Tees, where their old Penrith friends the Hutchinsons were living. Here—much closer to home—they remained for seven months, and here Wordsworth reestablished his ties with his future wife, Mary Hutchinson. Wordsworth composed the second part of what has become known as the "two-part" *Prelude* of 1799: the first part, written mostly in Goslar, had dealt with early childhood; the second part proceeds through adolescence. Although happy to be writing and to be back in England, Wordsworth was plagued by financial troubles, for he had both lent money which had not been returned and borrowed money which he could not yet repay.

With his finances in no better shape and approaching his thirtieth birthday the following spring, in December 1799 Wordsworth moved with Dorothy to Grasmere, where they had rented the cottage at Town End (later known as Dove Cottage) for eight pounds a year, a much more reasonable sum than Alfoxden. William and Dorothy now had their "little Nook of mountain-ground" and quickly established their domestic harmony. Wordsworth worked again on *The Recluse*, celebrating his return to the Lake District and his newly found domestic ideal with what was to be the first book, "Home at Grasmere." In the fall of 1800 he wrote *Michael* and other poems and prepared for the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, which a new publisher, Longman (one with whom Wordsworth was to have a long if not entirely happy relationship), would bring out. Besides keeping house and thereby making Wordsworth's frugal domestic life possible, Dorothy also recorded that life in her Grasmere journals, with concrete details of cooking, cleaning, visiting, walking, and writing.

The year 1801 was not as productive for Wordsworth as the previous few, although the spring (which seemed to be Wordsworth's most productive season) of 1802 brought renewed activity: "The Leech-Gatherer" (later known as "Resolution and Independence"), the beginnings of the *Intimations Ode*, many lyrics inspired by his reading of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry, revision of the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, and the Appendix on Poetic Diction. As Wordsworth was struggling with "Resolution and Independence," a poem concerned with the personal and economic fate of poets, he had begun to receive letters from Annette Vallon. By the end of 1801 Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson had quietly decided to marry, so these letters must have been particularly troublesome. The Peace of Amiens had opened up communications once again between England and France, and Wordsworth decided that he must go to France in order to clear the way for his marriage. With Dorothy accompanying him, William spent the month of August 1802 in Calais with Annette and Caroline. While in Calais, Wordsworth composed a small group of sonnets, which, except for Dorothy's brief journal entry, form the only records of this trip. The sonnets reveal Wordsworth's anxiously intertwined and unresolved thoughts on politics, marriage, and paternity. In contrast to the revolutionary excesses of the 1790s—which gave birth to an illegitimate daughter and an illegitimate ruler in



Dora Wordsworth's drawing, circa 1826, of her birthplace in Grasmere, the cottage where the Wordsworths lived from December 1799 until May 1808 (based on a circa 1806 drawing by Amos Green; by permission of the Wordsworth Trust). Later called Dove Cottage, it was home to Thomas De Quincey in 1809).

France—Wordsworth looks toward personal and political stability in 1802 through marriage to an Englishwoman of similar background to his own and by reviving Milton's spirit to revitalize the "ancient English dower / Of inward happiness" ("London 1802"). Although he parted on friendly terms with Annette and Caroline and visited them in later years while in France, the poems reveal unresolved personal issues against the fragile background of peace in Calais.

While Wordsworth was no longer the young radical of the early 1790s, recent critics have persuasively argued that there are strong connections between Wordsworth's early radicalism and his later conservatism. Wordsworth did become more conservative, but he never became coldhearted and always maintained his hatred of slavery and tyranny. His response to the Terror in France led to a fear of mob rule and any massive threats to order. But the charges of apostasy, going back to Shelley in 1816, obscure real continuity in Wordsworth's values and locate a dramatic change in Wordsworth well beyond the time when he began to reconsider his moral and ideological commitments in *The Borderers* (written

in 1796-1797, unpublished until 1842).

When William and Mary were married on 2 October 1802, Wordsworth's finances were about to improve. Sir James Lowther, Earl of Lonsdale, had died the previous May, and his heir, Sir William Lowther, agreed to repay the debt to John Wordsworth's estate, which would mean around eight thousand pounds including interest, to be divided among the Wordsworth "children." Although the Wordsworths' finances were never easy, the growing family would live at Dove Cottage with some stability until 1808. Wordsworth's extended family, which included Dorothy, Mary's sister Sara Hutchinson, and often Coleridge and John Wordsworth of the East India Company, was his mainstay during this period, which also saw the birth of John (18 June 1803), Dorothy—whom they called Dora—(16 August 1804), and Thomas (16 June 1806); Catharine (6 September 1808) and William (12 May 1810) were born after the move to Allan Bank. Also at this period the Wordsworths established a lifelong friendship with Sir George and Lady Margaret Beaumont of Coleorton in Leicestershire. Sir George, a lover of poetry, amateur painter, collector of the arts,

and a Tory in politics, became Wordsworth's benefactor. In 1803 he gave Wordsworth some property at Applethwaite near Keswick, making Wordsworth a freeholder of Cumberland with political rights. (Later, in 1805, Wordsworth reluctantly accepted Lowther's help in buying property in Westmorland; he never built on either estate.)

In August 1803 Wordsworth, his sister, and Coleridge toured Scotland, where the travelers paid their respects to the memory of Burns and visited Sir Walter Scott. Although the tour had such high points, it was not a happy one. Coleridge, who had become increasingly unhappy in his marriage, especially after he had met and fallen in love with Sara Hutchinson, and who suffered from bad health and drug dependency, had decided to go abroad to the Mediterranean. In his envy of Wordsworth's domestic happiness, Coleridge complained to Thomas Poole (14 October 1803) that Wordsworth was "more and more benetted in hyperchondriacal fancies, living wholly among *devotees*—having every the [*sic*] minutest Thing, almost his Eating and Drinking, done for him by his Sister, or his Wife." Although these comments must be filtered through Coleridge's personal frustrations, they do reveal the extent to which the Wordsworth women devoted their lives to Wordsworth, providing the domestic harmony that made poetic composition possible. They not only cooked and cleaned and nursed, but they labored over fair copies of manuscripts and provided the poet with loyal support. In a lighter tone, but with the same implication, Henry Crabb Robinson later referred to Wordsworth's "three wives"—Mary Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Sara Hutchinson.

But despite tensions on both sides, there was still love and admiration between the friends—and Wordsworth still saw Coleridge as an essential inspiration to *The Recluse* project. While Coleridge was trying to regain his health in Malta and Italy, Wordsworth had hoped that his friend would send him notes articulating a philosophical system for *The Recluse*. But the notes never came, and Coleridge claimed that they had been lost on his trip back from Italy in 1806. Instead of working on *The Recluse* directly, Wordsworth once again took up the poem on his own life, which also became known as the "poem to Coleridge," since he decided to address the poem to his friend, both as a tribute to him and as a way to restore him to hope.

At the beginning of 1804, Wordsworth began working on *The Prelude* again in earnest,



Silhouette of Mary Hutchinson Wordsworth in early middle age (by permission of the Wordsworth Trust)

and by early March he had finished a five-book version. This version, although it ended with the visionary experience of climbing Mount Snowdon in Wales (which Wordsworth had undertaken in the summer of 1791 with Robert Jones), essentially covers Wordsworth's life through his residence at Cambridge. After completing this version, Wordsworth began to envision an even longer poem of epic dimensions that would articulate how he—as a representative Englishman—had sustained the disappointments of recent history caused by the failure of revolution in France and the growth of tyranny in Europe. In the expanded version, the poet revisits France of the 1790s in his imagination and relives the painful years of that decade; he shows how his heart and

mind were restored by his links to the natural world and the people who inhabit it.

Although Wordsworth follows a general chronological movement from childhood to maturity, *The Prelude* is not strictly chronological. The actual composition of the poem began in Germany with Wordsworth's memories of childhood experiences, later called "spots of time." But the 1805 poem actually begins with Wordsworth's dedication of himself to poetry, and it ends with the mountaintop epiphany on Mount Snowdon in 1791. In book 1 Wordsworth frames his poem in a Miltonic context, proclaiming that "The earth is all before me," lines which echo the end of *Paradise Lost*: "The world was all before them." But Wordsworth begins his poem in the fallen world and changes the person and number of the pronoun: his quest begins without Eve, without a ready-made community. In the course of book 1, the poet creates the fiction that the poem is in search not only of a hero but of a theme. Wordsworth goes through various possibilities, as indicated by the great writers of the past, perhaps "some British theme, some old / Romantic tale by Milton left unsung." He discovers in the course of this inventory that he is most invigorated by "the story of my life," which will encompass the theme and region of his song.

Wordsworth wrote *The Prelude* as if to suggest that in the act of composition he discovered meanings in past experiences that were not obvious at the time. He typically describes being disturbed or chastened by an event, only to recognize as he writes how that event has unconsciously influenced his life. In order to capture this structure of recollecting and then interpreting a past experience, Wordsworth constantly moves from excited narrative passages to discursive passages, from past to present. A central example of this method occurs in book 6 of the 1805 *Prelude* as Wordsworth describes his walking tour across the Alps in 1790 with Robert Jones. Wordsworth describes himself and Jones as having tremendous expectations of actually crossing the Alps: they are tourists seeking the sublime, adventurers who have "sallied forth" on a quest. As Wordsworth explains, "mighty forms seizing a youthful fancy / Had given charter to irregular hopes." To their astonishment and disappointment, though, the young men actually cross the Alps without realizing that they have done so. From this intensely remembered disappointment, the poet shifts with no transition except a new verse paragraph to this present recognition:

Imagination!—lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my song
Like an unfathered 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'.

Fourteen years later in the process of writing, the poet recognizes how the human mind can compensate for such disappointments.

By May of 1805 Wordsworth had completed the thirteen-book *Prelude*, which he viewed as a tributary to his projected work *The Recluse*, not his major achievement. Wordsworth continued to revise the poem until 1839, when it was beautifully copied as a fourteen-book poem by Dora Wordsworth and her friend Elizabeth Cookson. While critics debate the merits of each version, students now have the advantage of several parallel texts for comparison. Members of Wordsworth's circle provide the only really contemporary response to the 1805 text: after hearing Wordsworth read the poem, Coleridge was moved to record his praise of Wordsworth's "prophetic Lay" in "To William Wordsworth," and family and friends who heard it over the years recognized its greatness. But the public was not to see *The Prelude* until 1850, the same year as the publication of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.

Shortly after he finished the thirteen-book *Prelude*, Wordsworth wrote to Sir George Beaumont (13 June 1805):

I have the pleasure to say that I finished my Poem about a fortnight ago. I had looked forward to the day as a most happy one; and I was indeed grateful to God for giving me life to complete the work, such as it is; but it was not a happy day for me—I was dejected on many accounts; when I looked back upon the performance it seemed to have a dead weight about it, the reality so far short of the expectation; it was the first long labour that I had finished, and the doubt whether I should ever live to write the *Recluse*, and the sense which, I had of this Poem being so far below what I seemed capable of executing, depressed me much. . . .

Wordsworth's sentiments provide a poignant analogue to crossing the Alps: "the reality so far short of the expectation." Far from being the blindly egotistical poet some thought, Wordsworth was vulnerable to doubts and anxieties about his poetic enterprise. *The Recluse* cast a



Wordsworth circa May 1806 (portrait by Henry Edridge; by permission of the Wordsworth Trust)

shadow over the present and made Wordsworth uneasy about the future.

Wordsworth goes on in the same letter to name his most pressing grief: "many heavy thoughts of my poor departed Brother hung upon me; the joy which I should have had in showing him the Manuscript and a thousand other vain fancies and dreams." Wordsworth's much-loved younger brother John, who had planned to retire with his family to Grasmere and join their circle, drowned with many of his crew when his ship, the *Earl of Abergavenny*, was wrecked in a storm near Weymouth Bay on 5 February 1805. The Wordsworths were profoundly grieved. John had been a most sympathetic and affectionate brother, who shared a love of poetry and the natural world. Furthermore, John had wanted to work in order to free William "to do something for the world." Immediately following John's

death, Wordsworth tried to compose tributes to him, but he was so distraught that he could not record the verses that he actually composed because he was too weak to hold a pen and too reluctant to ask another mourner to take dictation. These attempts at composition and composure did, however, have therapeutic effects, and in the spring, as we have seen, Wordsworth returned to *The Prelude*. And in May or June of 1806, thinking of John's death in stormy seas and his own visit to Piel Castle in 1794, Wordsworth wrote his "Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, by Sir George Beaumont." Although the poet remembers from his experience that "Thy [the castle's] Form was sleeping on a glassy sea," he identifies more closely with the painting of the castle braving the angry sea. He sees in the pictured castle an image of his own possible endurance:

And this huge Castle, standing here sublime,
I love to see the look with which it braves,
Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,
The light'ning, the fierce wind, and trampling
waves.

John Constable's *Weymouth Bay*, painted with Wordsworth's loss in mind, provides a visual context for Wordsworth's description of the angry sky and sea.

During this period Wordsworth was also constantly worried about Coleridge, and, when he finally saw his friend again in the fall of 1806, he was stunned by his bad health and broken spirit. Coleridge later visited the Wordsworths while they were staying in a farmhouse in Coleorton, but there was to be no repeat of the Alfoxden years. The months at Coleorton (October 1806-June 1807) were not unhappy, though, especially since Hall Farm was so much more spacious for the growing family than Dove Cottage. It is here that Wordsworth read *The Prelude* to Coleridge and the gathered family. For the first time since childhood, the Wordsworths became regular churchgoers, a practice perhaps related to the crisis of John's death. Wordsworth, too, revealed his skill as a landscape gardener, designing a winter garden of evergreens and holly for Lady Beaumont. Wordsworth also traveled a good deal—to London, which he seemed to enjoy more than in his earlier years and in spite of his criticism of urban life—and around the North. A trip in late summer and early fall would lead to the composition in 1807-1808 of *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1815), a poem based on traditional ballads and local legends.

During the spring of 1807 at Coleorton, Wordsworth was preparing copy for his new publication to appear in May as *Poems, in two Volumes*. Included in these volumes were numerous lyrics, many of which had been written in the spring of 1802, forty-six sonnets, poems from the Scottish tour, and other works written over the last five years. The volumes included many poems now regarded as some of Wordsworth's finest lyrics, the Intimations Ode, "Resolution and Independence," "The Solitary Reaper," and "I wandered lonely as a cloud," to name just a few. Despite this artistic wealth, the volumes met with resounding rejections from reviewers. Francis Jeffrey, who might justly be called Wordsworth's nemesis at the *Edinburgh Review*, attacked the volumes without mercy in the October 1807 issue. The leitmotif of his criticism (echoed by other reviewers)

was that Wordsworth as a serious poet wasted his time on mean and uninteresting subjects. Because Wordsworth violated Jeffrey's standard of decorum, his poems seem to be parodies of themselves:

It is possible enough, we allow, that the sight of a friend's garden-spade, or a sparrow's nest, or a man gathering leeches, might really have suggested to such a mind a train of powerful impressions and interesting reflections; but it is certain, that, to most minds, such associations will always appear forced, strained, and unnatural; and that the composition in which it is attempted to exhibit them, will always have the air of parody, or ludicrous and affected singularity. All the world laughs at Elegiac stanzas to a sucking-pig—a Hymn on Washing-day—Sonnets to one's grandmother—or Pindarics on gooseberry-pye; and yet, we are afraid, it will not be quite easy to convince Mr Wordsworth, that the same ridicule must infallibly attach to most of the pathetic pieces in these volumes.

Jeffrey's comments about such problematic poems as "Alice Fell" and "Beggars" are diminished by his judgment that the Intimations Ode is "the most illegible and unintelligible part of the publication." Jeffrey implies that Wordsworth has feminized the art of poetry with his "namby pamby," his "prettyisms," his "babyish" verse; he approves of "The Character of the Happy Warrior" (written in part as a tribute to Horatio Nelson) because it is "manly." Implicit in Jeffrey's gendered standards is the notion that real poets (men) do not write poems about daisies and daffodils.

Jeffrey's criticism probably helped to ensure much poorer sales for *Poems, in two Volumes* than for the *Lyrical Ballads*; after seven years 230 of the 1,000 copies remained at Longman's. Jeffrey also went far to create the fiction that Wordsworth belonged to a school of poetry, a "brotherhood of poets who have haunted about the lakes of Cumberland." This allegedly conspiratorial fraternity included the likes of Coleridge and Robert Southey, who lived at Greta Hall, Keswick, with the Coleridges. While Wordsworth had known Southey as long as he had known Coleridge, and remained friendly with him all of his life, he did not particularly admire Southey's more-popular poetry. Nevertheless, the legend of the Lake School thrived in reviews for many years and was strengthened by the ideological connection of Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge as conservative turncoats. All of this made it per-

fectly natural for Byron to attack "the Lakers" en masse on political and poetic grounds in the dedication to *Don Juan* (1819-1824).

Following the attacks on his 1807 book, Wordsworth repeatedly expressed to friends his own faith in his work. When Lady Beaumont wrote her consolations, Wordsworth responded: "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 . . . teach the young and the gracious of every age, to see, to think, to feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous. . . ." More and more, this group of "gracious" readers became idealized as "the People" as opposed to "the Public." Beyond his sympathetic circle of friends and family, Wordsworth seemed to pin his final hopes on being vindicated by time and not by contemporary readers. In the "1815 Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," published in his *Poems By William Wordsworth* (1815), he bases his overview of literary history on the premise that great writers are not popular in their time. As evidence, Wordsworth points to Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1779-1781) and asks, "where is the bright Elizabethan constellation? . . . where is the ever-to-be-honoured Chaucer? . . . Spenser? . . . Sidney? . . . Shakespeare?" Despite the consolation of implicitly placing himself in this stellar company, Wordsworth still worried over the sale of his books and deeply resented his inability to make enough money from his writing "to buy his shoestrings." (For years he worked to make the copyright laws more responsive to the author's right to earn profits and pass on profits to his heirs.) But the poor reception of his 1807 poems made Wordsworth more reluctant than ever to publish.

Wordsworth's anxiety about publication is evident in the history of *The White Doe of Rylstone*, a poem in seven cantos completed by January 1808. From the beginning, Wordsworth was proud of *The White Doe*, representing it to his sympathetic circle as a spiritual work destined to be misunderstood by the public. Wordsworth felt that the poem would disappoint the expectations of readers looking for the kind of action and adventure found in Byron's popular tales or Scott's metrical romances, particularly *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to Lady Beaumont on 3 January 1808 that "I certainly misled you when I said that it would be a sort of romance, for it has nothing of that character." Wordsworth exploited neither the early Eliza-

bethan border setting and its Gothicism nor the potential for adventure and suspense inherent in the ballad material about the Norton uprising from Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). Instead of action or event, the narrative focuses on Emily Norton, whom Wordsworth compares to Edmund Spenser's Una and whose entire family is killed in an uprising against loyalists to Queen Elizabeth. Despite her loss of family and home, Emily finds spiritual consolation in her bond with a mysterious doe, who after Emily's death makes a weekly pilgrimage to Bolton Priory and the Norton gravesite.

Fearing to be misunderstood, Wordsworth went on for seven years before he was willing to publish *The White Doe*. Dorothy wrote to various correspondents, assuring that "we women" urge publication. While separated from William in March of 1808, she even wrote him: "Do, dearest William! do pluck up your Courage—overcome your disgust to publishing—It is but a *little trouble*, and all will be over, and we shall be wealthy, and at our ease for one year, at least." But even this dramatic plea was to no immediate avail. When he did publish the poem in 1815, Wordsworth insisted on an expensive quarto volume (twenty-one shillings) with large type, lots of space on the page, and an engraving of the doe after Sir George Beaumont's painting. Thus, Wordsworth intended his quarto to rival the presentation of Byron's more popular tales, or, as Wordsworth said, to show the world what *he* thought of *The White Doe*.

But *The White Doe* has never received the kind of critical attention Wordsworth thought it deserved and is not now usually included among Wordsworth's greatest accomplishments. While its reception was more mixed than the 1807 *Poems*, reviewers were generally confused about the nature of Emily's consolation and questioned the lack of explicit motivation. In the *Eclectic Review* (January 1816) Josiah Conder disliked the "mystical elements" and added that "The story is . . . so much more like history, than romance, so destitute of plot, and so purely tragical, that it forms a much better subject for a ballad, than for a poem of seven cantos, in which the reader is led to expect more of incident and detail." Jeffrey, too, objected to the "metaphysical sensibility" and "mystical wordiness" while musing that the material might have made an interesting ballad in the hands of Byron or Scott (*Edinburgh Review*, October 1815). But only Jeffrey claimed that "This, we think, has the merit of being the very worst

poem we ever saw imprinted in a quarto volume. . . .”

In May of 1808, several months after Wordsworth had finished writing *The White Doe*, the family moved across Grasmere Vale from Town End to Allan Bank, a larger house to accommodate the growing family, but one whose smoking chimneys were to bother the Wordsworths. During this spring and into the fall, Wordsworth composed some poetry intended to be part of *The Recluse*. For the three years he lived at Allan Bank, Wordsworth worked intermittently on what would become *The Excursion* (1814) and wrote a good deal of prose: his *Concerning the Convention of Cintra* (1809), a version of *A Guide to the Lakes—published as the introduction to *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire* (1810)—and three *Essays Upon Epitaphs*; the first of the *Essays on Epitaphs* appeared in Coleridge’s short-lived publication *The Friend* (22 February 1809), as did “A Reply to Mathetes” (14 December 1809, 4 January 1810). Wordsworth wrote *Concerning the Convention of Cintra* in response to what he saw as the British generals’ betrayal of Spanish and Portuguese forces. After the Spaniards and Portuguese had risen against Napoleon’s troops, the British negotiated and let the French go. Wordsworth interpreted this action as a betrayal of the cause of liberty, both a betrayal of spirited allies and a betrayal of British values going back to the republicans Wordsworth had celebrated in his sonnets of 1802. Coleridge and Wordsworth’s new friend and admirer Thomas De Quincey helped with the long and complicated task of seeing this pamphlet through the press.*

In the fall of 1810 came Wordsworth’s painful falling out with Coleridge. Coleridge had resolved to go to London, and Wordsworth’s old friend Basil Montagu and his wife had offered to take him into their household. Well acquainted both with Montagu’s regular habits and with Coleridge’s addiction and undisciplined way of life, Wordsworth confidentially warned Montagu that the plan would not work. On the way to London, Montagu carelessly told Coleridge what Wordsworth had said: this indiscretion marked the beginning of a long and painful (and to the outside observer rather ridiculous) string of misunderstandings about exactly what Wordsworth had said. Wordsworth absolutely denied that he had called Coleridge a “rotten drunkard,” as Coleridge believed. After many letters and the mediation of such friends as Charles Lamb and Henry Crabb Robinson, Wordsworth and Coleridge

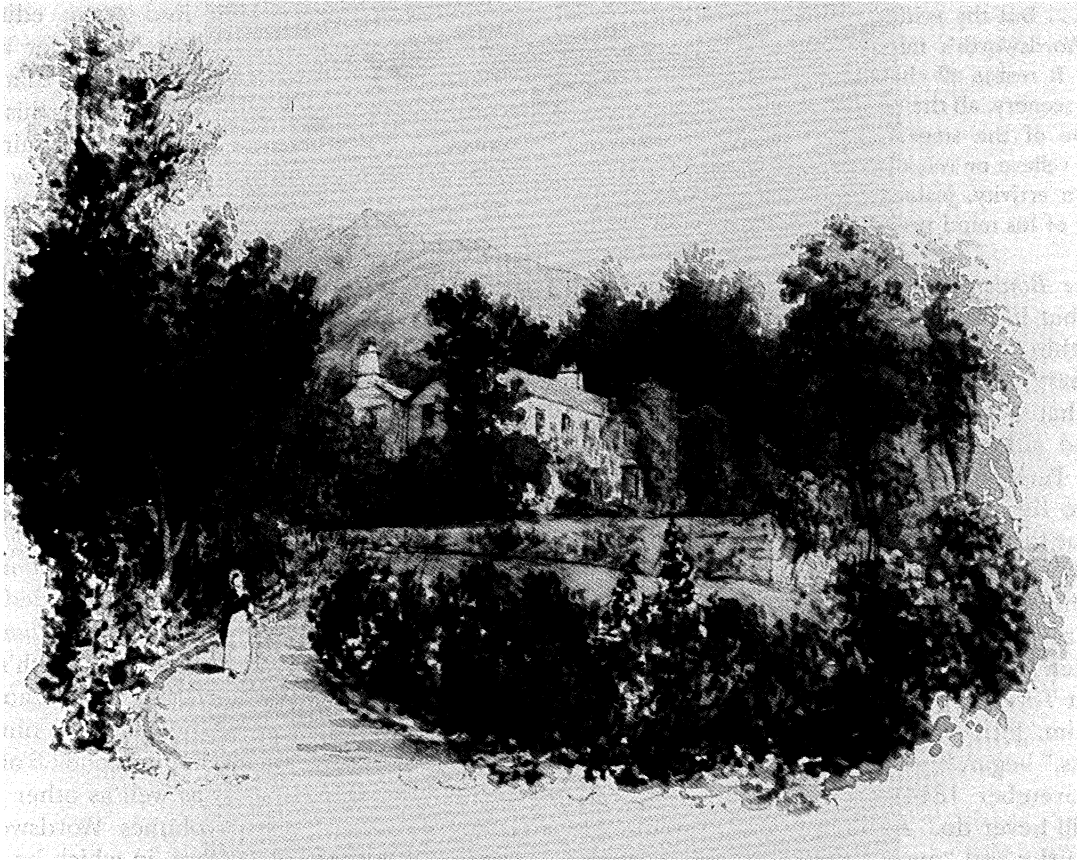
halted their dispute in the spring of 1812. Although they remained on friendly terms until Coleridge’s death in 1834, they never shared the same intimacy of their earlier years, and Coleridge’s interest in and support of Wordsworth’s poetry diminished.

Escaping from the discomforts of Allan Bank, the Wordsworths moved to the Grasmere Vicarage in June of 1811. Wordsworth’s four-year-old daughter Catharine died in June 1812 after a series of illnesses, and then six-year-old Thomas died in December, following complications from the measles. Wordsworth was a most loving and devoted father, and both he and Mary went through long periods of mourning. Wordsworth expresses his loss of Catharine—and her continuing presence in his mind—in a sonnet published in 1815:

Surprized by joy—impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom
But Thee, deep buried in the silent tomb,
That spot which no vicissitude can find.

Following these deaths, Wordsworth became even more solicitous of his surviving children. John was a slow but steady student who would eventually attend Oxford and enter the Church; Willy, a constant worry to his parents, eventually took over Wordsworth’s position as Distributor of Stamps in 1842; sadly, Thomas had been the only son who showed real scholarly ability. With his daughter Dora, Wordsworth developed an intensely close relationship; as she grew into womanhood, and especially following Dorothy Wordsworth’s decline and Sara Hutchinson’s death in 1835, the spirited, talented, and devoted Dora became Wordsworth’s companion and amanuensis.

In March of 1813 Sir William Lowther, Earl of Lonsdale, appointed Wordsworth as Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland and part of Cumberland, a position that Wordsworth hoped would eventually help supplement his income by more than four hundred pounds a year. The position required traveling several times a year around the counties to collect revenue, a practice suited to Wordsworth’s love of travel, although it was time-consuming. In some circles Wordsworth was never forgiven for accepting this patronage of the Lowthers and the government: he became Browning’s lost leader who “left us” for “a handful of silver” (in “The Lost Leader,” 1845). Shortly after this, the Wordsworths moved to what would be their final home, the spacious and



Rydal Mount, Wordsworth's home from 1813 until his death in 1850 (an 1831 watercolor by William Westall; by permission of the Wordsworth Trust)

well-situated Rydal Mount, about two miles from Grasmere. Dorothy Wordsworth heralded the family's new comforts: "We are going to have a *Turkey!!!* carpet in the dining-room and a Brussels in William's study." But she went on to assure her friend Catherine Clarkson that at least the Turkey carpet was really economical, if the Brussels was just "smart."

The year after he settled at Rydal Mount, Wordsworth published *The Excursion*, which he dedicated to Lord Lonsdale, and advertised as a portion of his work in progress, *The Recluse*. *The Excursion*, a long poem in nine books (in two quarto volumes), begins with the much-revised version of *The Ruined Cottage* as its first book. Wordsworth essentially develops four main characters or dramatic voices in the poem: the Wanderer (the Pedlar of *The Ruined Cottage*), the Poet, the Solitary, and the Pastor. The Wanderer introduces the Poet to his friend the Solitary, an unbeliever embittered by the loss of his hopes in the French Revolution and the death of his family.

The trio soon meet up with the Pastor, who joins in the attempt to console the Solitary and reconcile him to himself and to God. In the course of the poem, we overhear many stories pertaining to rural characters and their fates, and discourses on war, colonization, education, and religion as the characters stroll through the countryside. The Solitary remains unconverted.

In his preface Wordsworth explains that "The Recluse will consist chiefly of meditations in the Author's own person," but that in *The Excursion* "something of a dramatic form is adopted." This dramatic or dialogue form allows Wordsworth to present different points of view on various subjects, although, as the astute Hazlitt noted in a three-part review for the *Examiner* (21 and 28 August, 2 October 1814), the main personae also represent parts of Wordsworth's own mind:

Even the dialogues introduced in the present volume are soliloquies of the same character, taking different views of the subject. The recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in one

poet. . . . But the evident scope and tendency of Mr. Wordsworth's mind is the reverse of dramatic. It resists all change of character, all variety of scenery, all the bustle, machinery, and pantomime of the stage, or of real life,—whatever might relieve or relax or change the direction of its own activity, jealous of all competition. The power of his mind preys upon itself.

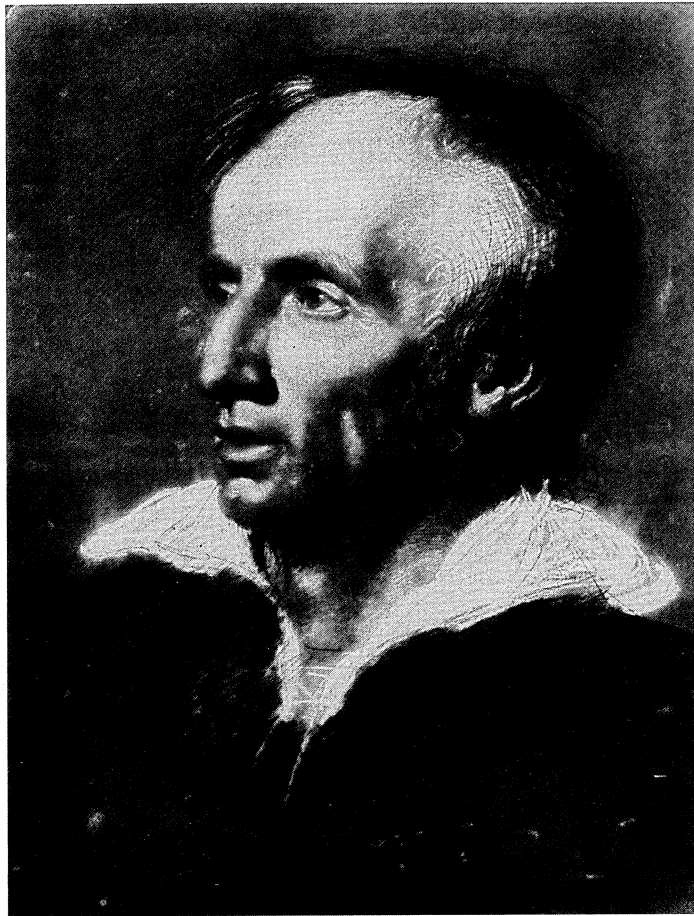
Like *The Borderers*, *The Excursion* might fail as drama, but it tells us a great deal about the conflicts within the poet's own mind. The fact that the Solitary (Hazlitt's "recluse") is not reconciled tells us that Wordsworth had to fight against alienation and melancholy, even though he embraced religion. Perhaps the revelation of this conflict appealed to Keats when he greeted *The Excursion* as one of the three things to rejoice about in the modern world. Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" pays tribute to the sometimes brilliant poetry of book 4, with its allusions to solemn nightingales and fading anthems.

But *The Excursion* did not meet with universal acclaim. Jeffrey, who gave Wordsworth up as "hopeless," began his review for the *Edinburgh Review* (November 1814) with the infamous quip, "This will never do." Although Jeffrey pointed to the obscurity and "mysticism" of certain passages, his main objection echoed his previous critiques of Wordsworth's lack of decorum: "Did Mr. Wordsworth really imagine, that his favourite doctrines were likely to gain any thing in point of effect or authority by being put in the mouth of a person accustomed to higgler about tape, or brass sleeve-buttons?" Similarly Hazlitt asserted, in the context of his more favorable review for the *Examiner*, that "We go along with him, while he is the subject of his own narrative, but we take leave of him when he makes pedlars and ploughmen his heroes, and the interpreters of his sentiments." In the *Monthly Review* (February 1815) John Herman Merivale perhaps expressed the sentiment of many readers, even today, when he claimed that the poem has "flashes of genius which no weight of pedantry and affectation can entirely suppress or extinguish." It is perhaps this overt didacticism that has most offended modern readers. Interestingly, the major reviewers did not object to the poem on political grounds, although when Shelley launched his attack on Wordsworth the following year, he assumed that *The Excursion* was the product of a reactionary renegade, a position that was later strengthened by the tone of Wordsworth's "Thanksgiving Ode" (1816) celebrating Napoleon's defeat.

The Excursion went into seven editions in Wordsworth's lifetime, but it has never assumed the place in his canon or in posterity that Wordsworth had cherished for it. In stating his preference for Wordsworth's lyric poetry against both *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*, Matthew Arnold helped in his 1879 edition to halt interest in the long poetry. But while *The Prelude* has come to be regarded as the center of Wordsworth's oeuvre, *The Excursion* never made a strong comeback. Nevertheless, as modern scholars want to learn more about Wordsworth's development and his influence on his own contemporaries, *The Excursion* warrants greater attention as the long work that they actually read, discuss, and quote.

In 1815 Wordsworth published, in addition to *The White Doe*, *Poems By William Wordsworth, Including Lyrical Ballads, and the Miscellaneous Pieces of the Author*, two volumes that included poetry written since the 1807 *Poems*, in two volumes. Several of the new poems reveal Wordsworth's passionate rediscovery of the classics: in "Laodamia," for instance, an admired poem in the nineteenth century, Wordsworth has in mind book 6 of the *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Heroides*, as well as other classical sources. Also in these volumes Wordsworth includes an important preface, in which he outlines his method of classifying his poems according to psychological categories or subject matter, as well as his analysis of the two faculties, imagination and fancy.

Although Wordsworth had also planned to publish *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner* in 1815, he delayed, perhaps because of the poor reception of *The White Doe*. Finally in 1819 Wordsworth brought out *Peter Bell*, written in 1798, and *The Waggoner*, probably written in 1806. *Peter Bell* had the distinction of being satirized before it was published: Keats's friend John Hamilton Reynolds heard the title of the poem and thought it ridiculous enough to write a spoof. Keats implicitly supported this sentiment, writing to his brother in 1819, "Wordsworth is going to publish a poem called Peter Bell—what a perverse fellow it is! Why wilt he talk about Peter Bells?" Keats, who by this time was disillusioned with Wordsworth, seemed to be basing his complaint on Wordsworth's choice of character and subject matter, as Jeffrey and Hazlitt had done for *The Excursion*. Reynolds's satire was but the first of many, which paradoxically made the real *Peter Bell* a much more popular volume than *The Waggoner*, a comic poem admired by and dedicated to Charles Lamb.



Wordsworth in 1818 (portrait by Benjamin Robert Haydon; by permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London).
The Wordsworth family, considering this drawing a rather dramatized image of the poet, called it "The Brigand."

Perhaps the most serious attack was Shelley's *Peter Bell the Third*, a work Shelley tried to publish in 1819 but which was not published until 1839—too late to influence the fate of the real *Peter Bell*. Shelley's poem is really not a parody of *Peter Bell* but a critique of Wordsworth's career and the political views that led him to write "odes to the Devil" such as the "Thanksgiving Ode." In Shelley's critique we see disillusionment with Wordsworth based on his political views and recent activities; for in 1818 Wordsworth had campaigned vigorously for the Lowthers in the Parliamentary elections and written *Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmoreland* on the occasion. In one of the addresses Wordsworth argues for "mellowed feudality" instead of democracy. In such claims and in his open attack on reform, Shelley saw betrayal and apostasy. Even Keats, who had met Wordsworth through their friend Benjamin Robert Haydon in London in December 1817,

had been disappointed to find Wordsworth away campaigning for the Lowthers when he stopped at Rydal Mount in 1818. Wordsworth, in his turn, defended his actions: he feared the influence of commercial and manufacturing interests and justified support of the Lowthers on the grounds that they would preserve counties like Westmorland and Cumberland and protect them from exploitation by urban areas. Wordsworth would later develop similar arguments in his opposition to the Reform Bill of 1832 and to other liberal measures.

While the younger generation of Romantic poets were becoming disillusioned with Wordsworth on political grounds, Wordsworth was continuing to publish his poetry and beginning to find a new audience. In 1820 the first collected edition of his poems appeared (four volumes excluding *The Excursion*), and then a five-volume collection came out in 1827. In 1828 a pirated edi-

tion of his complete works came out in Paris. During this period Wordsworth also published (among other works) a well-received collection of sonnets in *The River Duddon, A series of Sonnets: Vaudracour and Julia: and Other Poems* (1820); *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820* (1822), the fruit of one of his many trips to Europe; and *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822), sonnets influenced by his brother Christopher Wordsworth and his work in Church history. The works of this period are varied, although they have one quality in common: they are not part of *The Recluse*. Although Wordsworth continued to refer to this work, his prospects of finishing it diminished. In the sonnet "Nuns fret not" (1807) Wordsworth had praised the boundaries of "the sonnet's scanty plot of ground" for disciplining poetic impulses; he seems never to have found the "plot of ground" to discipline the unwieldy *Recluse* during these years. But he did not give up trying for a long time.

Wordsworth enjoyed growing popularity in the years between the death of Byron in 1824 and the ascension of Tennyson in the 1840s, especially after Scott's death in 1832. At Cambridge in the late 1820s he was admired and promoted by the Apostles, a group including Tennyson, Arthur Henry Hallam, and Richard Monckton Milnes. Debates were held at Cambridge and in London on the relative merits of Byron and Wordsworth. Tennyson himself revered Wordsworth and his poetry. In 1835 while Tennyson was in the Lake District and was rereading poems such as *Michael*, he composed his most Wordsworthian poem, "Dora," about which Wordsworth later reportedly confided, "Mr. Tennyson, I have been endeavoring all of my life to write a pastoral like your 'Dora' and have not succeeded."

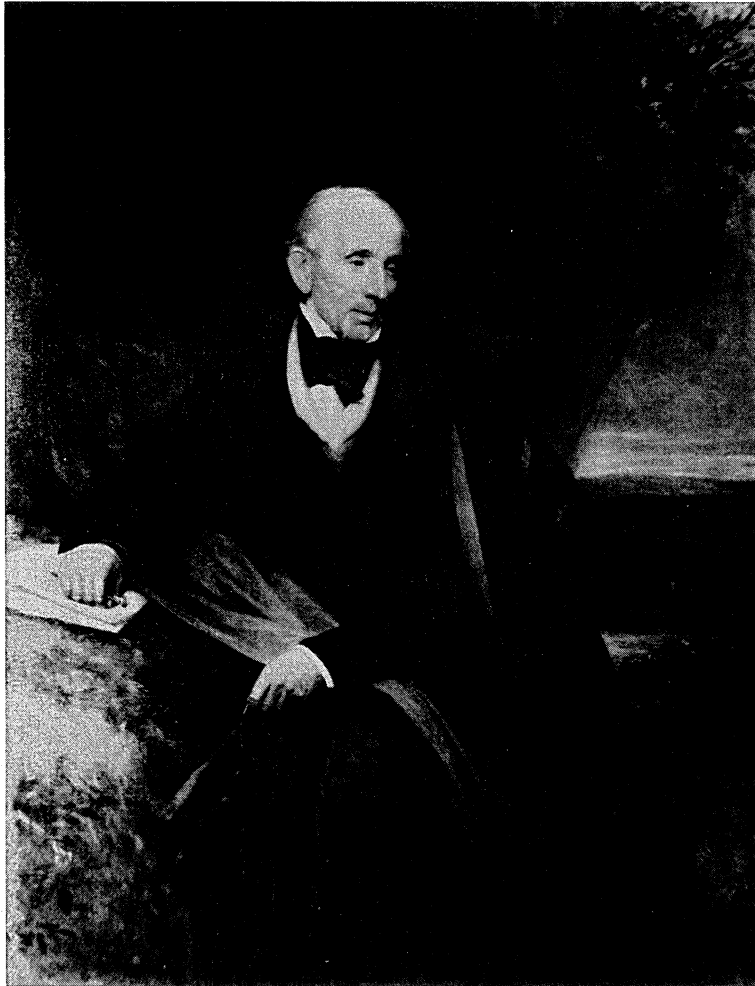
By 1835, when Wordsworth's *Yarrow Revisited, And Other Poems*, including poems from the most recent tour of Scotland and other works of the 1820s and 1830s, was published, Wordsworth's reputation was firmly established. In the *Monthly Repository* (1835) he was depicted as a survivor of various attacks and critical battles:

No poet has ever lived and written down, and that in the most quiet way, a greater host of difficulties than Wordsworth. The common consent which once denied him a place amongst the bards of his age and country, now seems to concede to him the highest rank. He has overcome a world of prejudices, and also some just objections. A new theory of poetry; a practice which

made more startling whatever was most startling in that theory; an offensive defiance of all the common-place, adventitious aids of what is called poetical interest; the political hostility of the two great parties of the state in succession; the heavier charge, with all parties, of apostasy; the repeated, and what appeared the demolishing, attacks of the acutest and most influential criticism of the day; ridicule from all quarters through many years: these are the rocks and brambles over which he has pursued his path up the lofty eminence on whose heights he now peacefully reclines. This is the course of greatness.

There were still critics and readers who would bring various charges against Wordsworth (Browning's "The Lost Leader" was not published until 1845), but in the mid 1830s Wordsworth's poetic achievement could not easily be brushed off. Wordsworth's literary influence later went beyond the genre of poetry: novelists such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Gaskell all revealed their debt to a poet who understood the workings of time and memory and history. Wordsworth also received growing public recognition: honorary degrees from the universities of Durham and Oxford, a Civil List pension in 1842, as well as the poet laureateship in 1843. In his later years Wordsworth received hundreds of curious people at Rydal Mount each year, including, according to Arnold's story, a clergyman who asked whether he had written anything besides the popular *Guide to the Lakes*.

Reading Wordsworth's letters and poetry of the late 1820s and early 1830s, we also see Wordsworth entering the transitional culture of the Victorian age. This is particularly evident in Wordsworth's relationships with women. Although Wordsworth's marriage to Mary Hutchinson was long and happy (and, according to the recently discovered love letters between the two, passionate), he cultivated relationships with other women throughout his life. His later poems and letters reveal a man who greatly admired talented women—writers and poetesses (as they were called)—but always urged that women first fulfill their "womanly virtue" and acquire "Domestic habits" before they thought of anything else. Wordsworth endorsed the developing ideology of womanhood based on notions of female purity and spirituality played out in the domestic sphere. These ideal qualities are evident in a poem Wordsworth published in *The Keepsake* for the 1828 Christmas season, "The Promise" (later "The Triad"), in which he praises the domestic and nur-



Wordsworth in 1832 (portrait by Henry William Pickersgill; by permission of the Master and Fellows of St. John's College, Cambridge)

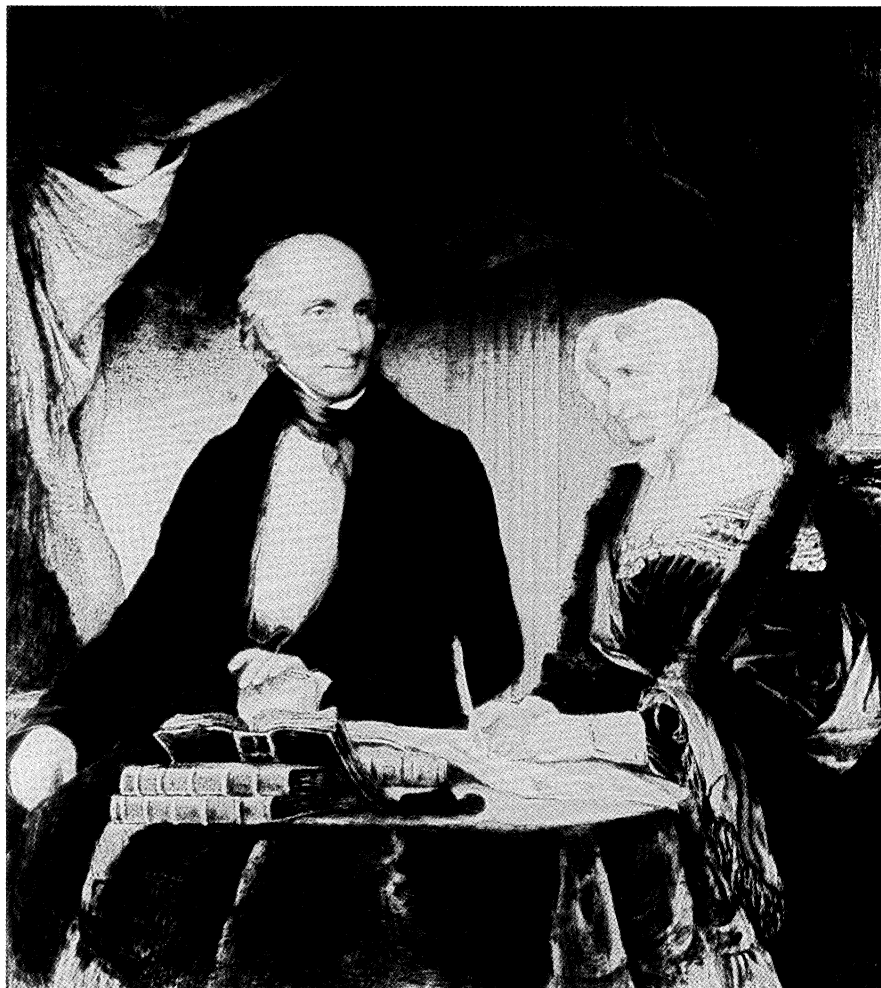
turing virtues of Edith Southey, Dora Wordsworth, and Sara Coleridge, daughters of the poets.

With his daughter Dora, Wordsworth revealed a possessiveness and dependency not evident in other relationships. Increasingly Wordsworth was bothered by an inflammation of his eyes that he had since his early thirties, and in a poem written in 1816 ("A little onward lend thy guiding hand") he links Dora both to his need for guidance and his need to guide. As she entered her twenties, Dora's health became more fragile, and Wordsworth feared anything that would strain it. But he also depended on Dora's company and her skill as an amanuensis at Rydal Mount. His only conflict with Dora came when she wanted to marry Edward Quillinan, a widower who had been a family friend for many years. Wordsworth agreed to the marriage reluc-

tantly in 1841 when Dora was thirty-seven years old. When Dora died of consumption in 1847, Wordsworth never really emerged from his grief to compose again.

Although Wordsworth remained an inveterate reviser of his poems all his life (and in 1842 finally published *The Borderers* and *Guilt and Sorrow* in *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*), he did not write much new poetry during his last decade. But he did see several new editions and selections through the press, and he maintained a keen interest in how his poems were presented on the page. During the winter and spring of 1842-1843 Wordsworth dictated notes on his poems to his friend Isabella Fenwick, providing valuable insight into his poetry and his later perception of that poetry.

Letters and memoirs by friends and associates of the Wordsworths paint a picture of the



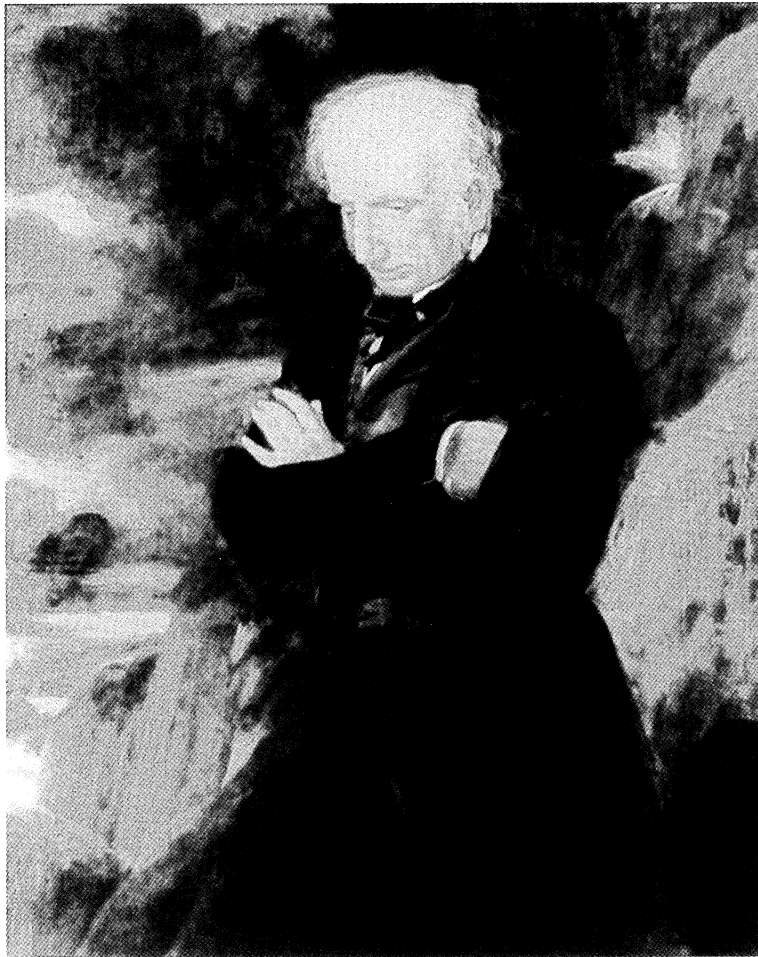
William and Mary Wordsworth in 1839 (portrait by Margaret Gillies; by permission of the Wordsworth Trust)

poet in his later years as a hearty man, still capable of climbing mountains and of extensive traveling. Wordsworth seems to have maintained a lifelong habit of composing poetry best while walking out of doors, later dictating the products of this activity. To observers such as Henry Taylor, Wordsworth's face seemed to take on the features of the outdoors: "It was a rough grey face, full of rifts and clefts and fissures, out of which . . . you might expect lichens to grow." Like the imposing mountains that he loved, Wordsworth became an image of strength and survival.

To the end, Wordsworth remained a man of conflicting impulses: he loved being settled at Rydal Mount, but he also loved to travel. When he was touring Italy with Crabb Robinson in 1837, he longed for home at the same time that he relished the freedom and discovery recorded in *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*, published in

Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years (1842). Harriet Martineau captures Wordsworth's impulses in her *Autobiography* (1877), when she records that Wordsworth warned her that in order to conserve her resources, she should charge houseguests for meat: "The mixture of odd economies and neighborly generosity was one of the most striking things in the old poet."

The old poet, known affectionately as "the Bard" to Hartley Coleridge, developed his final illness in March 1850. Following his usual habit of walking out of doors in all weather, Wordsworth came down with pleurisy and never regained his strength. He died at Rydal Mount on 23 April 1850, Shakespeare's birthday and sixteen days after his own eightieth birthday. Three months after her husband's death, Mary Wordsworth brought out *The Prelude*, having named the poem appropriately herself. Before his death, Words-



Wordsworth on Helvellyn, 1842 (portrait by Benjamin Robert Haydon; by permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London)

worth had authorized his nephew Christopher Wordsworth “to prepare for publication any notices of my life that may be deemed necessary to illustrate my writings.” The resulting two-volume memoir was longer than the brief notice that Wordsworth imagined, but Christopher Wordsworth thought that this longer work would discourage unauthorized biographies. In preparing his work, Christopher Wordsworth wanted to include mention of the affair with Annette Vallon, but other family members and friends objected. He did say cryptically that his uncle was “encompassed with strong temptations” in France. The memoir thus echoes Wordsworth’s treatment of the affair in *The Prelude*, where a fictional story of thwarted lovers (Vaudracour and Julia) is as close as Wordsworth gets to confronting this dimension of his French Revolution. While many

of Wordsworth’s friends and contemporaries knew of the affair, it was not rediscovered until the beginning of this century.

Reviews of *The Prelude* were generally not bad, although several reviewers criticized the flatness of long discursive passages and were puzzled by the problem of genre, since *The Prelude* was the first English autobiography written in verse and also contained elements of epic, romance, satire, and pastoral. The publication did not substantially change Wordsworth’s reputation, which was not as high as that of Tennyson, the new poet laureate. Wordsworth’s reputation had sagged enough by 1879 that Arnold felt a need to rehabilitate his poetry. With A. C. Bradley’s claim in the *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (1909) that “Wordsworth is indisputably the most sublime of our poets since Milton” and with the biographical revelations of George McLean Harper (1916) and



Dora Wordsworth, 1839 (portrait by Margaret Gillies; by permission of the Wordsworth Trust)

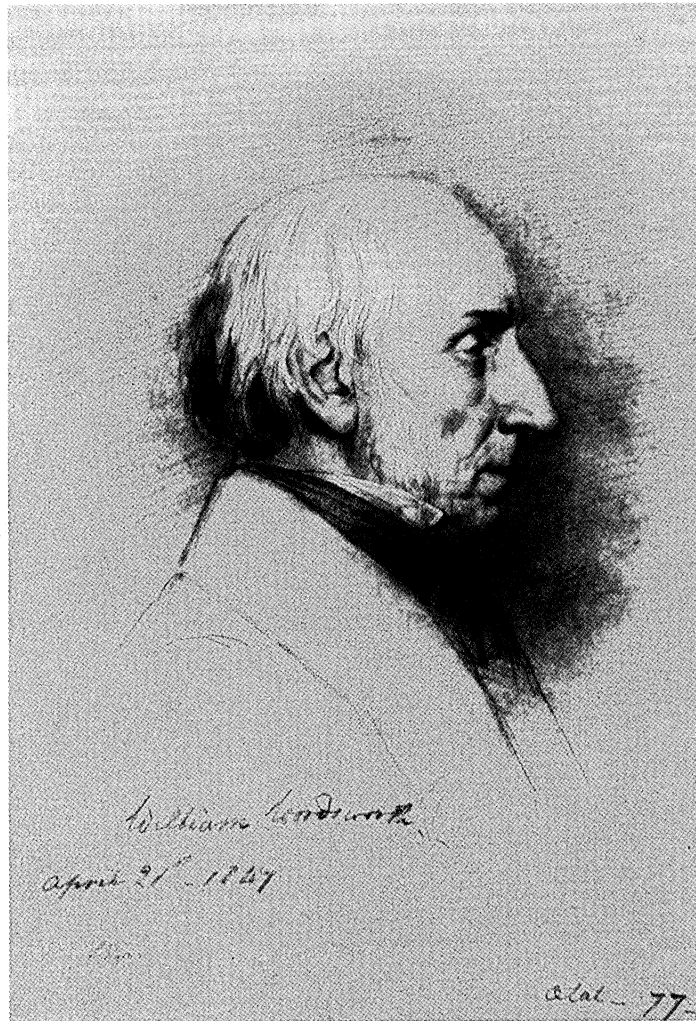
Emile Legouis (1922), interest in *The Prelude* began to revive.

For the last quarter of a century, critical focus on Wordsworth has been intense. While the New Critics disparaged the Romantics generally, the Romantics—and particularly Wordsworth—have been central to the work of many post-structuralists, who have found his texts particularly rich sites for interpretation. Although most of this work has focused on *The Prelude* and other texts of the great decade (1797-1807), readers with an interest in Wordsworth's historical situation are reevaluating the works of Wordsworth's youth and his later years. The Cornell Wordsworth editions, which began to appear in the mid 1970s, have facilitated new research. Although the judgment that Wordsworth's poetry declined after 1807 or 1815 still stands, several recent writers have suggested that we have not yet found a way to read Wordsworth's later poetry for what it

is rather than for what it is not. Perhaps if we think of Wordsworth as a poet who began writing in the eighteenth-century mode, worked through the Romantic period, and then entered the Victorian age, we can better understand the remarkable range of his achievement and of his contribution to English poetry.

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Drawing by Leonard Charles Wyon (by permission of the Wordsworth Trust)

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The main depository for manuscripts and papers of Wordsworth and his close circle is the Wordsworth Library, Grasmere. In the United States the libraries at Cornell and Indiana universities have strong Wordsworth collections.