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Contents

Articles

REGGIE WATTERS: 'We had classics of our own': Charles Lamb's Schoolboy Reading 114

LECTURES FROM THE WORDSWORTH WINTER SCHOOL 1998

PAMELA WOOF: Voices and Hauntings in Book I of the 1805 *Prelude* 129

GRAEME STONES: 'Upon a dromedary mounted high' 145

MARY WEDD: The Conjunction of the Matter-of-Fact and the Visionary in the 1805 *Prelude* 159

DUNCAN WU: Wordsworth's London 173

Reviews

RICHARD S. TOMLINSON on *The Romantic Reformation* by Robert M. Ryan 188

DAMIAN WALFORD DAVIES on *De Quincey's Romanticism* by Margaret Russett 189

Society Notes and News from Members 191

Editorial

All the full-length articles in this bumper issue of the *Bulletin* started life as lectures. Reggie Watters is ideally placed to write about the books devoured by Christ's Hospital boys in Lamb's day, and his survey of them is highly revealing. His lecture made for an entertaining and informative afternoon, and it is with great pleasure that we present it here.

The Wordsworth Winter School this year focussed on the *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, which Wordsworth began writing in 1804, and completed early in 1805; indeed, many of the contributors' citations refer to the poem as *1805*. Readers will see that the lectures collected here cover diverse aspects of the subject, and many different parts of the poem. Although the published lectures are no substitute for attendance at the Winter School, they do convey something of the flavour of the proceedings. I hope readers enjoy them.

This issue of the *Bulletin* will be published somewhat in arrears, for which I must render subscribers my deepest regrets. This was due to a catastrophic computer accident in which the entire typesetting for the issue was destroyed. As a result it has been necessary to undertake the work of typesetting, proof-reading, and copy-editing a second time, and this has led to the delay.

'We had classics of our own': Charles Lamb's Schoolboy Reading

By REGGIE WATTERS

> 'I should have thought,' said the officer . . . 'I should have thought that a pack of British boys—you're all British aren't you?—would have been able to put up a better show than that—I mean—'
>
> 'It was like that at first,' said Ralph, 'before things—'
>
> He stopped.
>
> 'We were together then—'
>
> The officer nodded helpfully.
>
> 'I know. Jolly good show. Like the Coral Island.'
>
> Ralph looked at him dumbly. For a moment he had a fleeting picture of the strange glamour that had once invested the beaches. But the island was scorched like dead wood—Simon was dead—and Jack had. . . . The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body.[1]

AS WILLIAM GOLDING'S HERO weeps at the close of *Lord of the Flies*, he is weeping both for what Golding calls 'the end of innocence' and for a whole tradition of British desert island literature. That tradition may have reached its apex with the great Victorian works like Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (which the naval officer names) or Stevenson's greater book *Treasure Island*, which he doesn't. It is easy to see why Golding chose to parody Ballantyne's tale of innocents rather than Stevenson's more ambivalent and disturbing yarn. I am a little surprised, in the age of *Flashman*, that no modern novelist has reconstructed Stevenson's story from Long John Silver's point of view, or perhaps, more tellingly and closer to Jean Rhys's prototype in *The Deep Sargasso Sea*, from the point of view of Long John's black West Indian wife. The sleight of hand in Golding's method was to apply adult attitudes to the world of *Coral Island* which that world was never designed to bear.

But what of the earlier tradition of desert island adventure which the Victorians had themselves inherited? I want to look particularly at some little known eighteenth-century examples of that tradition and I take my text from Charles Lamb's tantalisingly brief description of his schoolboy reading in *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago*. He is in the process of describing the Revd. Matthew Field, necessary Christ's Hospital bantam counterweight to the brutal Bowyer. Matthew Field is a man for whom I must confess I have always had a soft spot and, as David Wickham reminded us in a recent *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, he celebrates his 250th birthday this year.

James Leigh Hunt wrote of Field that 'a man of more handsome incompetence for his situation perhaps did not exist. He came late of a morning; went away soon in the afternoon; and used to walk up and down, languidly bearing his cane, as if it were a lily . . .'[2] Given the awful fate which awaited those assembled Bluecoats once they came within administrative range of Bowyer's birch, it has always seemed to me to illustrate some natural law of inbuilt checks and balances

[1] William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London, 1954), p. 248.
[2] James Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography* ed. J. E. Morpurgo (London, 1949) (hereafter Hunt), p. 66.

that their little world also contained a Matthew Field. The Matthew Fields of the profession get small credit for the teaching feats they accomplish by apparent acts of omission. They are, I suspect, always under threat from the Ofsted Inspectors of their day. Yet they do at least some good sometimes, by allowing the young idea to shoot off in its own directions. I guess wily old Bowyer tolerated Field largely because such an underling made the impact of his own draconian regime all the more electric and indelible.

Lamb names some of the secular texts which passed from boy to boy amid the mirth and misrule of Field's classes. These, he claimed, were read in place of their school task books, and his claim was borne out by his near contemporary, the novelist and Unitarian minister W. P. Scargill in his *Recollections of a Bluecoat Boy* published in 1829 and dedicated to Lamb himself. Here is Scargill on exactly *how* such reading was accomplished. The boys, he tells us, were set to work in pairs, sharing a dictionary and a grammar between them:

> There were many books on the desk at which we sat, and among these books it was not unusual to introduce some story book, which was very easily concealed, and so while we appeared to be learning our lessons, we were amusing ourselves with Robinson Crusoe or Jack the Giant Killer.[3]

George Orwell once described *Jack the Giant Killer* as perhaps the basic myth of the Western World and it is hard to imagine a more encouraging myth for young CH boys. As for *Robinson Crusoe*, Wordsworth claimed that 'children will derive most benefit from books which are not unworthy the perusal of persons of any age'. Here was a book which, along with the Bible, *Paradise Lost* and *Pilgrim's Progress* helped define the minds of eighteenth century Protestant England. Even more than *Jack the Giant Killer* it was surely the basic British myth.

And there is no doubt that it helped form adult lives from childhood. Coleridge's great hero, Sir Alexander Ball, whom he served as Secretary on Malta, had entered the Navy: 'in consequence of the deep impression and vivid images which were left on his mind by the perusal of *Robinson Crusoe.*'[4] This was the book which really lay behind that desert island tradition ended by Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Coleridge, again, liked the claim it could only have been written and loved by members of an island race. For him Crusoe was 'the universal representative—the person for whom every reader could substitute *himself*.'[5] Crusoe, in short, was the eighteenth-century version of God's Englishman. Even today his appeal may not have vanished completely, although I suspect he has dwindled to the archetypal figure of DIY Man.

Defoe himself came to see the story as an allegory of his own life, the shipwreck an emblem of his bankruptcy, much as Coleridge came to see *The Ancient Mariner* as an emblem of his own moral shipwreck.

Now to my text: 'We had classics of our own, without being beholden to "insolent Greece or haughty Rome", that passed current among us—*Peter Wilkins—The Adventures of the Hon. Captain Robert Boyle—The Fortunate Blue Coat Boy*—and the like.'[6]

Not simply an inert list of titles. Lamb presents them with all the urchin-like, iconoclastic panache of a literary Trabbs' boy. Here are texts fit for true British boys, otherwise condemned to toil at the Establishment's Latin and Greek classics! And like *The Arabian Nights* and the other 18th century children's tales he and Coleridge opposed to the Unitarian-Utilitarian purposes

[3] William Pitt Scargill, *Recollections of a Bluecoat Boy* (Swaffham, 1829) (hereafter Scargill), p. 92.

[4] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend* ed. Barbara E. Rooke (2 vols., London, 1969), ii. 539.

[5] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia* ed. George Whalley (London, 1984), ii. 165.

[6] Charles Lamb, *Elia and the Last Essays of Elia* ed. Jonathan Bate (Oxford, 1987), p. 21.

of contemporary educationalists, such books had, in Keats's phrase, no palpable designs upon their childish readers. Lamb's titles have never been pursued very far down the corridors of academia. For a start, it is misleading to lump them together as all of the same kind, and even Jonathan Bate in his excellent (and now I believe late-lamented) World's Classics *Elia* did that, classifying all three simply as 'popular eighteenth-century travel romances'—which the last, *The Fortunate Bluecoat*, certainly isn't.[7] Perhaps it may be worth trying to distinguish them in what Macbeth might have called a 'valued file', bearing in mind Dr Johnson's healthy strictures about debating the rival merits of a louse and a flea.

I'd like to add one other hint about CH boys' private reading: that marvellously evocative sentence in Lamb's earlier (1813) essay *Recollections of Christ's Hospital*: 'I remember when some half-dozen of them set off from school, without map, card, or compass, on a serious expedition to find out *Philip Quarll's Island*.'[8] That adds to our list another sea-adventure book, *The Hermit, or the Unparallel'd Sufferings and Adventures of Mr Philip Quarll*, first published in 1727 and frequently reprinted. Behind *Quarll*, again, lay *Robinson Crusoe*. Indeed, the four texts we now have can *all* be loosely classified as derivative from different strands of Defoe as follows. From *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) came the island sections of *Philip Quarll* and *Peter Wilkins*. From *Captain Singleton* (1720) came the privateering of *Captain Robert Boyle* and the central African adventures of *Peter Wilkins*. While from the first part of *Colonel Jack* (1722) came Book Two of *Quarll* and some of the background at least of *The Fortunate Bluecoat Boy*. Of course, this is all a little too simplified and schematic but nevertheless it may point to an underlying truth. In his pioneering tales Defoe, partly by accident, partly by journalistic instinct, had hit upon some of the dominant themes of the English fiction which was to follow: themes one might summarise as 'The City, the Sea, and the Change of Fortune'. For Christ's Hospital boys these themes were vital issues: the lives of most would depend upon them. And what was best about Defoe's stories was memorably defined by their two most illustrious CH readers. Lamb wrote to Wordsworth of their 'beautiful bare narratives' and Coleridge praised their 'every-day matter-of-fact Realness', going on (as Coleridge so often went on):

> Our imagination is kept at full play, excited to the highest; yet all the while we are touching or touched by common Flesh and Blood.[9]

But it is time to look at those Defoe-influenced Christ's Hospital classics a little more closely.

I shall deal with *Philip Quarll*, I hope not unfairly but as Charles Lamb himself does, almost in passing. Reading *Philip Quarll, Englishman* after *Robinson Crusoe* is a disappointing experience and very much a matter of *Love's Labour's Lost*: 'The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo.' Writing to his friend Walter Wilson, Lamb dismissed the book:

> I do not know who wrote Quarll. I never thought of Quarll as having an author. It is a poor imitation; the monkey is the best in it, and his pretty dishes made of shells.[10]

After which put-down, it may not be irrelevant to note that Lamb's correspondent was himself a Defoe man—the possessor of a vast collection of Defoe's work and Defoe's future biographer. Nevertheless, the relatively thin quality of *Quarll* can be quickly suggested. Some of the best of

[7] Ibid., p. 325.
[8] Charles and Mary Lamb, *The Works* ed. Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford, 1908), p. 180.
[9] Charles Lamb to Wordsworth, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1975-8), ii. 266; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, op. cit. ii. 167.
[10] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb* ed. E. V. Lucas (3 vols., London, 1935), ii. 371.

the book comes in its first part, when an English merchant, Edward Dorrington, describes finding Quarll living as a hermit on an inaccessible island off the west coast of Mexico. On a fishing expedition he clambers through a 'clift' in the rocks (significant Coleridgean word!) and discovers a lake, and beyond the lake the exotic landscape depicted in the frontispiece of William Lane's 1786 edition (along with the monkey!):

> A most pleasant land, flat and level, covered with a curious grass, something like chamomile, but of no smell, and of an agreeable taste; It bore also abundance of fine lofty trees, of different kinds and make, which in several places stood in clusters, composing groves of different height and largeness. [see figure 1][11]

It is quite easy to imagine young Christ's Hospital boys setting out on a leave-day, perhaps up the New River, in the hopes of finding some such outer London paradise. Incidentally, Scargill's memoir gives us interesting further evidence about the kinds of watergoing expeditions they were allowed to go on. Once, for example, he and a friend went up the Thames as far as Chelsea in a little skiff, with a sail to it, on an incoming tide and with a following wind. When they reached Chelsea and found both tide and wind still against them, they walked home, 'leaving the boat to find its way back to its owner as it might; for the owner's name and place of abode was painted upon it.' An anecdote with a characteristically abrasive eighteenth-century twist to it, which is only slightly lessened by the nineteenth century minister's comment that most probably the owner might have become conscious 'that he had acted wrongly in trusting two such boys with a boat.'[12]

Edward Dorrington's account of Quarll and his subsequent return down the Pacific Coast of South America left Coleridge, at least, with a few images which Lowes believed helped in the writing of *The Ancient Mariner*. There is for example a blood red sea and there is the Corpo Santo, St Elmo's fire, which burns at the masthead like the Mariner's death-fires. But such details could equally well have been taken from the traveller's books from which the writer of *Philip Quarll* himself derived them.

Once we reach Book Two, which retells the story of Quarll's deprived early years in London before taking to sea, the level of writing drops. There is nothing here to match the unforgettable details of the opening of Defoe's *Colonel Jack*, which Lamb praised sensitively, and which compares well with even the finest moments of Dickens.

Now for a second C.H. classic, again highly imitative of Defoe, *The Voyages and Adventures of Captain Robert Boyle, In Several Parts of the World. Intermix'd with the Story of Mrs Villars, an English lady with whom he made his surprizing Escape from Barbary* . . . etc. This *shortened* title will immediately give you some flavour of the book which appeared first in 1726, went through four editions before 1740, and had a dozen more printings in the second half of the century. The author was one William Rufus Chetwood, whose life seems to have been passed between Grub Street, the theatrical penumbrae of London and Dublin, and the debtors prison. A way of life which earned him perhaps very little money and a correspondingly small amount of reflected glory in the footnotes of literary history. For example, it was to Chetwood, in his capacity as prompter at Drury Lane, that the opening words of Henry Fielding's farce *Eurydice* (1737) are addressed:

> Hold, hold, Mr Chetwood; don't ring for the overture yet. The devil is not dressed; he has but just put on his cloven foot.

[11] Anon., *The Hermit; or, . . . Philip Quarll* (London, 1786), p. 3.
[12] Scargill, pp. 111-12.

THE
HERMIT:
OR, THE UNPARALLEL'D
SUFFERINGS
AND SURPRISING
ADVENTURES
OF
PHILIP QUARLL,
An *ENGLISHMAN*:
Who was lately discovered upon an uninhabited Island in the SOUTH SEA; where he lived above FIFTY YEARS, without any Human Assistance.

CONTAINING

I. His Conference with those who found him; to whom he recites the most material Circumstances of his Life; his being born in the Parish of St. Giles, educated by the charity of a Lady, and put Apprentice to a Locksmith.
II. His leaving his Master, and being taken up with a notorious House-breaker, who was hanged; his lucky Escape, and going to Sea a Cabin-Boy, marrying a famous Prostitute, enlisting a common Soldier, turning Singing-master, and afterwards marrying three Wives, for which he was tried and condemned at the Old Bailey.
III. His being pardoned by the King, turning Merchant, and being shipwrecked on this desolate Island on the Coast of Mexico.

With an elegant Frontispiece.

A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:
Printed for WILLIAM LANE, Leadenhall-street.
M.DCC.LXXXVI.

Frontispiece.

Philip Quarll and Beaufidelle his favorite Monkey.

Figure 1. Frontispiece and title-page of *Philip Quarll* (1786 edition).

THE
VOYAGES
AND
ADVENTURES
OF
Captain *Robert Boyle*,
In ſeveral Parts of the World.

Intermix'd with

The STORY of Mrs. *VILLARS*, an *Engliſh* Lady with whom he made his ſurprizing Eſcape from *Barbary*;

The HISTORY of an *Italian* Captive; and the LIFE of *Don Pedro Aquilio*, &c.

Full of various and amazing Turns of Fortune.

To which is added,

The Voyage, Shipwreck, *and* Miraculous Preſervation, *of*
Richard Caſtelman, Gent.

With a Deſcription of the City of *Philadelphia*, and the Country of *Penſylvania*.

LONDON:
Printed for JOHN WATTS, at the Printing-Office in *Wild-Court*, near *Lincolns-Inn Fields*. 1726.

Figure 2. Frontispiece and title-page of *Captain Robert Boyle* (1726 edition).

An even more transient literary fame had briefly come Chetwood's way in the first version of Pope's *Dunciad* where he appeared as the defeated rival of Edmund Curll in a pissing contest.[13] Perhaps Chetwood's grasp on fame, even in his most often reprinted book, was always a little tenuous. Even Charles Lamb misremembers his book's title, writing of the *Hon.* Captain Robert Boyle through a confusion with the name of the celebrated seventeenth-century Irish physicist and chemist. Chetwood's Robert Boyle was a very different animal. So at least it is comforting to record that Coleridge remembered his boyhood hero's name more accurately when he wrote to Godwin in December 1800:

> At present I have six excruciating Boils behind my right Ear, the largest of which I have christened Captain Robert . . .[14]

The book itself follows closely in the footsteps of such travel romances as Defoe's *Captain Singleton* of 1720. It was the kind of book a hack writer might put together from a contemporary travel account or two, spicing his tale with Barbary piracy, slavery and a mixture of bold British privateering in the Drake to Dampier mode, and binding it loosely in a picaresque style which allowed stories within stories to divert the narrative current whenever it seemed to be running slack. One notable feature of this eighteenth-century book is that we are certainly not in the rather assexual world of the later Victorian boys' story. In fact this novel, as its subtitle suggests, carries a recognisable charge of eroticism.

And a certain blunt crudeness about sex too. As early as page 13 a jealous husband, surprising his wife and her young lover 'playing at Rantum Scantum', has the lover castrated on the spot. Mrs Villars begins her story by telling how, as a rich merchant's orphan, she was tricked aboard the ship of a lustful seacaptain whose attempts to ravish her were only thwarted when she substituted her maid for herself in an extremely unlikely version of the old Shakespearian bed-trick. It is such quick-witted ingenuity as well as what the author describes as her 'charms' that marks Mrs Villars out as the heroine. She is a fit partner for the opportunistic Robert Boyle, whom she meets when they are both captives of Barbary coast pirates. Here, early stereotypes of the cruel, lustful oriental are played out, just of the kind that Edward Said has denounced. Chetwood's only touch of originality is the odd fact that *his* cruel Moor happens to be a renegade Irishman anyway. Unfortunately, the fact of his Irishness leads nowhere. I cannot help wondering, though, what kind of personal reception the Irish gave Chetwood when he became prompter of the Smock Alley Theatre, Dublin in the 1740s.

Robert Boyle is now a difficult book to find, and quite a difficult book to read, written in a slack style and extremely loosely constructed, with a narrative full of casual coincidences such as the surprise meetings of long-lost characters on other sides of the globe. For example, when Boyle, now captain of a vessel on a privateering venture to the South Seas, meets up with another English ship commanded by the real-life privateer Captain Dampier off the coast of Brazil, they entertain each other to a feast accompanied by Dampier's ship's musicians. During the evening Boyle recognises in his host's leading Castrato the young lover who had suffered such a rude fate on page 13. All of which serves merely to introduce a short interlude in which the unfortunate Eunuch proceeds to tell his story. Perhaps Chetwood's excuse might have been that such casual meetings and excursions demonstrated the power of something which the eighteenth century generally and Christ's Hospital boys in particular took rather seriously—something they would have called the working of the Providence.

[13] Alexander Pope, *The Poems* ed. John Butt (London, 1963), p. 385.
[14] *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. E. L. Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71), i. 653.

There is a recently published fragment from the history of Coleridge's own family which illustrates all this neatly. Sam's nearest brother Frank had become a midshipman at the tender age of eleven. He never saw his home again. But in a letter home to his beloved sister Nancy he described a meeting out in India, where he knew his elder brother John was serving in the Army, and which he explicitly thanks providence for bringing about. The interaction of eighteenth-century novels and eighteenth-century life, it seems to me, could hardly be demonstrated more poignantly:

> I was then in the lower deck, and though you won't believe it, I was sitting upon a Gun and thinking of my Brother, that is, whether I should ever see or hear anything of him, when seeing a Lieutenant, who had been sent to inform me of my Brother's being on board, I got off the gun; but instead of telling me about my Brother, he told me that Capt: Hicks was angry with me, and wanted to see me. Capt: Hicks had always been a Father to me, and loves me as if I had been his own child. I therefore went up shaking like an aspin leaf to the lieutenant's apartments, when a gentleman took hold of my hand. I did not mind him at first, but looked round for the Captain, but, the Gentleman still holding my hand, I looked in his face, and what was my surprise when I saw him too full to speak, and eyes full of tears; whether crying is catching I know not, but I began crying too, though I did not know the reason till he caught me up in his arms and told me he was my Brother and then I found it was paying nature her tribute, for I believe I never cry'd so much in my life. There is a saying in Robinson Crusoe I remember well viz. sudden joy like grief confounds at first. We directly went ashore, having got my discharge, and having took a most affectionate leave of Capt. Hicks I left the ship for good and all.[15]

In some such way as that the texture of novels and life must have interwoven for many of those Christ's Hospital readers.

Chetwood's tale abounds in basic and predictable English views of foreigners: 'most of the Portuguese are jealous, malicious, and revengful, and very seldom look into the Merits of the Cause.' Moors spend their time 'in Eating, Drinking, Sleeping, Dallying with their Women. Horses, and Prayers . . . and even their Prayers are hurried over so slothfully, as if they were asleep.'[16] It is also full of the basic British bravado which believes that one Britisher is worth any number of foreigners when it comes to a fight. This was, I confess, a view which proved very comforting to at least one schoolboy reading the last descendants of such stories curled up in Air Raid Shelters during the Second World War. Perhaps I can claim a very distant kinship with Charles Lamb and his fellows as we read our consolingly patriotic fantasies at opposite ends of that sadly complex historical phenomenon known as the British Empire.

In such tales daring and ingenuity usually bring tangible rewards ('the richest Prize that ever came into any Port of Italy') and having the right technology also helps enormously, particularly when fighting Savages. For instance, the passage illustrated in the Frontispiece of the 1726 First Edition ends as follows: 'When the morning dawn'd, we were amaz'd to see what Havock Death had made; the very Shores were stain'd with Blood, and we had not lost one Man of either of our Crews' [see figure 2].[17]

The book expresses a fast-moving crude vitality, and helps suggest the vigorous, bigoted, masculine fantasies about adult life upon which eighteenth-century Bluecoats were bred. Such

[15] *Coleridge: The Early Family Letters* ed. James Engell (Oxford, 1994), pp. 62-3.
[16] [William Rufus Chetwood] *The Voyages . . . of Captain Robert Boyle* (London, 1726), p. 122.
[17] Ibid., p. 169.

fantasies might be defined as part of the English eighteenth-century piratical ethic. Broadly speaking this is an ethic of expediency not far removed from that shown by the Mariner's shipmates after his shooting of the Albatross. Perhaps it is not too much to suggest that, however marginally, in *Robert Boyle* we have yet another boyhood route, if not to Xanadu, then at least to the South Pacific. Reaching the Straits of Magellan, Boyle finds 'the Weather extreamly cold, and the Mountains cover'd with Snow'. He and his crew are desperately hungry and raid Penguin Island, bringing back 500 birds and several thousand eggs, 'which prov'd delicious Food'. I must confess to disappointment that they weren't Albatrosses.[18]

For Coleridge, Lamb and their contemporaries, surely *Robert Boyle* would have augmented the appeal of the South Seas already firmly established by the presence as master in the Royal Mathematical School of the formidable Yorkshireman, William Wales, Captain Cook's navigator on his famous second voyage. A reading of *Boyle* may have even led Coleridge or Lamb to a reading of Wales's Journal of the voyage, which then lay within their reach and is now in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. That stories of Wales's South Sea adventures were rife in the school is borne out by a comment in Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography*:

> When he was at Otaheite, the natives played him a trick while bathing, and stole his small clothes; which we used to think a liberty scarcely credible.[19]

My claim for Chetwood's *Robert Boyle* would simply be that it formed part of a mythology which Christ's Hospital boys could easily absorb, a mythology which they might enact first on leave days in expeditions up the New River, a mythology which later might lead them to the Pacific or to the islands of the East or West Indies or to the Offices of the East India company or perhaps to stranger Romantic latitudes of the mind.

Our next Christ's Hospital classic evokes a mythology all its own and its full title suggests pretty clearly what that mythology might be: *The Fortunate Bluecoat Boy or Memoirs of the Life and Happy Adventures of Mr. Benjamin Templeman Formerly a Scholar in Christ's Hospital By an Orphanotrophian.* An early reviewer of the book pointed out that even its short title (*The Fortunate Bluecoat Boy*) gives away too much of the plot immediately: there can hardly be much suspense about the story of one who is proclaimed to be 'fortunate' even before it starts! The eighteenth century novelist's perennial concern about the workings of Providence has been given up with the first stroke of his pen. At the same time, the full title exposes another weakness of the book. It seems defiantly inward-looking: a book about a Christ's hospital boy for Christ's Hospital boys past and present, and by a Christ's Hospital boy, as the laborious joke of a classical pseudonym point out. The author tells us in a note that orphanotrophion means 'one brought up in a hospital', but the fact that he *needs* to tell us seems to me to blunt the edge of his witticism. The title page also makes a slightly subtler classical joke by simply including the unattributed words 'quorum pars magna fui'. These depend for their effect upon our putting them into their literary context, Virgil's Second Book of *The Aeneid* where they complete the sentence which in translation runs 'All those woes I once saw / And of which I was no small part'.[20] Knowing all the woes of which this little romance forms merely an idealised part, a Bluecoat audience might be expected to appreciate certain ironies and nuances from their harsh schooldays just as they would appreciate the classical allusion on the title page. Such an audience might be in Milton's words 'fit audience though few'. This set a tone which contrasts interestingly with the

[18] Ibid., p. 191.
[19] Hunt, p. 60.
[20] Virgil, *Aeneid* ii. 5: 'Quaeque ipse miserrima vidi / Et quorum pars magna fui'.

other classics on Lamb's list. Whereas the plot of each of those books proclaimed to their youthful readers that, in Coriolanus's phrase, 'there is a world elsewhere', a world through which young fancies might pursue the workings of a larger Providence, *The Fortunate Bluecoat* proclaims a different, far more complacent view of Fortune, which depends entirely upon the hero's being a Bluecoat boy. The implication almost seems to be that God is the Supreme Christ's Hospital Presentation Governor. Perhaps it is a more regressive fantasy than the others, closer to the childish world of *Jack the Giant Killer* than the more outgoing adult world of *Robinson Crusoe*. This serious self-limiting quality in the novel seems to me a shame, because the book itself is written with a certain literary originality.

Copies of the book are rare, and exist over two dates, 1770 and 1789. There was also a limited edition published in 1987. From internal evidence the novel seems to be the work of someone who had known the school intimately some forty or fifty years earlier and who uses his detailed knowledge to ground this adolescent fantasy in realistic fact. First, to outline the fantasy.

Essentially, this is a male Cinderella story. Ben Templeman is a young Crug or Bluecoat, the orphaned son of a Kent clergyman when his high-spirited pranks bring him first to the notice of the School Steward, Mr Henchman. Henchman decides such a lively, mischievous boy is fit only for a life at sea, so Templeman becomes a member of the King's Ward, the redoubtable Royal Mathematical School made up of boys destined for the Royal or Merchant Navies—the young terrors of the school. He grows into a handsome senior boy and is on the verge, we might presume, of launching out into a career not dissimilar to that of Robert Boyle or Peter Wilkins, when he happens to sing the solo part in a school anthem before the Lord Mayor and Governors in the School Church. A rich young City widow takes particular notice of him. She falls rapidly in love and offers him her hand in marriage, thus translating him effortlessly to the life of a gentleman. That, essentially, is the story, and one can see the reason both for its appeal to young Blues and its lack of appeal to others.

What gives the book its value, however, is the often vivid background against which this slight story is sketched. To compare widely disparate works for a moment, it seems to me that *The Fortunate Bluecoat Boy* has at least something in common with James Joyce's *Dubliners*. Both books set a number of key moments or Epiphanies against a city background in a style which Joyce memorably describes as one of 'scrupulous meanness'. Of course there are wide differences. But it is this essentially believable and scrupulous detail which gives Orphanotrophian's novel its appeal. Here, for example, is a moment when Ben Templeman is returning to Christ's Hospital late, after his first evening at his lady's fashionable Soho residence. He comes trailing clouds of glory, by coach and with coachman and footman in attendance, and is received by Allen the porter. (And there really was a Thomas Allen who served as Porter at Christ's Hospital from 1725 to 1736.)

At first Allen, described earlier in the book as 'that surly old cuss', assumes this must be some person of quality, so he opens his gate and lets down the chain. However, when he sees young Templeman step out of the carriage he has second thoughts and puts the chain up again. Ben manages to slip past while Allen is relighting his pipe at his lanthorn, but William the footman, who has a basket of wine and other good things as a peace-offering for Ben's Nurse, has difficulty in getting through. At length Allen reluctantly agrees to wait a moment before closing up and when William returns he finds:

> The old fellow there with his pipe in his mouth, who opened the gate halfway, with the chain up, *for him to stoop under*.[21]

The writer of that had gone about the world with his eyes open. There is a delicious realism about it which reminds one of Hogarth but also of modern London any day of the week. It is this sense of the earthiness of the London streets and of Christ's Hospital's place beside the City Ditch which gives his book its particular quality. All this was, of course, firmly within the imaginative scope of good Augustan writing, for, as Alexander Pope observed in his notes to the *Iliad*:

> there is a vast difference between a small circumstance and a trivial one, and the smallest become important if they are well chosen.[22]

Edmund Blunden, who with his sharp bird-like eye for neglected literature was an admirer of this obscure book, praised its 'style of liveliness and dry wit' which, he suggested, may have reflected the prevailing humour of the Fellow Crugs for whom it was written.[23] This seems to me to be a valuable hint. Part of the book's importance for us today must lie in the totally convincing way in which it draws us back into the mood and atmosphere of eighteenth-century Christ's Hospital as Lamb and Coleridge may have known it.

Overall, it is a world dominated by a realistically low view of human nature. Early in the book an apparently irrelevant chapter tells us about the contrasting views of Ben's Kentish hop-growing grandfather Colman and his grandson, Ben's elder brother Timothy, who inherits the estate. Whereas Grandfather Colman 'had been of the stamp of the ancient yeomen of Kent, generous and open-hearted', his young successor was a realist. 'He considered mankind as they really are; and it was a constant saying of his, *No man would do much for nothing*.'[24] It is the second view (what we might call the Thatcherite view!) which the whole course of the book supports even in its most fantastic sequences. Ben's good fortune is, of course, the stuff of Bluecoat boy dreams. But he deserves it and will make it good because of an innate shrewdness about both people and money.

Another telling apparent irrelevance from the main story occurs in the First Chapter of Book Two, which is entirely devoted to the dishonest behaviour of a tailor who has made Ben's birthday clothes. When asked for payment, Ben Templeman shows him a hundred pound bill and sends him to fetch change for it. Whereupon the quick-witted tailor, described by Orphanotrophion ironically as 'an *honest* North-country man', goes to a good-natured mercer for a loan of fifty pounds. Returning to Templeman he gives him the mercer's fifty pounds and takes the hundred: and . . . he had no sooner got the hundred pound note in his possession, than, thinking it a greater sum than ever he might have an opportunity of seeing again at one time, and a much better sight than a gaol, of which he was in daily expectation, he marched home, packed up all his clothes, linen, tools, and whatever else he could, and decamped, leaving his landlord an old table or two, and some few old chairs, &c, for a twelvemonths rent.'[25]

This London world of small businessmen on the verge of bankruptcy is, of course, the world of Defoe and Philip Quarll as it was later to become the world of Lamb and of Dickens. But Ben Templeman is, by nature as well as good fortune, likely to succeed in it. He first comes to the

[21] Orphanotrophian, *The Fortunate Bluecoat Boy* ed. Reginald Watters (Christ's Hospital Papers III, 1987) (hereafter Watters), pp. 41-2.
[22] Alexander Pope, *Notes to The Iliad* (Book VI).
[23] Edmund Blunden, *Christ's Hospital* (London, 1923), p. 66.
[24] Watters, p. 14.
[25] Ibid., pp. 81-3.

Christ's Hospital Steward's notice when a small boy because he is found to be conducting a successful usurer's business among the Lower Orders. When one debtor refuses to pay up, young Ben boldly goes to the Steward for justice. Whereupon the Steward beats him for usury, but also insists that the debtor pays him his sixpence: 'telling him if he made such foolish bargains he ought in justice to make them good.'[26]

It is by such no-nonsense, knock-you-down standards that the central actions of the book are to be judged. What is obvious, surely, is that this is the world of Bowyer rather than of Matthew Field, and Bowyer was, almost certainly, one of the book's early readers. At the heart of the novel there is, it seems to me, that supreme text for eighteenth-century prudence, Matthew 25:14-30—the Parable of the Talents. Orphanotrophian believes that, in an uncertain world, knowing how to husband and increase the value of the resources given you is the essential guide to life. Ben Templeman deserves his good Fortune because he is a good Steward.

What exactly did Lamb and Coleridge and Leigh Hunt make of all this, I wonder? Perhaps Charles Lamb (blessed with a Cockney shrewdness) absorbed that message rather better than the other two. Others among their contemporaries clearly took the message literally to heart. That handsome fellow Robert Allen, the Old Blue who first introduced Coleridge to Southey at Oxford, ensured that he married a rich widow early in life, and Valentine Le Grice, the elder of the two Le Grice brothers who were close to both Lamb and Coleridge, having played the nimble English pinnace to STC's more ponderous Spanish galleon in many a wit-sally at school, after Cambridge and Holy Orders took a post in Cornwall as tutor to the son of a land-owning widow and ended up marrying the widow and acquiring her estate of Trereife near Penzance. For him, at least, *The Fortunate Bluecoat Boy* seems to have been a formative book.

We come finally to the greatest of Lamb's classics—a book which imaginatively transcends the scrupulous meanness of Orphanotrophian's limited vision. *The Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins, a Cornish Man*, had appeared anonymously under Robert Dodsley's imprint, with an introduction and dedication simply signed R.P., in 1750. R.P.'s identity remained unknown until the early nineteenth century, when he was discovered to have been an attorney of Clement's Inn, Robert Paltock, possibly himself of Cornish extraction. Paltock apparently sold the copyright of his book to Dodsley for £20 before publication, so he made nothing out of its subsequent popularity. But his novel, unlike Chetwood's, is a minor masterpiece. Coleridge in his *Table Talk* praised *Peter Wilkins* as 'a work of uncommon beauty' and claimed that were *he* to write a travel romance he would try 'the marvellous line of Peter Wilkins . . . rather than the *real* fiction of Robinson Crusoe.'[27]

Peter Wilkins opens in the world of Quarll and Boyle—a place of family misfortune, poverty and captivity (with all of which Bluecoat boys might identify), and Wilkins' later adventures in escaping slavery across Africa follow the pattern of Defoe's *Captain Singleton* (and, like Defoe's sequence, are obviously dependent upon a reading of travel books). Then in Chapter Fourteen of Book One, the novel translates itself into a finer imaginative mode.

Peter has been shipwrecked on a rocky island somewhere to the south of Africa, and has set himself up, much like Philip Quarll, in a grotto beside a lake. He lives through a summer on his own and then, with the arrival of an Antarctic winter, he begins to hear strange Voices in the Twilight:

[26] Ibid., p. 9.
[27] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk* ed. Carl Woodring (2 vols., Princeton, NJ, 1990) (hereafter Woodring), ii. 295.

> At length one Night or Day, I can't say which, hearing the Voices very distinctly, and praying very earnestly, to be either delivered from the uncertainty they had put me under, or to have them removed from me, took Courage, and arming myself with Gun , Pistols, and Cutlass, I went out of my Grotto, and crept down the Wood.[28]

It is easy to imagine young C.H. readers responding to such a moment. But it is also worth noting that there is an imaginative control of imagery here which gives the passage a suggestive undertone: the *almost* self-reliant eighteenth-century Englishman is moving out of his reconstructed idyllic Grotto into an unknown twilight which is about to stretch his perceptions to their limits. What he sees on the Lake appear at first to be People in Boats 'laughing and talking very merrily'. A few moments later he realises that these beings are not in boats but have the ability both to sail on the lake and fly in the air above it at will. He has come upon a race of Flying Indians.

What, of course, this moment does is effectively to turn all the usual eighteenth century Englishman's preconceptions on their head. The novel's first reviewer in the *Monthly Review* of December 1750 rather patronisingly described it as 'the illegitimate offspring of no very natural conjunction betwixt *Gulliver's* travels and *Robinson Crusoe*.' Well, that wasn't too bad a parentage for an anonymous bastard! And the trick lay in making the conjunction. Dr Johnson was equally patronising to *Gulliver's Travels* with his 'when once you have thought of big men and little men, it is very easy to do all the rest.' Very easy, one is tempted to add, to belittle those strokes of genius which become obvious—in retrospect.

So, at the midpoint of *Peter Wilkins* notions of automatic Western superiority vanish and indeed some of the most telling moments of the latter half of the novel are those when Peter contemplates his own feelings of *inferiority*. One turn of plot adds even more to the novel's growing fascination (and it is one of those rare books which actually gets better in its second half).

After his traumatising experience by the lake, Peter withdraws to a troubled dream within his Grotto where he is visited by a dream vision of his long-lost Cornish wife Patty. Next morning he wakes to a thump on his antechamber roof and discovers that one of these mysterious flying people has crash-landed into his life:

> [I] fetched my Lamp, and returning, saw the very beautiful Face my *Patty* appeared under in my Dream; and not considering that it was only a Dream, I verily thought I had my *Patty* before me, but she seemed to be stone dead. Upon viewing her other Parts, for I had never yet removed my Eyes from her Face, I found she had a sort of brown Chaplet, like Lace, round her Head, under and about which her Hair was tucked up and twined; and she seemed to me to be cloathed in a thin hair-coloured silk garment; which, upon trying to raise her, I found to be quite warm, and therefore hoped there was Life in the Body it contained.[29]

James Leigh Hunt gives us a clue to how such a passage was read by his fellow Bluecoats when he writes that *Peter Wilkins* contained 'a mixture of sentiment and voluptuousness beyond all the bridals we have read.'[30] This female version of the Noble Savage with Wings is called a Gawrey: males are called Glumms. Through Peter's marriage with his Gawrey, young Christ's Hospital readers must have been led into an unfamiliar world of transvaluation greatly at variance with

[28] [Robert Paltock] *Peter Wilkins* (Oxford, 1990) (hereafter Paltock), p. 102.
[29] Ibid., p. 105.
[30] James Leigh Hunt, 'Poetical Anomalies of Shape' in *Essays* ed. Arthur Syrnons (London, 1887), p. 126.

the normal knock-you-down masculine attitudes of their own and most English male school environments. One of the clearest indicators of this remarkably sensitive and sympathetically open quality comes in the passages which deal with Peter's developing awareness of what a marriage of different cultures entails. To deal with a marriage at all in such a book was unusual. Crusoe's empire had remained resolutely single-sex and Philip Quarll's hermitage had been positively misogynistic. Of course it helps Peter Wilkins psychologically that he finds himself marrying into the local aristocracy, so that elements of the traditional romantic love of ennoblement can mingle with more liberal insights. Peter Wilkins' grotto comes to be the centre of a happy domesticity, where he lives with his wife, Youwarkee, for more than fourteen years, during which time she bears him six children. I cannot help feeling that the presence of *Peter Wilkins*, like the presence of Matthew Field, helped a little to humanise a Spartan existence whose official creed must have been all too often proclaimed by the Upper Master:

> Boy, the school is your father! Boy! the school is your mother! the school is your brother! the boy is your sister! the school is your first-cousin, and your second-cousin, and all the rest of your relations! Let's have no more crying![31]

The crucial difference between Peter and his Youwarkee is that she possesses the *Graundee*, a natural growth of pliable membrane and jointed bone. The Graundee serves both as a modest covering for the body when at rest on land and as an effective flying mechanism when extended in the air. Among Glumms it is the ultimate disgrace to have your Graundee slit so that you are no longer able to fly. And that, of course, is what all Glumms and Gawreys will assume has happened to Peter. In marrying him Youwarkee has taken a brave transcultural step. At the same time she misses her old homeland and family, and eventually Peter agrees that she must fly home on a visit.

This leads to the section of the book which comes closest to *Gulliver's Travels*. Superficially at least, there are satiric touches which might remind us of Swift. For example, Youwarkee's father is Governor of a town in the territory of a King *Georigetti*, a name which seems to be hinting at a whole possible sequence of political satire on Hanoverian England. But Paltock isn't quite that kind of writer. Perhaps if he had been, his book would have been less avidly read by the Bluecoat boys. He does later describe court intrigues which lead to a civil war, but these are developed largely for the sake of plain narrative interest rather than for any satiric purpose.

Yet, at the same time, there is a thought-provoking quality about the fantasy as Wilkins becomes more and more involved with the alien culture of his wife's people. He meets her father Pendelhamby who comes with an retinue of followers to visit his island. Great play is made with the effect upon this foreign nobleman of the fine Western clothes which Peter and his wife wear for the occasion. (Such matters were close to the hearts of Bluecoat boys. Fine clothes were, after all, the outward and visible sign of Ben Templeman's good fortune.)

When Peter visits the mainland of Doorpt Swangeanti ('The Land of Flight') he begins to introduce his hosts to the ways of his native England. A strong Whig humanism runs through this section, most particularly in Peter's idealistic views about Slavery:

> Are we not all equally Creatures of, and Servants to the same Master, the great Collwar [God]? Would not the King have been a Slave, but for the Accident of being begotten by one who was a King?[32]

[31] Woodring, ii. 187.
[32] Paltock, p. 300.

The author's strongest prejudices, however, are those of the English Protestants of his day. He deplores the local habit of worshipping idols, and wages a one-man campaign of almost Wesleyan fervour which aims at the religious Reformation of the class of Ragams or priests. Some among them respond to his new teachings about Collwar, and are soon able to produce fine extempore prayers to God, which reflect their new Inner Light:

> When [the first Ragam] had done, another and another went on till we had heard ten of them, and in every one something new, and very *a propos*, and several of them afterwards confessed, they had never had the like Satisfaction in their Lives; for they had new Hearts, and New Thoughts, they said.[33]

As so often, with Protestant Christianity comes European technology. Peter introduces fire, and from the use of fire, metallurgy. He uses gunpowder to help establish King Georigetti, like some Western puppet, over his rivals, and there is even an aerial battle sequence which must have appealed to young readers—and which points ironically forward to the disaster which was to bring Golding's school boys to *their* desert island. Wilkins also introduces his hosts to a mixed, cash economy, based on international commerce and consumerism. At one point Peter ends a chapter by reflecting wrily on the somewhat dubious 'improvements' he has brought with him:

> Pendlehamby could not well understand all I said; and I found by him, that all the Riches they possessed were only Food and Slaves; and, as I found afterwards when amongst them, they know the want of nothing else. But I am afraid I have put them upon another way of thinking, tho' I aimed at what we call civilizing them.[34]

What this unusual book must certainly have done was to open young minds to the possibility of new worlds which might challenge their own assumptions. It was a way of education uncommon in their time, and perhaps we should end today by giving the Revd. Mr Field his due, for indirectly helping Coleridge into the speculative realms of Xanadu and Lamb into the more quizzical relativities of his writings generally and his letters to Thomas Manning in particular. A book which raised questions rather than giving answers must have led at least some of its Christ's Hospital readers towards that mind-challenging activity which a recent scholar has called 'the Obstinate Questionings of English Romanticism'.[35]

Nether Stowey, Somerset

[33] Ibid., p. 302.
[34] Ibid., p. 215.
[35] L. J. Swingle, *The Obstinate Questionings of English Romanticism* (Louisiana, 1987).

Voices and Hauntings in Book I of the 1805 *Prelude*

By PAMELA WOOF

AS ONE WHO HAS tended, at least in print, to approach Wordsworth and Coleridge with the writings of Dorothy Wordsworth somewhat centrally in mind, I felt myself almost in a new world when I was asked to speak on Wordsworth's *Prelude* at the Wordsworth Winter School. A sense of freedom, of delight, was my immediate reaction. Asked for a title I simply lit upon Book I, and then realised, too late, that I was not the scholar to explain how Wordsworth built up Book I from bricks of passages composed in 1798 and 1799, passages then revised in 1803 or 1804; to explain how, in new 1804 words, Wordsworth commented on 1799 words; how his thoughts of 1804 and 1799 comment on the thoughts and experiences of the boy that the poet was in the late 1770s and 1780s; how the jumps in time have sometimes 1804 bridges to help the reader across, how sometimes they have not. Recent editions provide these explanations. What could I offer? Delight faded.

I reread Book I, and never have I perused it more feelingly, felt so keenly the bafflement that Wordsworth conveys at the beginning of his long poem. I now knew with him the difficulty of making an approach, settling on a theme, finding an object, a road to keep me in bounds. And I knew why Wordsworth talks about himself so much, why, where there is no defined matter, the egotistic is inevitable. I hoped that I would stumble upon some route through the poem whilst reading it, even as Wordsworth stumbled, or makes appear he stumbled, upon a direction in writing it.

The only thing to do if you don't know what to do is to enjoy the present, and reader and writer do exactly that in the first lines of Book I:

> Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze,
> That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
> And from the sky; it beats against my cheek,
> And seems half conscious of the joy it gives. (*Thirteen-Book Prelude*, i. 1-4)[1]

A poem comparable in length to *Paradise Lost* follows, yet this beginning gives no hint of that, is no statement of ideas; we simply and sensuously acknowledge a good feeling. How bold to begin with a cry, a cry of pleasure, 'Oh'. It is conversational, personal. It exists for that moment of the breeze's coming, and coming not only from the green fields but from the distances of clouds and sky to focus upon a tiny spot, the cheek of the poet. The clouds, of course, are in the sky, part of it, and Wordsworth, logically perhaps, cuts them from his 1850 text, but in doing so he deprives the gentle breeze of some of its potential for power as one by one in the first version we associate the muse-like breeze with earth, sky, and the clouds that belong to both. The first three lines describe a physical relationship between breeze and poet: 'it beats against my cheek', and the fourth line offers interpretation:

> And seems half conscious of the joy it gives.

[1] The text of the *Thirteen-Book Prelude* referred to throughout this lecture is that edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, Stephen Gill and M. H. Abrams, and published by Norton in 1979.

With this we are back in spring 1798 when Wordsworth tentatively announced his

> faith that every flower
> Enjoys the air it breathes. ('Lines written in Early Spring', 11-12)

The same tentativeness is here: the breeze, an aspect of nature in both its immensity and its local touch, cannot be wholly known; Wordsworth can only suggest that it 'seems half conscious of the joy it gives.' These four lines demonstrate one of the recurrent patterns of the poem: an immersion in physical experience and then a commentary upon it, with often, as here, an obstinate honest uncertainty as to whether the interpretation is true. Wordsworth often makes this leap from sensuous experience to a thought, at times a startling thought, but always one that engages the reader because the physical experience itself has rung true. Here, in the poem's initial lines, we are introduced to the *Prelude*'s first intimation that nature might be a living conscious force. As we read on, the particular experiences become more detailed and the abstractions that rise from them become grander, more numinous, unconnected almost with the daily ways of logic and expression. This is because Wordsworth often makes use of the accepted vocabulary of religion, and the words lift the reader into a high music, discourage painstaking analysis towards a prose meaning and carry their own charge of power:

> Wisdom and spirit of the universe
> Thou soul that art the eternity of thought,
> That giv'st to forms and images a breath
> And everlasting motion . . . (*1805*, i. 427-31)

This apostrophe, as to a god, follows upon the vivid narration of the boat-stealing and its dark internal consequences.

But to return to the simpler patterning of the *Prelude*'s first lines. How different their almost casual celebration of joy, rapturously repeated:

> O welcome messenger! O welcome friend! (*1805*, i. 5)

from the massive judgmental words

> Of Man's first Disobedience and the Fruit
> Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste . . .

that open the great poem that precedes Wordsworth's in length and scale, *Paradise Lost*; and how brilliantly in his own first lines Wordsworth establishes himself, his surge of upward feeling, his modern personal extraordinary way of starting a long poem with a mood. Not until this is established are the shades of Milton allowed into the poem, and by then we are caught up in feeling, with even Milton, so properly and ambitiously remembered at the start of Wordsworth's epic, transformed by his careless joy. The prisoner is out of bondage, the captive out of the city —Goslar, London, Bristol, or simply—to use a later phrase—a City of Dreadful Night, a City that means depression—no matter, the mood is of jubilation, and in almost intoxicated irresponsibility, 'free, enfranchised and at large', Wordsworth ranges directionless in question after question: where should be the habitation, what the dwelling, in what grove, by what stream. 'The earth is all before me' (*1805* i. 15). The confidence is so big that it begins to seem dangerous. Milton's rhythms at the end of *Paradise Lost*, recalled here, have not Wordsworth's excited bravado where a wandering cloud, a twig or any floating thing will serve to determine a future course. For Adam and Eve at the end of their poem the freedom they faced was a more sober affair,

> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
> They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
> Through Eden took their solitary way.

Providence, and no chance twig or floating thing, will guide them seriously through a world of work and of conscience, and like Milton's Samson (also evoked here by Wordsworth), a hero released for one significant day from the common prison to feel again the breath of Heaven, fresh blowing, Adam and Eve will finally achieve liberty but it will be theirs only after strenuous effort and suffering.

Wordsworth, by contrast, in the onrush of joy and confidence seemed to feel that he was practically in a Paradise garden already. He would drink wild water,

> pluck green herbs,
> And gather fruits fresh from their native bough (*1805* i. 37-8)

with the sweet breath of heaven on his body and its inspirational counterpart within, a mild, albeit uncontrolled creative breeze that promised poetry, 'The holy life of music and of verse' (*1805* i. 54), that promised that elusive impossible philosophic poem, *The Recluse*, which Coleridge so believed, and Wordsworth too, at that time, believed, that only he could write.

We then find that at line 55ff the present tense passage of abundant joy that we have thrilled to—if, perhaps, a little warily—is not the present at all. It belongs to years ago. The real present is a conversation with Coleridge in 1804. This immense poem which calls on Milton for comparison is, after all, a conversation poem, and Book I is itself a smaller conversation poem in the old Coleridgean and *Tintern Abbey* style: it returns, but with a new understanding, at its end to its beginning, to Coleridge, to Milton, 'The road lies plain before me' (*1805* i. 668), to a sense of direction and to the new certainty about writing, that it is labour. Wordsworth told Coleridge in 1804 (*1805* i. 60-1) that in that earlier joyful mood the 'poetic numbers came / Spontaneously'; he had felt 'clothed in priestly robe', 'singled out'. As Wordsworth puts that confidence to the test, it drops from him, and the sympathetic reader is troubled. When, in the final line of Book I, Wordsworth reiterates his address to Coleridge, he uses the word 'labour' to describe the process of writing. It is the right word. It is right for the reader as well as for the writer. Already, the reader has shared in the jubilations, dismays and recoveries of writing. He will later have part in the writer's struggle to evoke scarcely graspable states of mind and feeling. It is one of the very modern characteristics of Wordsworth that he acknowledges the reader's part in sharing the labour and, in consequence, the achievement of poetry. He had always expected it:

> It is no tale but should you think,
> Perhaps a tale you'll make it. ('Simon Lee', 79-80)

At the end of the *Prelude*'s last Book, the end of this mighty conversation poem, again addressing Coleridge, Wordsworth's first and utterly creative auditor, he speaks of them both in their future hopes as

> joint labourers in the work—
> Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe— (*1805* xiii. 439-40)

How close after all he has come to Milton; the careless freedom, the impossible spontaneity of the poem's introduction, though it catches at us with feeling, has given place to poetry that is

composition, thought, work, where passages of feeling are earned and placed influentially to irradiate a complicated pattern.

The pattern starts in Book I. Some of it can be seen only in hindsight. Not until Book VII does Wordsworth recall the poem's beginning:

> Five years are vanished since I first poured out,
> Saluted by that animating breeze
> Which met me issuing from the city's walls,
> A glad preamble to this verse . . . (*1805* vii. 1-4)

and with this reminder that at the first entrance into the poem he had set up the opposition of the City that meant bondage and the unnatural, and the Country that fostered freedom, Wordsworth in Book VII deepens that already articulated opposition. Within a contrasting frame of redbreasts' song, the glow-worm's light and, at the Book's close, the steady form of mountains, he evokes the part-baffling, part-heady excitements of London, yet is finally oppressed by the unnatural deformity of the uncreative life of its people. Towards the end of Book VII, and half-way through the whole poem, he uses the words which describe the undergrounds in which former epic heroes tended to roam mid-way through their journeys: 'hell', 'anarchy', 'infernal'. And that deformity becomes monstrous indeed when the pattern is repeated once again in Book X, in the revolutionary city of Paris. The grotesque festival of Book VII's Bartholomew Fair is now revolting celebration, a carnival of death:

> Domestic carnage now filled all the year
> With feast-days . . . (*1805* x. 329-30)

Connected with the City/Country opposition that Book I establishes is, of course, the poem's recurrent interest in the nature of true freedom, both for the self and for society.

> Now I am free, enfranchised and at large

sang Wordsworth in his first blindness and physical delight. By Book X he knows how wishful was the thought that man might

> . . . start
> Out of the worm-like state in which he is,
> And spread abroad the wings of Liberty . . . (*1805* x. 835-7)

Social freedom, Wordsworth comes to know, can have no truck with mass revolution but must depend upon 'The freedom of the individual mind', and this can take as guide neither twig, floating thing, external Providence, nor even the proud encounter of 'the light of circumstances' when it is 'flashed / Upon an independent intellect' (*1805* x. 828-9). 'Genuine liberty' (*1805* xiii. 122) is altogether more elusive. For Wordsworth it has come out of the entire experience and lengthy process he describes in the *Prelude*; and this, he felt, gave to him a mind that could 'send abroad . . . transformation' (*1805* xiii. 93-4). Men come nearest to being free when they creatively

> build up greatest things
> From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
> Willing to work and to be wrought upon. (*1805* xiii. 98-100)

And here, scarcely into the poem, I have been offering a sort of map of the whole *Prelude* on the basis of Book I. Fortunately, the poem refuses such clarity, and Book VIII, for example, qualifies

the easy City/Country opposition of Book I, for in Book VIII London, even London, is perceived to be 'thronged with impregnations', just as were the naked valleys, echoes, waterfalls and pointed crags of his childhood,

> That into music touch the passing wind. (*1805* viii. 796)

The imagination in London 'impregnated'—and Wordsworth uses this very physical word again —his knowledge, 'made it live'. It is a timely reminder that we cannot turn Wordsworth into an allegorical writer: City, Bad; Country, Good.

To return to Book I. A narrative mode succeeds the first joyous passion as Wordsworth recalls his walk of years before to the chosen vale and his composing as he walked:

> My own voice cheared me, and, far more, the mind's
> Internal echo of the imperfect sound—
> To both I listened . . . (*1805* i. 64-6)

We know from Hazlitt that Wordsworth liked to shape his initial compositions out of doors 'walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption' ('My First Acquaintance with Poets'), and we know from Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journal* how very often Wordsworth was to be found 'walking backwards & forwards'. In these *Prelude* lines he speaks of how he composed as he paced towards Grasmere, hearing words as he spoke them aloud, and hearing again in an inner workshop

> . . . the mind's
> Internal echo of the imperfect sound—
> To both I listened . . .

Composition involves listening, and Wordsworth was a good listener and heard well the unheard melodies within himself and no less the melodies without:

> and I would stand
> Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth. (*1805* ii. 326-8)

Listening requires stillness and so another pattern in this poem's intricacy begins in Book I, an interplay between movement and stillness. The walking slows to a halt, and the poet lies upon the ground

> . . . long I lay
> Cheared by the genial pillow of the earth
> Beneath my head, soothed by a sense of touch
> From the warm ground, that balanced me, else lost
> Entirely (*1805* i. 88-92)

In his stillness, and in the stillness of the sheltered grove, the one sound that deepened the silence was that of solitary acorns falling, as they now and then did, to the ground. Vast silence and intensely heard tiny sound: with this combination Wordsworth is able to surprise us into hearing afresh, just as, later in Book I, he can make us see afresh as we move, slowly as he moves, casting an eye over miles of sky-reflecting or moonlit sea

> . . . o'er three long leagues
> Of shining water, gathering, as it seemed,
> Through every hair-breadth of that field of light
> New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers. (*1805* i. 605-8)

The hair-breadth progress over that immensity of light, the minuteness of the bee as compared with such space, evoke that same and yet rare sense of physical closeness to earth's processes. It reminds us that Wordsworth, scarcely an erotic poet in the normal sense, has a felt eroticism about the earth.

> . . . long I lay
> Cheared by the genial pillow of the earth
> Beneath my head, soothed by a sense of touch
> From the warm ground, that balanced me . . .

The water of Windermere in Book II

> . . . lay upon my mind
> Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
> Never before so beautiful, sank down
> Into my heart . . . (*1805* ii. 177-80)

The sky not only 'sank' into the heart but, needing two prepositions, 'sank down / Into my heart', and these prepositions emphasise and prolong the physical impact. The whole earth could behave for Wordsworth with intimacy: he had seen the sun

> . . . lay
> His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
> The western mountain touch his setting orb . . . (*1805* ii. 188-90)

Such verbs of the physical senses accumulate within the *Prelude* and suggest, nuance by nuance, that the things of the earth are humanised presences. And so relationship is possible, communication; we are not surprised that late in Book I

> The earth
> And common face of Nature spake to me
> Rememberable things . . . (*1805* i. 614-6)

We recall the 'low breathings' from among the solitary hills that came after the boy when he had appropriated the trapped woodcocks of others, the 'strange utterance' of the wind when he was suspended in the high places, the much later rocks that muttered close upon the ears and the black drizzling crags of the Alpine pass that spake as if a voice were in them (*1805* vi. 562-4), the ruined abbey of Book II that has sobbings and respirations and ivy that is shuddering; there are endless such suggestions of living presence and they all produce the impression that this long meditation of one man upon his own inner growth, this monologue addressed to a single listener, Coleridge, is itself a dramatic poem, a poem full of voices. Voices are a part of the texture, and so, though the great 'spots of time' passages, such as that of the stolen boat, can exist for us out of context or as anthology pieces, they belong best in their places within the new complex composition of the 1805 *Prelude*. A nature that can so physically touch and speak can also, when there is need, rise up between a boy and the stars and in measured motion stride after him.

We do not know all this at the start of Book I; we cannot know everything about either the poet or nature. Such knowledge grows over time, and over readings, until, in some dim and far off way, yet not unlike Wordsworth himself composing, we can move up and down the *Prelude* and in and out of the poem's memories and instabilities just as we move into the knowledge of living persons, accumulating memories, holding past and present simultaneously, unconfined by chronology.

We do learn a central fact about Wordsworth very quickly in Book I, that he desires to write, to achieve some 'prowess in an honorable field' (*1805* i. 52), and so composition, and the failure to compose, become the anxious and astonishingly modern first subject of the poem. Wordsworth's initial passive expectation that verses would flow easily is scotched. The gentle breeze of inspiration caused the odd Aeolian visitation, but failure came,

> . . . the harp
> Was soon defrauded, and the banded host
> Of harmony dispersed in straggling sounds,
> And lastly utter silence. (*1805* i. 104-7)

No priestly robe, no holy services came to the walking, composing poet. He had to pursue his road and arrive in Grasmere, he says, like a peasant (significantly perhaps, in the context of the toils of composition, the 'peasant' of 1805 becomes 'a home-bound labourer' in the 1850 *Prelude*). And thus, another of the *Prelude*'s patterns is established: the pattern of expectation, frustration and then an accommodation to and discovery of the virtues of what simply is or was —in this case

> . . . the love, the life
> In common things, the endless store of things
> Rare, or at least so seeming, every day
> Found all about me in one neighbourhood . . . (*1805* i. 117-20)

Wordsworth, in entering on a poem about the writing of a poem, and one which will develop into a meticulous probing of the self, is as original and experimental as he was in *Lyrical Ballads*. Yet the *Prelude* is more than a treatise, advanced for its time, on psychology, a study of the problems of writing, an account of contemporary history: it is a poem, and has the form, and contains within it the music of poetry. Book I's very worrying about composition advances in a regular momentum of hope and failure towards resolution. Like the whole poem, it is composed form. At the same time, the *Prelude* can strike readers as free and flowing rumination. Wordsworth recognised these two aspects. Writing to Sir George Beaumont in May 1805 he speaks of the 'alarming length' of the work, 'not much less than 9000 lines' and a 'thing unprecedented in Literary history that a man should talk so much about himself'; and he goes on to express his fear that,

> If when the work shall be finished it appears to the judicious to have redundancies they shall be lopped off, if possible. But this is very difficult to do when a man has written with thought, and this defect, whenever I have suspected it or found it to exist in any writings of mine, I have always found incurable. The fault lies too deep, and is in the first conception.[2]

[2] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805* ed. Ernest De Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), pp. 586-7.

In other words there is nothing to be brutally 'lopped off'. Wordsworth, while recognising possible reactions, resisted any notion of redundancies and defects; his 1805 poem (whatever might be 'lopped off' or added to it later) has been given thought and deliberate shape.

Having arrived in Grasmere (*1805* i. 115), and with everything conducive to creative activity, there is yet no achievement. Confidence dwindles:

> . . . gleams of light
> Flash often from the east, then disappear . . . (*1805* i. 134-5)

Even short poems, 'gifts / Of humbler industry', are unattainable, for the mind evades control,

> The meditative mind, best pleased perhaps
> While she as duteous as the mother dove
> Sits brooding, lives not always to that end,
> But hath less quiet instincts – goadings on
> That drive her as in trouble through the groves. (*1805* i. 150-4)

The quiet allusion here to Milton's Holy Spirit, brooding, still and dove-like, over Chaos at the great Creation is linked to the far from creative plunging movements of a goaded driven animal. The mind contains such opposites:

> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light . . . (*1805* vi. 567)

These forces Wordsworth finds later in an Alpine landscape 'like workings of one mind'. His own mind knew the phenomenon, as Book 1 indicates, where turbulent unruliness militates against calm writing. Such antithesis is another recurrent pattern.

Canvassing for a subject, Wordsworth ruminates on possible poetic subjects in the old style, themes in the tradition of Milton or Spenser or, more unusually, stories of known, though some of them little known, heroes who had tried in single determination (as Wordsworth himself might in dreams aspire) to alter history in the cause of freedom. Brave ideas, and brave to mention the possibility of philosophic song and

> . . . meditations passionate from deep
> Recesses in man's heart . . . (*1805* i. 232-3)

for these last approach perhaps the formidable topic of *The Recluse*; but in the event, no formulated subject pleases. How should it? How should so experimental a poet write for contemporary readers in an earlier fashion? He cannot ignore the literary history behind him, but he cannot tread exactly in the places of other poets. Wordsworth is stuck:

> Were it not better done, as others use,
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
> Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair? (*Lycidas*, 67-9)

That was Milton's question for the struggling poet, and Wordsworth, with bitterness, recalls it:

> Ah, better far than this to stray about
> Voluptuously through fields and rural walks . . .
> Far better never to have heard the name
> Of zeal and just ambition. (*1805* i. 252-8)

And it is in this mood, conscious of his great predecessor, that Wordsworth feels most his failure. It is in this mood that resolution simply arrives; the voice of the river comes into his mind in the words he had written, feeling similarly a failure, in the imprisoning frozen Goslar winter of 1799. The voice of the river had been a remembered music then—and a remembered reproach—and it comes again, at first to reproach—'Was it for this?'—but then, gradually, to allow Wordsworth to move from his adult self in trouble to a simpler childhood self, from bewilderment to certainty, from literary tradition and social conflict to a natural world, from opposition to harmony. The passage has been hard-earned, and it falls like music on the ear, and on the mind.

Musical, the river passage is about music, about composition. The poet, 'Unprofitably travelling towards the grave' (*1805* i. 269), asking the old despairing question, 'Was it for this?', recalls his first great teacher, his first Muse, 'the fairest of all rivers, loved', and with that merest pause after 'loved' at the end of the line we are enclosed in reciprocal love with the suggestion that the river is the loved object, immediately followed by the realisation that it is the loving river that loved

> To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song . . . (*1805* i. 273)

The river's murmurs come

> . . . from his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows . . . (*1805* i. 274-5)

with the rhythmic doubling here ensuring the flow of the passage. While the infant would know the river only as sound heard beside his father's house, the poet is aware of the river's earlier life, the various places that informed its murmuring sound. The river is mature, has a past and is moving to a future, a future that is glimpsed as he 'flowed along my dreams', not 'into' my dreams but 'along' them, that is, both in and alongside, as though the mind in its infant potential is an extended physical place such as rivers might flow through; in something of the same metaphorical and yet substantial way, they flow through this poem about the onward and ever more complex-stranded growth of a mind. In the second sentence, with the rhetorical question again, but now only half repeated, not 'Was it for this?' but just 'For this didst thou . . .', the river is no longer the more august 'him'; he is 'thou, O Derwent', an intimate addressed directly, because he is known, as the reader too now knows him, in his quiet places and in his rocky falls, and when Wordsworth yet again repeats the question, dropping even more of it – it is now only 'didst thou, beauteous stream'—that 'didst thou' has become affirmation, statement, not a question at all. The recalled 'steady cadence', the love remembered, has overcome the frustrated anguish, has made the questioning mode redundant, and in the 1850 text the final question mark is simply removed. The syntax has mirrored and reinforced the positive turn within the poet's mind.

> For this didst thou,
> O Derwent, travelling over the green plains
> Near my 'sweet birthplace', didst thou, beauteous stream,
> Make ceaseless music through the night and day,
> Which with its steady cadence tempering
> Our human waywardness, composed my thoughts
> To more than infant softness, giving me
> Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,
> A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
> Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves? (*1805* i. 276-85)

The murmurs of the first sentence have blended to make ceaseless music in this second sentence as it takes up phrases and notions from the first: the fairest of all rivers becomes the 'beauteous stream', later 'that beauteous river'. The sentences are in no hurry; they add clauses and participial phrases at will. Even the third sentence begins with 'When . . .', as though it is not a beginning at all,

> When, having left his mountains, to the towers
> Of Cockermouth that beauteous river came . . . (*1805* i. 286-7)

There is a disinclination to start again, to make a break; the inclination is for flowing. Steady cadence is what we hear: no cries of ecstasy – 'Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze'—no exclamations—'O welcome messenger! O welcome friend!'—no flurry of questions: 'What dwelling . . . in what vale . . . underneath what grove . . .'.

The steadiness is in the language. If it composed the infant's thoughts, his 'thoughts', incidentally, rather than the possibly more expected 'feelings', it seems to give something composed, a composure even, to the writer recollecting that first Muse who had provided him with an example of composition, a voice that effectively conveyed the calm 'Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves' (*1805* i. 285). This cadence will not be short-lived like the 'glad preamble' of the poem's first lines; steady verse, the patterning of syntax as well as repeated or almost repeated words and phrases, long cumulative sentences that wind themselves into paragraphs, and extend as a person speaking might extend a story by using words like 'and' and 'when', this is the basic flow of the *Prelude*. The intensity, of course, varies as the huge poem manages its transitions between lyric, narrative, meditative and expository modes.

Even in this passage on the river Wordsworth moves into distinct phases of feeling. The intimate address to 'thou', 'For this didst thou . . . didst thou' of the second sentence gives way in the revised 1805 version, though it had not earlier in 1798 and 1799, to a third person account, a slightly cooler tone as Wordsworth says of 'that beauteous river' that 'He was a playmate whom we dearly loved' (*1805* i. 290) again, with 'loved' at the end of a line, making its own connection with 'the fairest of all rivers loved'. The change from 1799 'thou' to the more distant 1805 third person reflects the change from the fully absorbed infant hearing ceaseless music through the night and day to the boy of five now separate from the river, bringing a human energy to bathe or leap, or momentarily to stand and look at the larger context of distant Skiddaw and the mountains. The still, listening infant has grown into the energetic child.

Wordsworth's voice in this whole passage is a lyric voice. Although the poem is addressed to Coleridge, and Coleridge is not forgotten even here in the allusion to *Frost at Midnight*'s 'my sweet birthplace', the tone is a lyric tone, the voice of a man speaking to himself or murmuring momentarily a love-song to a river. Love encloses the whole paragraph – from the nurse's song at the beginning in harmony with the river to the charming boldness of the final simile of a child's daring encounter with a more violent nature, a thunder shower, but yet an encounter in safety and not far from his 'mother's hut'. The endless golden days of a loved childhood are evoked, again by suggesting repeated action: 'Oh, many a time', 'one long bathing of a summer's day', 'all a summer's day', 'basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again'. The words, 'summer' and 'sun' catch each other up, the same action using the same verb is repeated, 'basked'; the continuous unending verbal form is used, 'bathing', 'leaping'. The 'deep radiance' towards the end moves beyond the bronzed and temporarily sunlit colours of Skiddaw to cast an irremovable light upon the childhood and upon the passage.

We become aware that entwined with the *Prelude*'s movements backwards and forwards in time are transitions of tone. The very next lines are an almost brisk resumé in the language of a later date and they require us to be alert to difference:

> Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
> Fostered alike by beauty and by fear,
> Much favored in my birthplace, and no less
> In that beloved vale to which erelong
> I was transplanted. (*1805* i. 305-9)

with the repetition of 'birthplace' taking us back again for a mere second to Coleridge's loss of his 'sweet birthplace', and Wordsworth's heartfelt appreciation of his. But these lines are in a more public voice and offer a different poetic pattern: the controlling image is of seed-time and transplanting; clutches of words strengthen each other: 'fair', 'fostered', 'favored', 'beauty', 'beloved', 'birthplace', and, placed amongst them, equal parts of the pattern, are the two unexpected words, 'fear' and 'soul'. Soul, not mind or body, had its seed-time, and with the word 'fear' we have to hold two meanings, the sense of panic and dread that would assail the boy after the cheating at the woodcock snares, his consciousness of low breathings and 'steps / Almost as silent as the turf they trod' (*1805* i. 331-2) or, after the taking of the boat, the darkness in the mind, the blank desertion, the slow-moving huge and mighty forms. This is fear, and it played its educative part, but it promoted too the other fear, the fear that comes of reverence, the proper awe for Nature, an order of being alive and mighty in grandeur – the sublime. That fearful 'blank desertion' after the boat-stealing is very closely related after all to those most precious, ever to be retained 'blank misgivings' of himself as a boy, a creature 'Moving about in worlds not realised' of the *Immortality Ode*. Fear's two aspects are something that the child must feel; beauty, outside himself, he learns to see and love. The two abstractions belong to the inner and outer worlds; they imply a relationship, a movement between the child and nature.

Throughout this mammoth poem we are asked to pay such detailed attention to its language. Take the paragraph, a single sentence addressing the 'presences of Nature' (*1805* i. 490). The first lines, of course, are a revision of *1799*'s more fanciful, more literary

> Ye powers of earth, ye genii of the springs,
> And ye that have your voices in the clouds,
> And ye that are familiars of the lakes
> And of the standing pools . . . (*1799* i. 186-9)

These become in *1805* the plainer, more basic and credible

> . . . presences of Nature, in the sky
> Or on the earth, ye visions of the hills
> And souls of lonely places (*1805* i. 490-2)

but they are still multiple and ubiquitous, a huge embracing power, the recipients still of Wordsworth's fervent pressure of feeling that can be conveyed, in *1805* as in *1799*, only by a sentence that simply cannot stop. After the presences addressed comes the main verb,

> . . . can I think
> A vulgar hope was yours . . . (*1805* i. 492-3)

a question that, by the end of the expanding sentence, is forgotten, as Wordsworth heaps up the evidence that Nature gave him special care indeed. Balancing clauses come next, the syntax repeated, first in abstract summary—

> . . . when ye employed
> Such ministry . . . (*1805* i. 493-4)

a second time at more leisure, more concretely,

> . . . when ye through many a year
> Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
> On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
> Impressed . . . (*1805* i. 494-7)

and then the expected object of 'Impressed' but only after a delaying phrase,

> . . . upon all forms the characters . . . (*1805* i. 497)

these characters then defined into alliterating abstractions,

> Of danger or desire . . . (*1805* i. 498)

the clause still not ending but continuing into an expansion in keeping with its massive content —the huge earth, the extraordinary 'universal earth', subjected to a crescendo of qualities of danger and desire, the list rising to stark monosyllables, while their verb and final image provide an overwhelming sense of Nature's power:

> . . . and thus did make
> The surface of the universal earth
> With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear,
> Work like a sea? (*1805* i. 498-501)

The rising sentence structure conveys the unstoppable feeling, while individual words begin to establish the ebbing and forward flow into other parts of the poem. The word 'ministry', for instance, catches up Nature's chastising authority, the 'Severer interventions, ministry / More palpable' of the boat-stealing episode (*1805* i. 370-1); the word 'work', as 'triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear, / Work like a sea', recalls how the boy's brain, after he had experienced the measured motion of the striding cliff, had

> Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
> Of unknown modes of being. (*1805* i. 419-20)

while the great revision of *1799*'s line,

> Thus by the agency of boyish sports

to *1805*'s

> Haunting me thus among my boyish sports (*1805* i. 495)

brings into play all the frightening yet spiritual ghostlinesses of all the low breathings, undistinguishable motions, strange utterances of wind, the sky unlike a sky of earth, clouds in indefinable motion, cliffs that strode, and mighty forms that moved slowly through the mind.

In the young Wordsworth we have just a hint perhaps of the young Hamlet, haunted so much more terrifyingly by a world beyond the senses. Wordsworth's hauntings, of course, are ultimately benevolent, part of the 'fair seed-time' of his soul. They come, as hauntings do, when they are not expected, and it is in Book I that we get used to those movements characteristic of the *Prelude*, unprepared-for translations from the outside busy world to an unknown world within. The schoolboy's rowing venture in a borrowed boat over a moonlit lake is nothing extraordinary, but it turned into the extraordinary when the boy's mind was taken over and inhabited 'for many days' by darkness and by unknown moving and mighty forms.

Book I accustoms us to these transitions; we learn to move up and down in time, from one mood and tone to another, and from the world outside to the world of inner vision. And we move back again. Exciting as the heightened visionary experiences are, the ordinary outside world, by contrast, becomes dear to us, and necessary, as it was to Wordsworth. It is the equivalent of the wall or tree he had had to grasp as a boy walking to school to reassure himself that a world outside his imagination existed.[3] It is the equivalent of the 'warm ground, that balanced me, else lost / Entirely' (*1805* i. 90-1). The boy who on the ice

> . . . wheeled about
> Proud and exulting like an untired horse (*1805* i. 458-9)

a boy among many boys in noise and action, needs that normal activity before in solitude and in a silent bay

> . . . the solitary cliffs
> Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had rolled
> With visible motion her diurnal round. (*1805* i. 484-6)

Wordsworth twice uses the verb, 'wheeled', and thus the actual exultant yet perfect circle of the wheeling skates mirrors the almost visionary perception of the earth's movement, her wheeling, her rolling her diurnal round. Both outer and inner worlds exist and here are in accord. The warm peat fire of the cottage, the scrubbed table and the evening games offer something similar to the games and din of the skating boys, an anchoring, a relief, and a balance to help hold the intense experiences of Book I.

The 1805 line, 'Haunting me thus among my boyish sports' gathers up these alternating states and gathers up also hauntings of a different kind, such hauntings as *Tintern Abbey*'s sounding cataract that 'Haunted me like a passion'. We are reminded that Wordsworth's language haunts itself within poems and from poem to poem. These hauntings at times are of the briefest, mere flittings across a major tone. In the loving passage about the Derwent, for instance, the river, we are told,

> . . . composed my thoughts
> To more than infant softness, giving me
> Among the fretful dwellings of mankind
> A knowledge, a dim earnest of the calm
> That Nature breathes among the hills and groves? (*1805* i. 281-5)

[3] See *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth* ed. Jared Curtis (London, 1993), p. 61.

Those merely glimpsed fretful dwellings carry back with them into the early brightness of the Derwent the dark places of the poet's future,

> . . . the fretful stir
> Unprofitable, and the fever of the world . . . (*Tintern Abbey*, 53-4)

of the not long written *Tintern Abbey* and its still sad music of humanity. Similarly, into the midst of Book I's later line describing how the schoolboys went fishing 'All the green summer, to forlorn cascades' (*1805* i. 515), while the phrase 'All the green summer' recalls the golden energies of 'all a summer's day' of the Derwent passage, the older boy's knowledge of loss and of lonely places is anticipated as the fishing expeditions took the boys to pools

> . . . shut out from every star
> All the green summer, to forlorn cascades
> Among the windings of the mountain brooks. (*1805* i. 514-6)

Later, 'Winds, thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn' thrash against each other in a narrow chasm in the Alps, and the gentle opposition in that Book I line of green summer and forlorn cascades will expand to the dynamic clashing energies of opposing tumult and peace that announce permanence and power, 'like workings of one mind' (*1805* vi. 555-72). These things begin for the reader in Book I.

Everywhere there is careful orchestration; the 1805 *Prelude* is a composed work, alike in its larger shape and its smaller revisions—as the *1805* addition of the word 'haunting' has demonstrated. And we recall that when the skating passage began life in the 1799 *Two-Part Prelude* it ended with the diminuendo lines describing the gradual slowing into stillness of the wheeling cliffs:

> Behind me did they stretch in solemn train
> Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
> Till all was tranquil as a summer sea. (*1799* i. 183-5)

This image of a tranquil summer sea must increasingly have become difficult to retain: firstly, because the next paragraph, indeed the next sentence, is the passage 'Ye presences of Nature' (*1799* i. 490ff) which, as we have seen, ends with an image of an immensely powerful, not primarily a tranquil, sea as nature's forces made

> The surface of the universal earth
> With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear
> Work like a sea . . . (*1805* i. 499-501)

Secondly, 'tranquil as a summer sea' must have seemed inappropriate after the death of John Wordsworth at sea in February 1805, and especially after the writing in 1806 of the *Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a picture of Peel Castle in a Storm* in which Wordsworth uses words like 'tranquil', 'glassy', 'calm', only to reject them as conveying no reality about the nature of the sea. Certainly, in the event, in the 1805-6 fair copies of the new *Prelude*, the image was omitted. Half a line is left blank: 'Till all was tranquil as . . .'. Only years later, in 1818, was the line completed: 'Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep'.

The sea returns to the poem towards the end of Book I. Wordsworth has gone back to 'our dawn of being' (*1805* i. 584) and spoken of his early grasping at beauty, as ever, physically, drinking in – not just drinking, but like a greedy child, drinking in

> A pure organic pleasure from the lines
> Of curling mist . . . (*1805* i. 591-2)

The poet goes on here to speak of the sands of Westmorland, the creeks and bays of Cumbria's rocky limits—expressive, of course, and articulate—for they can tell

> How when the sea threw off his evening shade
> And to the shepherd's huts 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 I have stood
> Even while mine eye has moved o'er three long leagues
> Of shining water, gathering, as it seemed,
> Through every hair-breadth of that field of light
> New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers. (*1805* i. 596-608)

This is another long undroppable sentence: first, its composite subject—'sands . . . creeks and bays', then the main verb, 'they can tell', and the clauses caught up again and again, 'How when the sea . . . How I have stood . . . yet I have stood / Even while . . . gathering, as it seemed . . .'. The structure, in its desire not to end, evokes the infinite stretch of evening sky, rising moon and the leagues of shining water, and in all that space the poet is dramatically still. Wordsworth prolongs the stillness for us by repeating the verb, 'I have stood', and this itself is caught up from the skating passage, 'and I stood and watched', and goes back as far as the five-year-old child who,

> . . . when crag and hill,
> The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
> Were bronzed with a deep radiance, stood alone
> Beneath the sky . . . (*1805* i. 298-301)

It goes back in its haunting quality to *Tintern Abbey* where, for a mind informed, indeed impressed (a Wordsworthian word), by the power of place and images, the important thing for Dorothy Wordsworth to remember is

> That on the banks of this delightful stream
> We stood together . . . (*Tintern Abbey,* 151-2)

It goes back to Milton where simply to stand is enough: 'They also serve who only stand and wait'. Without intending to, I too have returned to Milton, to some sense of the *Prelude* as a continuing conversation where the talk flows to the dead, to the living, and to ourselves in Wordsworth's future.

I have not found a clear way of reading Book I. I have not found, as Wordsworth did, by its end, that 'The road lies plain before me' (*1805* i. 668), or managed to achieve a coherent view of the entire poem, but I am confirmed in the sense that the whole *Prelude* is a vast and limitless field of light, of land, and of shining water, and that in reading it one might be able to gather

> Through every hair-breadth of that field of light
> New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers. (*1805* i. 607-8)

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'Upon a dromedary mounted high'

By GRAEME STONES

TAKING HUMOROUS ASPECTS of *The Prelude* as a subject to explore is rather a tall order—this isn't the most immediately rib-tickling of English poems. My first impulse was to look outside the poem instead, to parodies of *The Prelude*. Sadly there are very few, and those few are usually rather terse, along the lines of this paraphrase:

> Dear Samuel Taylor C.,
> Enclosed is some verse. It could be
> That there's rather too much
> About Nature and such,
> But most of it's all about me.[1]

This is a little too reductive to be useful, so I return to Wordsworth himself, beginning with the history of the subject.

There was a time when it was better not to bring the humorous Wordsworth into polite company. Herbert Read, for example, called Wordsworth's humour 'the worst disfigurement of his poetry'.[2] His behaviour, supposedly, was all feet and elbows: clumsy, embarrassing, and somehow at odds with his poetic vocation. Trelawny tells a story about Wordsworth travelling in Switzerland, in days when that country was not so infallibly hygenic. He had a small terrier in the carriage, and as Trelawney waved goodbye, to his surprise Wordsworth dangled the dog at the window and bellowed: 'This hairy fellow is our flea trap'.[3] For Read and friends, such levity is unseemly in an epic poet. In verse, it makes Harry Gill's teeth chatter, it makes the ankles of an old huntsman swell, it makes seven-year-old girls disrespectful to their elders and betters.

Read was followed by those who still found this behaviour a problem, but tried to read it positively, discovering 'a warm, half-clumsy heartiness', to quote John Jordan from 1958.[4] To Wordsworth's humour Jordan applied Samuel Johnson's opinion of a dog's walking on its hind legs—remarkable because it is done at all, not because it is done well. It should be tolerated, even encouraged, because Wordsworth's 'advance into solemnity' marks his 'poetic decline'. But Jordan was uneasy: 'even his most sympathetic critic', he said, keeping the table between himself and Wordsworth: 'even his most sympathetic critic must admit that although his sense of humour was real, it was not sure . . . his humor is sometimes heavy-handed, awkward, banal, tasteless.'[5] Wordsworth remained rather a liability, then, but a good host makes allowances. For the distance travelled since the 1950s one might look perhaps at Mary Jacobus writing of feeling as 'obliquely revealed' through humour, and 'celebrating the capacity of the ordinary world to yield themes of genuine importance'[6]. Reading Wordsworth in company with other comic writing turned the notion of gaucheness on its head. With help from Sterne and Burns in particular, along with Chaucer, Shakespeare, Fielding, Lamb and others, Wordsworth's clowning began to be called

[1] Ron Rubin, in *How to be Well-Versed in Poetry* ed. E. O. Parrott (London, 1991), p. 24.
[2] Quoted by John Jordan in 'Wordsworth's Humour', *PMLA* 73 (1958) 82.
[3] Ibid., 82.
[4] Ibid., 86.
[5] Ibid., 91.
[6] *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford, 1976), p. 257.

successful and moving. However, these readings were slow to be applied to *The Prelude*. Those in search of Wordsworth's humour tended to concentrate on less central poetry: early ballads, *The Idiot Boy, The Waggoner*, or *Peter Bell*.

Attentions to *The Prelude* then, often treat Wordsworth's humour there as inclusions of this lighthearted mode, in isolated skits and sketches serving rather like the porter answering the gate in *Macbeth*, as useful relief from the real action. A favourite example is the mock-heroics of Book One, where Wordsworth solemnly overplays the evening cottage games of the children, who:

> round the naked table, snow-white deal,
> Cherry, or maple, sate in close array,
> And to the combat—lu or whist—led on
> A thick-ribbed army, not as in the world
> Neglected and ungratefully thrown by
> Even for the service they had wrought
> But husbanded through many a long campaign. (*The Thirteen-Book Prelude* i. 542-7)[7]

This is gently done. It is also satisfying on the level of literary trumping. As everyone points out, Wordsworth looks back to the rather showy parade of cards in Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, his 'Parti-colour'd Troops, a shining Train / Draw[n] forth to Combat on the Velvet Plain'.[8] Cowper is also audible, with the winter compensations of *The Task*:

> Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know.[9]

Cowper, a little primly, thought cards should be superfluous in country cottages, along with 'all the tricks / That idleness has ever yet contrived / To fill the void of an unfinished brain'.[10] Somewhere between the brocaded and the homespun, Wordsworth arrives at something very much his own.

But there is another undertone, or undertow perhaps, in this passage which is worth looking at more closely, since it shows the humour to be more than local. Wordsworth is sending himself up as well, borrowing his own diction, the language used elsewhere to moralize the plight of discharged, or discarded, soldiers, and applying it to paper veterans instead: 'Neglected and ungratefully thrown by / Even for the very service they had wrought'.[11] This is not just mock-heroics, in other words, it is also self-parody, a tease at his own expense about his own ambitions, his own earnest sense of vocation, his own crusades on behalf of the hard-done-by. It is an undertow which appears to run all through *The Prelude*.

This can be seen more clearly in another favourite passage, in Book Four, when Wordsworth is revisiting Hawkshead and old friends, on vacation from Cambridge. Trelawny's story about Wordsworth in Switzerland shows that terriers lack proper respect for epic poets, and sure enough as soon as one appears here, dignities are at risk:

[7] All quotations from the 1805 *Prelude* are from the Norton edition.
[8] Canto iii. 43-4.
[9] *Task* iv ('The Winter Evening'), 140-3.
[10] Ibid., 207-9.
[11] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* i. 545-6.

Among the faces which it pleased me well
To see again was one by ancient right
Our inmate, a rough terrier of the hills,
By birth and call of nature preordained
To hunt the badger and unearth the fox
Among the impervious crags.[12]

As with the Battle of the Cards, again the poetry elevates the humble, solemnly making a warrior out of the little dog. Terriers seem perfectly chosen as mock-emblem of the heroic, in their diminutively feisty attitudes. This one becomes a delightful foil, as Wordsworth describes himself, when a lad, becoming infected with books, abandoning mischief and dawdling dreamily through countryside in which he and the terrier had each once been a 'fell destroyer':

when first
The boyish spirits flagged, and day by day
Along my veins I kindled with the stir,
The fermentation and the vernal heat
Of poesy, affecting private shades,
Like a sick lover, then this dog was used
To watch me, an attendant and a friend,
Obsequieous to my steps early and late,
Though often of such dilatory walk
Tired, and uneasy at the halts I made.[13]

Like Don Quixote's niece, the terrier clearly fears that Wordsworth:

> may possibly, reading such books, take it into his head to turn shepherd, and wander through the woods and fields, singing and playing on a pipe; and, what would be still worse, turn poet, which they say is an incurable and contagious disease.[14]

And of course the dog's fears are realized—the days of poaching woodcock and stealing raven's eggs are over. But, being a terrier, he trots along making the best of a bad lot, like a hairy and canine Sancho Panza, while Wordsworth's mind is on higher things:

A hundred times when in these wanderings
I have been busy with the toil of verse—

'Great pains and little progress' says Wordsworth, mock lugubriously—

and at once
Some fair enchanting image in my mind
Rose up, full-formed like Venus from the sea,
Have I sprung forth towards him and let loose
My hand upon his back with stormy joy,
Caressing him again and yet again.[15]

[12] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* iv. 84-9.
[13] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* iv. 91-100
[14] *Don Quixote*, Part 1, Book 1, Chapter 6.
[15] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* iv. 101-8.

The little dog does his best to keep Wordsworth out of trouble, jogging on ahead while the poet saunters 'like a river murmuring and talking to itself', coming back to warn him of anyone ahead:

> and straitway,
> Punctual to such admonishment, I hushed
> My voice, composed my gait, and shaped myself
> To give and take a greeting that might save
> My name from piteous rumours, such as wait
> On men suspected to be crazed in brain.[16]

This deflation of his own prophetic calling serves a special purpose in a poem which is effectively *about* his own prophetic calling. Wordsworth's version of epic, his self-conscious challenge to Milton and the whole tradition, in making the self (and specifically his own self) the subject involves him in exactly what his detractors charge him with—the risk of egotism and triviality. As Mark Storey points out, in a discussion of Wordsworth's humour, 'The very notion of epic suggests particular limitations of propriety', in other words it must not become too personal, it must not become too particular. But the epic as such can no longer be written, and although it continues to trouble him Wordsworth knows that the self is the proper subject for the epic poem of his age. To quote Storey again, Wordsworth 'found that the problems of self-centredness could at least be eased by a variety of tones, including the self-mocking and self-deflating'[17].

The growth of his own mind was not what Coleridge had prescribed as his proper subject, which is one reason why Wordsworth is at his most self-deprecating when he addresses Coleridge within the poem. If one *was* to paraphrase what Wordsworth is up to in *The Prelude*, it ought really to come out more like this:

> Dear Samuel Taylor C.,
> Enclosed is some verse. It could be
> You won't like my drift—
> I've had to make shift,
> And there's rather a lot about me.

Storey's account of all this uses those lines about the card-games, from Book One. Although he is interesting on the place of mock-heroic in a modern epic, he actually has a rather low opinion of Wordsworth's use of it. Looking back to the *Rape of the Lock*, Storey says: 'By comparison, of course, Wordsworth comes off very badly . . . Wordsworth's lumbering epic engine has none of the point, wit or finesse of Pope.'[18] That 'of course' is unjustifiable. It arises because Storey believes in polarities. There is epic, and there is mock-epic, in his account: Wordsworth occasionally resorts to self-deflating mock-epic to relieve, or put to good use, his embarrassment at making himself the epic subject; and Wordworth's mock-epic is not as polished as Pope's (I am brutalizing, but this is essentially Storey's position). So Wordsworth's humour is still local, still embarrassing, and still a form of light relief from the real action.

At this point I should spell out some disagreements. To begin with, any idea that epic and mock-epic exist as immiscible opposites seems wrongheaded. The *Iliad* is full of mock-epic moments, and they are not some peculiar by-product, they are a necessary agent in large poetic

[16] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* iv. 115-20

[17] Storey, *Poetry and Humour from Cowper to Clough* (London, 1979), p. 60.

[18] Ibid., 61.

gestures. The differences between Homer and Pope and Wordsworth are in degree, not in kind. Next, I think humour in *The Prelude* is rather more than light relief. I use that phrase 'humour in *The Prelude*' carefully, so as to sidle out of problems of intent. Humour seems never far from the surface, even in sections which scholars take very seriously indeed, sections about the imagination, its relationship with the natural world, and about the human predicament between the two. As another escape clause, when I use the word humour I mean something as unsettling as it is amusing. To find out if there's anything in this I would like first to take a serious look at a serious passage.

My title comes from Book Five of *The Prelude*, from the famous dream passage, a dream which De Quincey felt 'reaches the very *ne plus ultra* of sublimity'. De Quincey gives a lovely summary of the dream, quoting by memory from a reading of the poem thirty years previously, which is worth repeating now to call the vision to mind. 'The form of the dream is as follows', he says, adding, 'and, by the way, even this form is not arbitrary':

> but, with exquisite skill in the art of composition, is made to arise out of the situation in which the poet had previously found himself, and is faintly prefigured in the elements of that situation. He had been reading 'Don Quixote' by the seaside; and, oppressed by the heat of the sun, he had fallen asleep whilst gazing on the barren sands before him. He dreams that, walking in some sandy wilderness of Africa, some endless Zahara, he sees, at a distance
>
> 'An Arab of the desert, lance in rest,
> Mounted upon a dromedary.'
>
> The Arab rides forward to meet him; and the dreamer perceives, in the countenance of the rider, the agitation of fear, and that he often looks behind him in a troubled way, whilst in his hand he holds two books—one of which is Euclid's 'Elements'; the other, which is a book and yet not a book, seeming, in fact, a shell as well as a book, sometimes neither, and yet both at once. The Arab directs him to apply the shell to his ear; upon which—
>
> 'In an unknown tongue which yet I understood,'
>
> the dreamer says that he heard
>
> 'A wild prophetic blast of harmony,
> An ode, as if in passion utter'd, that foretold
> Destruction to the people of this earth
> By deluge near at hand.'
>
> The Arab, with grave countenance, assures him that it is even so; that all was true which had been said; and that he himself was riding upon a divine mission, having it in charge [To bury those two books], that is, in effect, to secure the two great interests of poetry and mathematics from sharing in the watery ruin. As he talks, suddenly the dreamer perceives that the Arab's
>
> —'countenance grew more disturb'd,'
>
> and that his eye was often reverted; upon which the dreaming poet also looks along the desert in the same direction; and in the far horizon he descries
>
> —'a glittering light.'
>
> What is it? he asks of the Arab rider. 'It is,' said he, 'the waters of the earth,' that even then were travelling on their awful errand. Upon which, the poet sees this apostle of the desert riding off,

'With the fleet waters of the world in chase of him.'[19]

De Quincey catches both the art of the passage, its 'exquisite skill in . . . composition', and its seeming artlessness: the autonomous, mesmerising power of the dream-narrative once begun.

It certainly is a most unsettling passage, with a dream's capacity to carry complete conviction and remain perplexing. It is among the most troubling and powerful set-pieces of *The Prelude*, and yet, utterly unlike those others—the Simplon Pass, or the climbing of Snowdon, say—in its setting and atmosphere. Why an Arab rescuer? Why a flood in the desert? Why are the 'children of the earth' at risk? Where did all these come from? Why a camel, of all things, in *The Prelude*?

If Wordsworth had wanted to find out about camels, and related matters, he might have gone to Buffon's *Natural History*, popular and available in several editions in the late eighteenth century. If he did, he would have met one of the most evocative and disturbing passages of that *History*, Buffon's equivalent of the 'very *ne plus ultra* of sublimity':

> The Arabians regard the camel as a present from heaven, a sacred animal, without whose assistance they could neither subsist, carry on trade, nor travel . . . With their camels, they not only want nothing, but have nothing to fear. In one day, they can perform a journey of fifty leagues into the desert, which cuts off every approach from their enemies. All the armies of the world would perish in pursuit of a troop of Arabs. Hence they never submit, unless from choice, to any power. Figure to yourselves a country without verdure, and without water, a burning sun, an air always parched, sandy plains, mountains still more adust, which the eye runs over without perceiving a single animated being; a dead earth, perpetually tossed with the winds, and presenting nothing but bones, scattered flints, rocks perpendicular or overturned; a desert totally void, where the traveller never breathes under a shade, where nothing accompanies him, nothing recalls the idea of animated nature; absolute solitude, more dreadful than that of the deepest forest; for to man, trees are, at least, visible objects: More solitary and naked, more lost in an unlimited void, he every where beholds space surrounding him as a tomb: The light of the day, more dismal than the darkness of night, serves only to give him a clearer view of his own wretchedness and impotence, and to conceal from his view the barriers of the void, by extending around him that infinite abyss which separates him from the habitable parts of the earth; an abyss, which, in vain, he should attempt to traverse; for hunger, thirst, and scorching heat, haunt every moment that remains to him between despair and death.

If nothing else this is a reminder of the absence of Wordsworthian consolations in *The Prelude*'s dream: another landscape where 'nothing recalls the idea of animated nature', where pantheism falters and hearts are dry as dust. It brings home, too, how peculiarly reliant travellers are upon their guides, something Buffon emphasises for, as he says,

> The Arab, however, by the assistance of his camel, has learned to surmount, and even to appropriate, these frightful intervals of Nature. They serve him for an asylum, they secure his repose, and maintain his independence.[20]

Again, this dependence on an Arab guide is a most un-Wordsworthian state of affairs. As De Quincey says of Wordsworth, gossiping shortly before discussing the dream:

[19] De Quincey, *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets* ed. David Wright (Harmondsworth, 1970) (hereafter *Recollections*), pp. 169-70.
[20] Buffon, *Natural History* tr. W. Smellie (3rd ed., London, 1791), vi. 127.

> Freedom—unlimited, careless, insolent freedom—unoccupied possession of his own arms—absolute control over his own legs and motions—these have always been so essential to his comfort, that in any case where they were likely to become questionable, he would have declined to make one of the party.[21]

Worse still, even before the estrangements of dream-narratives come into it, Arab guides had an ambivalent reputation. A footnote to Richard Payne Knight's *Progress of Civil Society* (1796) says that:

> There is no animal in human shape so totally devoid of the milk of human kindness, as the wandering Arab of the Desert; yet to those whom his laws of honour entitle to the rights of hospitality, he is kind, generous, and faithful in the extreme.[22]

So *The Prelude*'s Bedouin is an ambiguous rescuer: foreign, unreadable, unreliable; not unlike his mount, a haughty animal with a reputation for spitting in people's faces.

If all this is so un-Wordsworthian, where did it come from? We know that the dream is a reworked version of three dreams recorded by Descartes, which were 'clearly indicative of divine blessing upon his philosophic mission'.[23] Descartes imagines two books, one of science, one of poetry, and a mysterious stranger who converses with him. But Descartes's setting is a library, his dream a tame affair beside *The Prelude*'s Book Five, and anyway Wordsworth is unlikely to have read of it himself.

In *The Prelude*, he attributes the dream to 'a friend', at least in the 1805 version (by 1839, it becomes his own). Both Michel Beaupuy and Coleridge have been suggested, with Beaupuy usually the favourite, as most probably familiar with Descartes at the right time. Coleridge should not be discounted so easily; he too read Descartes, and was more likely to have passed the bare bones on without mentioning where he found them. But, who then reset the dream in the Arabian wilderness? Beaupuy, Coleridge, or Wordsworth himself? We do not know, nor are we likely to, now, although again Coleridge seems likely and some circumstantial evidence points to his at least setting the poem in motion. But here as elsewhere, the dream can't finally be pinned down. It is 'perhaps the most enigmatic passage in *The Prelude*',[24] at once inimitably imagined and highly allusive, dependent on or involved with all sorts of other texts.

Some of these are obvious. Wordsworth read *The Arabian Nights* of course, 'a precious treasure', he calls his childhood copy of it, later in Book Five. One might derive from it the foreign, the arbitrary, and also the comic. But the appeal of those Tales is to the exotic East—perfume, indolence and arabesques—not the desert and the ascetic. It is easy to see why Coleridge was more affected by them than Wordsworth. What is missing so far are sources for the more unsettling qualities of the dream: the isolation, and that deeply disturbing vision of 'riding o'er the desert sands / With the fleet waters of the drowning world / In chase of him'.

Buffon's *Natural History*, mentioned earlier, is no more than a possibility, along with a number of other temptations. One which does deserve looking at is the *Travels* of James Bruce, published in five volumes in 1790. Bruce returned from Egypt with his health ruined but his spirit alight with all he had seen, heard and lived through. He is a most evocative and moving storyteller, especially when writing of the precariousness of life in the desert, and the effects of

[21] *Recollections*, 158.

[22] Richard Payne Knight, *The Progress of Civil Society* (London, 1796) Bk.II, note to line 415.

[23] Jane Worthington Smyser, 'Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science: The Prelude, V', *PMLA* 71 (1956) 269-75.

[24] Paul Hamilton, *Wordsworth* (Brighton, 1986), p. 104.

solitude on the mind. Here is a passage from the middle of one journey which Bruce barely survived, a desperate scramble from one water-hole to the next:

> We were in the middle of the most barren, inhospitable desert in the world, and it was with the utmost difficulty that, from day to day, we could carry wherewithal to assuage our thirst .... lances and swords were not necessary to destroy us, the bursting or tearing of a girba [water-skin], the lameness or death of a camel, a thorn or sprain in the foot which might disable us from walking, were as certain death to us as a shot from a cannon. There was no staying for one another; to lose time was to die, because, with the utmost exertion our camels could make, we scarce could carry along with us a scanty provision of bread and water sufficient to keep us alive.[25]

Bruce lost all his camels on this trip, several of his companions, and was close to death when he reached safety.

The *Travels* certainly share the unpredictable, estranging atmosphere of *The Prelude*'s dream. Bruce has a great deal to say about camels, too. He even dissects one, to investigate its reservoirs of water and other semi-mythical qualities. He has so much to say, in fact, that he sets off argument and discussion about camels in the literary periodicals in England which rumble on through the 1790s. He also writes at length about Arab guides, and their potential treachery. But, did Wordsworth actually read the *Travels* in time for Bruce to influence *The Prelude*? Alan Liu, for one, would like to think so, in *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*. Bruce is useful to Liu for his own interpretation of imagination in *The Prelude*. Without going into the details, it would suit his purposes if Wordsworth had seen the *Travels*. Circumstantial evidence supports him, but he admits that there is no proof.[26]

I would like briefly to add to this evidence, but first need to recover another, slightly surprising source for the apocalyptic power of Wordsworth's dream. That source is Erasmus Darwin, in his distinctly individual blend of poetry and science, *The Botanic Garden* of 1791, which Wordsworth read in time for it to influence *The Prelude*. Darwin has a visionary passage which is close to that of Wordsworth.

In this poem Darwin has a vision, a recreation in verse of 'The Destruction of the armies of Cambyses', who marched from Persia to subdue Ethiopia. The armies of Cambyses were destroyed, in the desert, by an apocalyptic flood—a flood not of water, but of sand and air. Darwin being the kind of poet he is, this vast sandstorm has to be martialled and conducted by a group of gnomes. However, apart from the gnomes, it is certainly a striking piece:

> GNOMES! o'er the waste you led your myriad powers,
> Climb'd on the whirls, and aim'd the flinty showers!—
> Onward resistless rolls the infuriate surge,
> Clouds follow clouds, and mountains mountains urge;
> Wave over wave the driving desert swims,
> Bursts o'er their heads, inhumes their struggling limbs;
> Man mounts on man, on camels camels rush,
> Hosts march o'er hosts, and nations nations crush,—

[25] *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, In the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773* (5 vols., Edinburgh, 1790) (hereafter *Travels*), iv. 568.

[26] See Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford, 1989), esp. pp. 3, 4, 513.

Wheeling in air the winged islands fall,
And one great earthy Ocean covers all![27]

It is a very Darwinian passage, not just the gnomes, but the exuberant tautological pile-ups, the way nouns squash nouns, or as he would put it, nouns nouns squash. However, although Darwin can be energetic enough on his own in fact the impetus of this passage comes directly from Bruce's *Travels*, and the description of a storm raised in the desert by the simoom, that fabulous, terrifying windblast from the Eastern quarter of the compass. Darwin admits this himself, and even footnotes the paragraphs which most affected him. This being *The Botanic Garden*, those paragraphs are quoted in full. If Wordsworth read nothing else of Bruce, he certainly read this essential description:

> It was in vain to think of flying; the swiftest horse, or the fastest sailing ship, could be of no use to carry us out of this danger, and the full persuasion of this rivetted me as if to the spot where I stood.[28]

What Bruce is watching at this point are whirlwinds, moving towers of sand lit by the sun to resemble huge pillars of fire. His guide, Idris, shaken to the core, knows that these are only harbingers of what is to come, the awful simoom itself, which arrives soon afterwards:

> At eleven o'clock . . . Idris cried out, with a loud voice, Fall upon your faces, for here is the simoom. I saw from the S.E. a haze come in, in colour like the purple part of the rainbow, but not so compressed or thick. . . . It was a kind of blush upon the air and it moved very rapidly, for I scarce could turn to fall upon the ground with my face to the northward, when I felt the heat of its current upon my face. We all lay flat on the ground, as if dead, till Idris told us it was blown over. The meteor, or purple haze, which I saw, was indeed passed, but the light air that still blew was of heat to threaten suffocation.[29]

As Duncan Wu has pointed out,[30] there is no direct evidence that Wordsworth read the *Travels* before writing *The Prelude*. Perhaps this passage quoted by Darwin inspired him to do so. It may also have inspired Coleridge, who footnotes the same passage from the *Travels* in his own apocalypse in *Religious Musings*, an apocalypse first published separately as 'The Present State of Society' in *The Watchman* in March 1796. Since Wordsworth is also writing about the present state of society, again one wonders about the influence of Coleridge on Wordsworth's dream (it was Coleridge who had another vision of poetry on the loose in the desert, in 1798: 'had I met these lines running wild in the deserts of Arabia, I should instantly have screamed out 'Wordsworth', he wrote in a letter[31] then, about lines which later went into *The Prelude*).

If Wordsworth did read the *Travels*, one could look to James Bruce to assist with another perplexity: this business of the stone, that half of the Arab's 'twofold treasure' which contained 'Euclid's Elements'. There have been some ingenious and fascinating discussions of the stone and the shell, most of which have concentrated on the shell, naturally enough since it both speaks in verse: 'An ode in passion uttered', and finds poetry: 'A joy, a consolation, and a hope' in the face of death. For a shell to be, as De Quincey described it, 'a book and yet not a book, seeming

[27] *The Botanic Garden* (London, 1791), Part 1, *The Economy of Vegetation* vii. 485-99.
[28] *Travels* iv. 553, as quoted by Darwin (slight but insignificant variations from original).
[29] Ibid., 557, as quoted by Darwin.
[30] In *Wordsworth's Reading 1800-1815* (Cambridge, 1996), p.32.
[31] To Wordsworth, 10 December 1798, *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71), i. 453.

in fact, a shell as well as a book, sometimes neither, and yet both at once' seems natural enough in a dream context. More than natural, it is a haunting, wonderful image. But that stone is rather obdurate. It is solid, silent, apparently unprophetic (it merely 'holds acquaintance with the stars'), unpersuading, and awkward. Euclid's Elements on a stone. De Quincey says there are six volumes in the version Wordsworth knew. On a stone. And tucked under the Arab's arm. How big was it, exactly? How heavy? Does it not it rather slow him down? As a reader, one stubs one's toe on it; or kicks out at it, in a Sam-Johnsonian literalist huff: 'Euclid's Elements? I refute it thus!'

However, there is a chapter in Bruce's *Travels* which might be palliative. Bruce was fascinated by the origins of language, and came back with first-hand knowledge which enabled him to take an energetic part in the pedagogic quarrels of his day. He first insists that Osiris was not the first real king of Egypt (this was one of the current debates), but a legendary figure, derived from Syrius, the dog-star, who played a vital part in Egyptian cosmology. Syrius appears in the night sky at the right moment to predict the bursting of the banks of the Nile: 'his first appearance was figuratively compared to the barking of a dog, by the warning it gave to prepare for the approaching inundation.'[32] And Bruce maintains that the very first hieroglyph was a representation of Syrius. He goes on to discuss the evolution of hieroglyphics, and is refreshingly brisk: 'I know that most of the learned writers are of sentiments very different from mine in these respects. They look for mysteries and hidden meanings, moral and philosophical treatises, as the subjects of these hieroglyphs.'[33] Bruce's view is straightforward. The hieroglyphs are astronomical tables, they hold 'acquaintance with the stars' largely with the pragmatic aim to rescue the populace of Egypt from drowning. And as hieroglyphs evolve, Bruce describes how these tables become smaller and more condensed, until, in their sophisticated form, they are literally, as he calls them, a 'portable almanack'. He writes about one of these in great detail: 'the length of the whole stone is fourteen inches, and six inches broad, upon a base three inches high, projecting from the block itself, and covered with hieroglyphics.'[34] About right to tuck under an arm, then. He goes on: 'This I suppose was what formerly the Egyptians called a book, or almanack; a collection of these was probably hung up in some conspicuous place, to inform the public of the state of the heavens, and seasons, and diseases, to be expected in the course of them'.[35] Connections with *The Prelude* are intriguing, if not exactly watertight.

Enough of this allegory on the banks of the Nile. I wanted to emphasize this side of the dream, so as to bring out the seriousness, so to speak, of its humour, which is going on at the same time, and with an equivalent richness of association. One would think that apocalypse is no laughing matter. James Bruce certainly does not think it is, and whatever Darwin's supporters say about his playfulness, readers are not supposed to be amused by his desert gnomes. As with the stone and the shell, there have been as many interpretations of Wordsworth's flood as there are critics: 'What . . . is one to make of "the fleet waters of the drowning world" that pursue the Arab Quixote with whom Wordsworth so deeply identifies'.[36]

For Geoffrey Hartman the sterility of the landscape leaves the poet facing the power of the imagination alone, a power acting independently of the natural world.[37] Hartman's deluge, then,

[32] *Travels*, i.412.
[33] Ibid., 414-5.
[34] Ibid., 418.
[35] Ibid., 419.
[36] Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982) (hereafter *Borders of Vision*), p. 194.
[37] *Wordsworth's Poetry: 1787-1814* (New Haven 1964), p. 230.

is imagination itself. For Jonathan Wordsworth: 'this seems to be going far to seek disquietude. It is surely a threatened engulfment *of*, not by, imagination that causes the terror.'[38] For others, the flood is 'cultural dislocation',[39] or the inevitably 'radical temporality of any relationship of mind with a rhetorical text',[40] or the revolutionary bloodbath and its tidal ruin, to give a recent cross-section of serious interpretations.

There is another reading of the flood which might enhance these without denying any one, and that is that of Abbie Findlay Potts, way back in 1953, a reading which seems to have been largely forgotten. Where one might least expect it, Potts restores the link with Pope:

> the deluge which threatens human culture looks like a Wordsworthian version of Pope's deluge of dullness and darkness which 'drown'd . . . Sense, and Shame, and Right, and Wrong,' in *The Dunciad*.[41]

Potts backs this up with close readings of the two passages, and ties this in with Wordsworth's self-deflations, especially Wordsworth's amusement at his own student follies at Cambridge, where allusions to Pope are particularly dense.

Bringing the levity of *The Dunciad* into things, some might call a 'disfigurement', an undermining of *The Prelude*'s epic integrity, and its prophetic message. But here humour is an undertow again, not undermining but undetermining, and the effect is to make one listen more, not less, attentively to this 'ode in passion uttered'. In a sense, it doesn't entirely matter what the deluge is in *The Prelude*. The end is always nigh, in one way or another. A poem which arrives like a comet, with a long beard and pretences to foretell events is flirting with absurdity. But the dream-passage arrives with two tails, narrative and counter-narrative together. It is self-parodic, in other words, aware of its own absurdities, but never losing a deeper conviction. It is rather like Don Quixote out on the empty plain watching a huge cloud of dust rolling towards him, and predicting prodigious armies on the march. Although Don Quixote is mistaken, eloquence remains with him, not with the literalist who insists those armies are only sheep.

With Quixote in mind, I would like to elaborate Mark Storey's idea a little, and say that humour in *The Prelude* is not just a putting-to-good use of anxiety about the self as subject, but also of anxiety about the subjectivity of self. 'Why hath not the mind / Some element to stamp her image on / In nature somewhat nearer to her own?' asks Wordsworth, immediately before the Arab appears,[42] distracted by the seeming final isolations of mind from mind.

In these conditions parodic subjectivity survives its own incompetence: 'Look, sir,' said Sancho Panza, 'those which appear yonder are not giants, but windmills, and what seem to be arms are the sails, which, whirled about by the wind, make the mill-stone go'. 'It is very evident,' answered Don Quixote, 'that thou art not versed in the business of adventures'. In such a conversation, truth lies couched. If *The Prelude* is a quest into the landscapes of the mind, in search of the secret of imagination, with which to restore the world's natural harmony, then it is a quest in which giants of the unconscious may very well take up whatever shape they wish, a quest into a landscape bordering on madness, but an adventure worth pursuing in a world which,

[38] *Borders of Vision*, 194.

[39] David Collings, *Wordsworthian Errancies: The Poetics of Cultural Dismemberment* (Baltimore, 1994), p. 180.

[40] Timothy Bahti, 'Wordsworth's Figures of Interpretation', *Studies in Romanticism* 18 (1979) 601-27, p. 625.

[41] Potts, *Wordsworth's Prelude: A Study of its Literary Form* (Ithaca, NY, 1953), p. 51. Although Mary Jacobus does not refer directly to Potts, she makes similar comparisons with Pope, in chapter 4 of *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on The Prelude* (Oxford, 1989).

[42] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* v. 44-6.

otherwise, is nothing but a grinding mechanism. Wordsworth's semi-identification with Quixote stops the poem from clinging, like Sancho Panza, to the palpable. Or perhaps it allows the poem at once to pursue the everyday and discover the fabulous, offering two opposites between which to form a whole in the way Cervantes does.

Everyone comments on the 'dyadic', the binary nature of the dream of Book Five: its oppositions of dry and wet, stone and book, voiceless and prophetic and so on. To these pairings one may add the two tails of the dream, the serious and the mock-serious. The tails are part of something not much discussed, and that is the oxymoronic quality of the passage, in its pairing of absurdities: madness and reason, authority and folly, sense and nonsense. It is in oxymoron that much of the humour in *The Prelude* lies, and it is a curious source of strength. For all his instabilities, the Arab guide is the most commanding of Wordworth's solitaries.

If the guide is unstable, one wonders about his mount, that ship of the desert and in this case ark of a covenant, the camel of my title.

> He saw before him an Arabian waste,
> A desart, and he fancied that himself
> Was sitting there in the wild wilderness
> Alone upon the sands. Distress of mind
> Was growing in him when, behold, at once
> To his great joy a man was at his side,
> Upon a dromedary mounted high.
> He seemed an arab of the Bedouin tribes;
> A lance he bore, and underneath one arm
> A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell
> Of a surpassing brightness.[43]

Looking at that phrase, 'upon a dromedary', I remembered W. J. B. Owen's essay on the difficulties of understanding *The Prelude* and how, much of every reader's reading consists of nonsense, of inexplicabilities left unresolved.[44] Owen reminds us that the devil is in the details, his essay being built around the exact distance an arrow might or might not travel, in *The Prelude*. So, in the spirit of Owen, why a dromedary, exactly? What did Wordsworth know about dromedaries? Where did he find out about them? And, last but not least, what is a dromedary?

Wordsworth's camel probably comes first from Spenser:

> At length they spide, where towards them with speed
> A Squire came gallopping, as he would flie;
> Bearing a litle Dwarfe before his steed,
> That all the way full loud for aide did crie,
> That seem'd his shrikes would rend the brasen skie:
> Whom after did a mightie man pursew,
> Riding upon a Dromedare on hie,
>
> Of stature huge, and horrible of hew,
> That would have maz'd a man his dreadfull face to vew.

[43] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* v. 71-81.

[44] Owen, 'Understanding The Prelude', *Wordsworth Circle* 22 (1991) 100-9.

Here the camel is a fitting mount for a 'mightie man', a 'Pagan', a Muslim with eyes so piercing that a glance can slay an enemy, yet a man full, Spenser writes, of 'sad powre'.[45]

At the same time, it is not an easy animal on which to keep one's seat. As Alex Russell describes it, in *The Natural History of Aleppo* in 1794: 'The constant mode of the Camel's walk is by raising the two legs of the same side, the one immediately after the other: not moving the legs diagonally, in the manner of most other Quadrupeds.'[46] A camel is a kind of walking 'unexpected juxtaposition of incongruities', to borrow that ponderous definition of humour. And dromedaries are difficult to define, not just figuratively, but literally. Spenser is not much help here, but there is a handy mnemonic for people who are unsure exactly what a dromedary is:

> The camel has a single hump,
> The dromedary two;
> Or else the other way around;
> I'm never sure—are you?[47]

Not so useful after all, then. And so to that rock of certainty in a confused sea, the *OED*: 'Dromedary: A light and fleet breed of the camel, specially reared and trained for riding. . . . Usually of the Arabian or one-humped camel, but the Bactrian [or two-humped] camel may also be improved into a dromedary'. A delightful phrase there, 'improved into a dromedary', but still leaving something of a puzzle. We seem to arrive at: how do you like your tease, one hump or two? And the more one squints into the sun to scrutinize these beasts, the more blurred and indeterminate they become. *The Canting Crew*, a dictionary of slang in 1698 uses dromedary to mean: a Thief or Rogue. The vernacular term was drumbledary, from the same root as the drumbledore or bumblebee, and with the same associations: not light and fleet, but, perversely opposite: bumbling, sluggish or stupid. And, most interestingly, that root 'drumble' has a verbal variant meaning to trouble, to disturb.

Well, how many humps did the dromedary have in *The Prelude*? If Wordsworth went to the Latin Bestiaries for advice, he would have first discovered that the camel's hump symbolised temperance and prudence. At this point a modern mind might begin to worry about that term 'humping', and sure enough the Bestiaries also find the camel symbolizing lust, with supposedly voracious sexual appetites. But, although *Leviticus* lists the camel as unclean, for 'he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof',[48] nevertheless the camel was an important figure of Christian humility, from its habit of kneeling, and carrying burdens. Drumbledaries are humble-humps, in other words. More confusion, then, and on the matter of numbers of humps the Bestiaries are equally ambiguous. There is no shortage of advice alsewhere (all of it conflicting). No doubt Wordsworth came to have his own views on the matter. He did, after all, see one in the flesh in *The Prelude*'s Book Seven, in the 'Babel din' of London, a 'dromedary with an antic pair / Of monkies on his back',[49] though how many humps the monkeys sat on is not mentioned. Naturally the twentieth century has a prosaic answer to the problem, but it is not relevant. Like the existence of Don Quixote's Dulcinea, a dromedary's humps 'ought not to be too nicely enquired into'. What the camel does is help the poetry resist resolution, to occupy, like Dulcinea, a strange charismatic semi-existence, partway between the factual and the fabulous.

[45] *Faerie Queene* IV. viii. st. 38, 39.
[46] Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo* (2 vols., London, 1794), ii. 169.
[47] Ogden Nash (much anthologized).
[48] Leviticus 11:4.
[49] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* vii. 193-4.

The Prelude's dromedary is also a nice example of 'A rhetorical figure by which contradictory or incongruous terms are conjoined so as to give point to the statement or expression', to give the dictionary definition of an oxymoron. It is a definition which reminds us that there is a point to this; oxymoron is not, as we loosely use it, simply contradiction in terms, but a figure in which incongruity assists expression. Perhaps, like so many rhetorical skills, the use of oxymoron is almost a lost art. *The Prelude* shows what understated, but moving effects it can have.

The poet's identification with the 'arab phantom', the 'semi-Quixote' of the dream passage, leaves one with perhaps the most poignant, enduring image of the dream, that of Wordsworth as a gentle dweller in the landscapes of the mind, almost crazed, 'by love and feeling and internal thought / Protracted among endless solitudes'.[50] It is a quietly humorous image which could scarcely be less clumsy or embarrassing, and it gives *The Prelude*'s vatic utterances an eloquent uncertainty which, far from undermining them, is unforgettable.

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[50] *The Prelude* V, 145-6.

The Conjunction of the Matter-of-Fact and the Visionary in the 1805 *Prelude*

By MARY WEDD

SITTING IN MY ARMCHAIR, I idly reached out a hand and took down the nearest book, which happened to be R. D. Havens' *The Mind of a Poet.*[1]

There now! You didn't want to know all that, did you? Coleridge, referring to Wordsworth, would put this sort of thing in his first category of matter-of-factness, the defect of a 'laborious minuteness and fidelity in the representation of objects and their positions as they appeared to the poet himself'.[2] But my reference to Havens is not an irrelevance.

The book was first published in 1941 and reprinted a number of times, my copy in 1967, and it was invaluable to me years ago when I first made a careful study of *The Prelude*. The work of scholarly editors and some other subsequent criticism have, inevitably, dated the book somewhat but Havens does often interestingly compare the 1850 text with MS A, the basis for the 1805 text as we know it, and his thoughtful comments in general are still interesting. I had not looked at *The Mind of a Poet* for some time and had forgotten that the first chapter of Volume I is on 'The Matter-of-Factness of Wordsworth'. This led me to return to the second volume, in which Havens provides a detailed commentary on the poem, to see whether I agreed with his opinions on which passages suffered from the 'matter-of-factness' Coleridge deplored and which did not.

It seems that extreme youth and extreme old age have in common a disregard for that becoming modesty with which, in the intervening years, one approaches the august personages of English Literature. When I read *Biographia Literaria* at school—oh yes, I *did* read it at school —I got in a rage at some of Coleridge's unfavourable criticisms of Wordsworth and wrote in the margins several times an uncompromising 'Rot!' with a big exclamation mark. Now, youth and age 'Coming together in life's pilgrimage', I again find it difficult to read some passages, such as the absurd snobbery about the pedlar, with any patience. Coleridge, of course, does not give examples of matter-of-factness from *The Prelude* as such, because, though he knew it, it had not, except for a few passages, been published; but Havens, using Coleridge's criteria, does.

Let us leave *Biographia* published in 1817, for the moment, and pick up instead Hazlitt's 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', so much more entertaining! Though not published till 1823, the essay conjures up brilliantly from memory the young man's hero-worship and sense of magic when he first met Coleridge in 1798 and then visited Somerset and met Wordsworth. But youthful idealism does not last and, as Hazlitt also says in this essay, 'As we advance, we exhaust our fund of enjoyment and of hope'.

The reader cannot entirely regret that sad process, for we would not wish to be without those occasions when he combines his inimitable prose-style with a sort of delighted cattiness, as when, in describing Coleridge's appearance, he says, 'his nose, the rudder of his face, the index of the will, was small, feeble, nothing—like what he has done'. A tinge of the same sharpness comes through his account of Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth, a neat killing of two birds with one stone.

[1] R. D. Havens, *The Mind of a Poet* (2 vols., Baltimore, 1941) (hereafter Havens).
[2] *Biographia Literaria* ed. George Watson (London, 1975) (hereafter Watson), p. 251.

> Coleridge and myself walked back to Stowey that evening, and his voice sounded high
> Of Providence, foreknowledge, will and fate,
> Fix'd fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute,
> as we passed through echoing grove, by fairy stream or waterfall, gleaming in the summer moonlight! He lamented that Wordsworth was not prone enough to believe in the traditional superstitions of the place, and that there was a something corporeal, a *matter-of-factness*, a clinging to the palpable, or often to the petty, in his poetry in consequence.

Shades of the pixies of Ottery? There is a tendency to end the quotation there, but the passage goes on.

> This genius was not a spirit that descended to him through the air; it sprung out of the ground like a flower, or unfolded itself from a green spray, on which the goldfinch sang.[3]

Exactly. Nor could this 'spirit' rise unless the 'ground' was solidly there, the 'flower', the 'green spray' and the 'goldfinch' made 'palpable', as Coleridge acknowledges when he comes to Wordsworth's virtues.[4] Hazlitt goes on to record that Coleridge then modified his criticism.

> He said, however (if I remember right), that this objection must be confined to his descriptive pieces, that his philosophic poetry had a grand and comprehensive spirit in it, so that his soul seemed to inhabit the universe like a palace, and to discover truth by intuition, rather than by deduction.

A generous tribute.

But, jumping to Wordsworth's defence, as I did at sixteen, cannot blind me now to those instances when Coleridge's strictures prove just. I don't think many of us would quarrel with objections to those lines in 'The Thorn' which illustrate Coleridge's second category of matter-of-factness, 'the insertion of accidental circumstances'.

> I've measured it from side to side:
> 'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide.

One can see why Wordsworth wrote this, in order to be in character with his tiresome narrator, but it does not succeed.

On the other hand, in Book III of the 1805 *Prelude* (1.56) we find another exact measurement which has quite a different effect.

> And from my bedroom I in moonlight nights
> Could see right opposite, a few yards off,
> The antechapel where the statue stood
> Of Newton with his prism and silent face.

I think this is one of the passages where everyone agrees that the addition of the two lines that follow in the 1850 version was an inspiration.

> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of Thought alone.

[3] William Hazlitt, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt* ed. Christopher Salveson (London, 1972), p. 254.
[4] Watson, p. 268.

But I cannot agree with Havens that 'Could see right opposite, a few yards off' is so pedestrian as to be a 'distressing line'.[5] To me it gives immediacy and puts the undergraduate in close proximity to that great idol of eighteenth century Cambridge. I do not feel that the 1850 alternative is any great improvement.

> And from my pillow, looking forth by light
> Of moon and favouring stars, I could behold . . .

Somehow that seems to distance him and us from the reality of the experience.

For the reader inevitably it is a matter of opinion, but one has to conclude that Wordsworth himself did not always know which instance of matter-of-factness should be in and which out. Considering the amount of revision he did, it is hard to understand how he could have allowed to remain such awkward lines as, in Book V (290-1) 'My drift has scarcely / I fear been obvious', or in Book VIII (706-7) 'Alas, I feel / That I am trifling'. This latter example follows hard upon his first vision of London, when 'A weight of ages did at once descend / Upon my heart'. One cannot escape the incongruity, bearing out Coleridge's charge of 'inconstancy of style'. These examples surely approximate to his criticism of 'an anxiety of explanation . . .'[6]

Then there is that French castle in Book IX (485-6). 'Dear me! *You* know the one . . . where that lady lived . . . oh bother! What *is* its name?' Why did Wordsworth, as Jonathan Wordsworth points out, 'let "name how slipped / From my remembrance" stand for 45 years'?[7] I'm sorry, but I think he should either have looked it up on the map or left it out altogether.

An excellent example of Wordsworth's own uncertainty about what details to include and what not is the incident of the Old Soldier in Book IV (375 ff.). In what became the 1805 version, as Helen Darbishire describes, Wordsworth 'is returning, tired from an evening's revelry, along a solitary mountain road'.[8] Miss Darbishire quotes:

> On I went
> Tranquil, receiving in my own despite
> Amusement, as I slowly pass'd along,
> From such near objects as from time to time,
> Perforce intruded on the listless sense
> Quiescent, and dispos'd to sympathy,
> With an exhausted mind, worn out by toil,
> And all unworthy of the deeper joy
> Which waits on distant prospect, cliff, or sea,
> The dark blue vault, and universe of stars.
> Thus did I steal along that silent road,
> My body from the stillness drinking in
> A restoration like the calm of sleep,
> But sweeter far. Above, before, behind,
> Around me, all was peace and solitude,
> I look'd not round, nor did the solitude

[5] Havens i. 12 and ii. 340.

[6] Watson, p. 248.

[7] *William Wordsworth, The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (London, 1995) (Penguin *Prelude*), p. 623.

[8] Helen Darbishire, 'Wordsworth's Prelude' in *The Nineteenth Century* XCLX (May 1926), reprinted in Macmillan Casebook pp. 90-1.

Speak to my eye; but it was heard and felt.
O happy state! what beauteous pictures now
Rose in harmonious imagery—they rose
As from some distant region of my soul
And came along like dreams; yet such as left
Obscurely mingled with their passing forms
A consciousness of animal delight,
A self-possession felt in every pause
And every gentle movement of my frame.

Then she asks 'Why did he strike the passage out?' Why indeed? None of this is left in the 1850 version. Miss Darbishire continues:

> The mental exhaustion, the gradual restoration of the mind through the body, the involuntary images that rose as from some inner recess of his being, the consciousness of animal delight, make up a state which, reviewed in the cold light of reason, must have seemed to him confused, irrelevant to the purpose in hand. He was wrong. The passage is strictly relevant to his purpose. The sudden vision of the old soldier, still, uncouth, majestic, rising up as from another world, gets much of its sublime effect from its contrast with the mood that preludes it.

If he thought this passage 'irrelevant to the purpose in hand' or, as Coleridge would put it, an example of matter-of-factness, why did Wordsworth in the 1850 version add the lines describing the Windermere Regatta from which he was returning?

Once, when these summer months
Were flown, and autumn brought its annual show
Of oars with oars contending, sails with sails,
Upon Winander's spacious breast, it chanced
That—after I had left a flower-decked room
(Whose in-door pastime, lighted up, survived
To a late hour), and spirits overwrought
Were making night do penance for a day
Spent in a round of strenuous idleness—
My homeward course led up a long ascent. (1850 *Prelude*, ll. 370-9)

Surely this was even more matter-of-fact. Yet, for my taste, both passages are helpful to the reader, which the lines beginning 'When from our better selves' (1850, ll. 354-370) put in to fill the gap in the 1850 version are not, being artificial and remote from the experience described.

In the incident of the stolen boat (Book I, ll. 372 ff.), the 1805 version tells us:

'Twas by the shores of Patterdale, a vale
Wherein I was a stranger, thither come
A schoolboy-traveller at the holidays.
Forth rambled from the village inn alone
No sooner had I sight of this small skiff,
Discovered thus by unexpected chance,
Than I unloosed her tether and embarked.
The moon was up, the lake was shining clear
Among the hoary mountains; from the shore

I pushed, and struck the oars, and struck again
In cadence, and my little boat moved on
Even like a man who walks with stately step
Though bent on speed.

Havens calls these details 'irrelevances',[9] but are they? The passage was cut in the 1850 version and, while Jonathan Wordsworth finds the first part 'no great loss',—I *do* find it a loss— he says 'the cutting of lines 383-8 . . . weakens the lead-in to this great episode'.[10] Though it is fortunately possible for readers to appreciate Wordsworth without ever visiting the Lake District—I did myself till I was over fifty—there is no doubt that an added radiance falls on the poem by association with particular scenes. But, even setting that aside, it is much easier to accept and enter into visionary experiences if

the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.[11]

We know that Ullswater is there, that the boy was staying at the inn at Patterdale on his way to Penrith from school at Hawkshead and, as boys will, took a chance-found boat without permission. All that is real and so we are ready to make a transition over the shadowy, moonlight-sprinkled lake into another and stranger dimension, where one can have 'a dim and undetermined sense / Of unknown modes of being'. We can believe the poet when he says,

Huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through my mind,
By day, and were the trouble of my dreams.

At his best Wordsworth is a master of such transitions: from the noisy, real-life play of the skating boys to the moment when 'all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep', from the rowdy games in the inn-garden to the moment in the returning boat, 'oh then the calm'

And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart and held me like a dream. (*1805* ii. 176-80)

The two elements, of matter-of-fact and visionary, are often interdependent. Without the down-to-earth details, such as the card-games and noughts-and-crosses for instance, we would not believe that the transcendental experiences had happened to a real boy.

A particularly endearing example of the conjunction of the matter-of-fact and the visionary occurs in Book IV from line 84. Wordsworth recalls his walks as a schoolboy with 'Our inmate, a rough terrier of the hills', and describes how, when he was spouting poetry out loud as he continued to do all his life, the dog would warn him if anyone were coming, so that he could adjust his demeanour and not risk being thought a madman. The narrative moves straight on from this humorous account to his return to Hawkshead in the summer vacation, when he was reunited with his pet and remembered those days.

[9] See Havens, p. 12.
[10] Penguin *Prelude*, p. 560.
[11] *A Midsummer Night's Dream* V. i. 7.

Those walks did now like a returning spring
Come back on me again.

Havens comments on the use of the image of Venus rising from the sea, linking this here with the early poem 'The Dog: An Idyllium' (ii. 358), which ends with the delightful lines

Then, while my glad hand sprung to thee,
We were the happiest pair on earth.

The joyful memory of that down-to-earth, day-to-day companionship of boy and dog leads in to the renewed vision of the undergraduate.

When first I made
Once more the circuit of our little lake,
If ever happiness hath lodged with man
That day consummate happiness was mine,
Wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative.
. . . Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and self-transmuted stood
Naked as in the presence of her God.
As on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate;
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
At least not felt; and restoration came
Like an intruder knocking at the door
Of unacknowledged weariness. (*1805* iv. 127-48)

From what seemed to him in retrospect when writing to have been an unreal and superficial life of socializing and parties, both at Cambridge and in the long vacation, though he had enjoyed them at the time, Wordsworth obtained relief and the reanimation of his deeper self on his return to the area of Hawkshead. The beauty of the natural world around him, endeared to him by familiarity and its associations with visionary experiences in childhood, reawakened the spiritual aspiration without which he felt man to be nothing. This is beautifully demonstrated in another passage in Book IV, the one we call 'The Dedication Walk'. In describing what he calls 'these vanities' of social life he gives an example that speaks volumes: he does not feel at home in his new posh clothes.

The very garments that I wore appeared
To prey upon my strength, and stopped the course
And quiet stream of self-forgetfulness. (ll. 292-4)

I am sure it is no longer so, in these informal days, but I remember well the perpetual anxiety and self-consciousness about the right clothes felt by an unsophisticated teenager of little means when going up to Oxford or Cambridge before the war. One recalls Dorothy 'very busy during his stay,' just before he left for his first term, 'preparing his cloaths for Cambridge'.[12] The unaccustomed dressing up represented for William the epitome of the artificial life he was leading.

[12] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), p. 11.

Yet, in the midst of his condemnation of 'This vague heartless chase / Of trivial pleasures', Wordsworth has to check himself and recognize that, as with the meeting with the Old Soldier, the dedication experience 'gets much of its sublime effect from its contrast with the mood that preludes it'.

He has been to a dance which he describes with telling circumstantial detail. Would Coleridge have regarded this as 'a laborious minuteness'? Certainly it is a list, linked, as Havens points out, by numerous 'ands',[13] but *what* a list!

> In a throng,
> A festal company of maids and youths,
> Old men and matrons staid—promiscuous rout,
> A medley of all tempers—I had passed
> The night in dancing, gaiety, and mirth,
> With din of instruments and shuffling feet
> And glancing forms and tapers glittering
> And unaimed prattle flying up and down,
> Spirits upon the stretch, and here and there
> Slight shocks of young Love-liking interspersed
> That mounted up like joy into the head
> And tingled through the veins. (*1805* iv. 316-27)

How vividly he creates the scene and is not afraid to include sexual attraction, much better expressed here than by saying, as we would, that they 'fancied' each other! The whole almost frenetic atmosphere, in which both young and old participated in the fun, reminds me of the barn-dances of my early childhood.

> Ere we retired
> The cock had crowed, the sky was bright with day;
> Two miles I had to walk along the fields
> Before I reached my home. Magnificent
> The morning was, a memorable pomp,
> More glorious than I ever had beheld.
> The sea was laughing at a distance; all
> The solid mountains were as bright as clouds,
> Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light;
> And in the meadows and the lower grounds
> Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—
> Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
> And labourers going forth into the fields. (*1805* iv. 327-39)

Notice another exact measurement, on which, true to form, Havens comments, approving in this case the change in 1850. He says with satisfaction, 'the prosaic "Two miles I had to walk along the fields" is dropped . . .'[14] Perhaps he sees it as 'the insertion of accidental circumstances' in Coleridge's phrase. For us indulging in the inessential but harmless pursuit of the topography of *The Prelude* it is helpful. Conceding Wordsworth's way of conflation of different memories, in this case perhaps of the six-mile walk from Whitehaven to a dance at Egremont, after which he

[13] Havens, ii. 366: 'There are eight "ands" in these five lines'.

[14] Havens ii. 367.

said 'the first voluntary verses' he ever wrote were written,[15] with the walk in the long vacation at Hawkshead, we can at least eliminate in this latter case anything much longer than two miles. About the route of this walk it is almost a case of 'Quot homines, tot sententiae'. I once tested out all the suggested possibilities, as far as one could, since the planting of conifers has changed the nature of many places and eliminated landmarks. In the end, it seemed to me that he was probably walking back to Hawkshead over Claife Heights from one of the big houses on Windermere and, whether or no, I can recommend the view, particularly from Latterbarrow. It is easy to understand the powerful effect if had on Wordsworth. Another thing that has changed is the kind of agriculture practised. When I first knew Hawkshead the field one crosses to go to Colthouse where Wordsworth was lodging at this time with Ann Tyson was a hay-meadow full of wildflowers and when I came down from Latterbarrow one day early in June nearly twenty-five years ago, in the 'meadows and lower grounds' the farmer was making hay. That does not happen now. But the wonderful view is still there, and remains an inspiration.

> Ah, need I say, dear friend, that to the brim
> My heart was full? I made no vows, but vows
> Were then made for me: bond unknown to me
> Was given that I should be, else sinning greatly,
> A dedicated spirit. On I walked
> In blessedness, which even yet remains. (*1805* iv. 340-5)

Wordsworth does not say that he made a conscious act of dedication or that he saw his vocation at that time as poetry. He only knew that he was 'a dedicated spirit', as Jonathan Wordsworth says 'to a life of service'.[16] The Miltonic tinge given to the passage of description, in 'grain-tinctured' and 'empyrean light' indicates deep seriousness and also beautifully yokes grandeur with 'a common light' and the everyday business of 'labourers going forth into the fields', in other words linking in the vision both heaven and earth, so that the matter-of-fact perhaps provides not only creative contrast but sometimes also the unity of all. Of course, in the *Intimations Ode* he uses the contrast between 'celestial light' and 'the light of common day' for a quite different purpose.

Here, he goes on to explain that

> That summer, swarming as it did with thoughts
> Transient and loose, yet wanted not a store
> Of primitive hourse, when—by these hindrances
> Unthwarted—I experienced in myself
> Conformity as just as that of old
> To the end and written spirit of God's works,
> Whether held forth in nature or in man. (*1805* iv. 353-9)

In 1850 he adds 'Through pregnant vision, separate or conjoined'. It is not an impressive line but perhaps its mention of vision fills a gap.

I find I have been disagreeing with Havens a good deal but in the main he is very sensible. In 1850 Wordsworth rewrote this passage somewhat and included the line, 'Then Folly from the frown of fleeting Time'. How comforting it is when Havens supports one's own distaste by

[15] Penguin *Prelude*, 576.
[16] Ibid.

condemning it in no uncertain terms as 'artificial, alliterative; and 'amazingly bad'! Well Horace admitted that even Homer had been known to nod—though he thought it a pity!

Yet another function that so-called 'unnecessary detail' fulfils sometimes is what one might call 'atmospheric' or even 'symbolic'. In Book X when Wordsworth, crossing Leven Sands, hears of the death of Robespierre, the passage begins:

> Without me and within, as I advanced
> All that I saw, or felt, or communed with,
> Was gentleness and peace. Upon a small
> And rocky island near, a fragment stood
> (Itself like a sea-rock) of what had been
> A Romish chapel, where in ancient times
> Masses were said at the hour which suited those
> Who crossed the sands with ebb of morning tide.
> Not far from this still ruin all the plain
> Was spotted with a variegated crowd
> Of coaches, wains, and travellers, horse and foot,
> Wading beneath the conduct of their guide
> In loose procession through the shallow stream
> Of inland water; the great sea meanwhile
> Was at safe distance. (*1805* x. 515-29)

Havens comments: 'Here the verses are good and the description of the crowd vivid and relevant, but wherein do the lines about the island, the fragment upon it, and the use the structure had formerly served contribute to the picture of the event that followed? Wordsworth included them merely because they were there . . .'[17]

Surely their relevance is to the first three lines of the passage, which Havens does not quote. The chapel and the Masses once held there contribute to the sense of 'gentleness and peace'. This mood is mediated through the lively and purposeful picture of the travellers 'So gay and cheerful' to the triumphant news that Robespierre was dead and to the restoration for the moment of Wordsworth's faith in his vision that he will yet see 'earth / March firmly towards righteousness and peace'. He had yet to learn that, as Blake put it,

> The hand of Vengeance found the bed
> To which the purple Tyrant fled;
> The iron hand crush'd the Tyrant's head
> And became a Tyrant in his stead,

though at the end of 1805 Book X he tells how he did discover it (see line 791 ff.). The contrast in this passage is between calmness and peace at first and subsequent excitement and exultation.

From the earliest times the route across the sands, fording the two rivers, the Kent and the Leven, with the Cartmel peninsula between them, was the way to and from Furness and the Lake District. The improved turnpike road inland completed in 1820 lessened this traffic somewhat but it was not until after the coming of the railway in 1857 that the path[18] over the sands was no longer much used except for pleasure. People in Wordsworth's time took the crossing for granted and William Green in his *Tourist's New Guide* of 1819 wrote that 'there is a daily coach from

[17] Havens i. 15-16.
[18] Norman Nicholson, *The Lakers* (London ,1955) (hereafter Nicholson), p. 77.

Lancaster to Ulverston' over the sands.[19] Travellers were always led by guides called 'Carters' after an early eighteenth century guide named John Carter. As the dangerous quicksands and soft spots are always shifting, the guides would mark out each day the safe route by sticking leafy branches called 'brobs' into the sand, anchoring them with iron bars. Also the crossing had to be made at exactly the right stage of the tide, when it had been ebbing for six hours. In spite of all precautions, however, drownings did take place, as graves at Cartmel testify. Even guides were not immune. A visitor once asked a carter 'if any of the guides had been lost on the sands. "Nay, I niver knew any *lost*", replied the man, "There's yan or two been drownded, but they're usually foond agean when t'tide gaas oot"'.[20]

William Cockin in a note to the second and all successive editions of West's *Guide to the Lakes* (1780) says that the view of the sands must affect the mind 'in a very sublime and unusual manner'. He emphasizes '*The sands themselves* rather than the surrounding country'. 'The plain is then seemingly immense in extent, continued on in a dead level, and uniform in appearance'. Does that remind you of anything? Perhaps that curious dream-desert at the beginning of Book V, which is about to be inundated 'By deluge now at hand'.

> He saw before him an Arabian waste,
> A desert, and he fancied that himself
> Was sitting there in the wide wilderness
> Alone upon the sand. (*1805* v. 71-4)

Wordsworth was fully aware both of the 'sublime and unusual' effect of the sands and of the danger, yet to him the journey across them was as much all in the day's work as our taking the bus to Kendal or Keswick. Thus the matter-of-fact and the visionary coalesced, so that when he composed the wonderful line, 'The fleet waters of the drowning world' (1.136), he visualized that incoming tidal wave called 'the bore' which travelled at the speed of a good horse and which no human being could outrun. How well, within the dream framework, this area of Wordsworth's everyday life suited his theme!

At the beginning of the section headed 'Books', Wordsworth praised those 'Things worthy of unconquerable life' (1.19) that human beings have created, 'And yet we feel—we cannot choose but feel— / That these must perish'. He mourns their vulnerability, both by natural disaster, as we have had occasion to do recently in relation to Assisi, and by human evil. W. J. B. Owen, in his Cornell edition of the *Fourteen-Book Prelude*, refers us to Wordsworth's *Convention of Cintra* pamphlet, where he says that under Despotism 'whether the power be hereditary or not' it is inevitable that 'Science and Art must dwindle', even when 'the supreme power' is 'given by election'. Science and the Arts are the stone and the shell that the Arab Quixote is desperately trying to save, like another Noah, from the Flood. Professor Owen suggests that the 1850 lines, 'Contemplating in soberness the approach / Of an event so dire' (1850, ll. 157-8) 'seems to mean that Wordsworth foresaw the imminent collapse of Western civilization under French aggression'.[21] The threat of barbarism has not decreased in the world today, but barbarism has many forms. As well as the warfare and sickening genocide so widely spread, there is—even in so-called civilized societies—the power of philistinism and materialism, evidenced for example

[19] William Green, *The Tourist's New Guide, Containing a Description of the Lakes, Mountains and Scenery in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire* (2 vols., Kendal, 1819), i. 13.

[20] Nicholson, p. 86.

[21] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974), i. 312; *The Fourteen-Book Prelude* ed. W. J. B. Owen (Ithaca, NY, 1985), p. 97.

in what is described by an appropriately repellent term as 'the dumbing down' of education and the media. One can envisage a time when students, if they read *The Prelude* at all, will not recognize any of the allusions. Probably none of us catch them all without help but it would be a great loss to us if we saw none. For example, here at line 25 inverted commas should at once spark off our memory to Shakespeare's Sonnet 64 which ends

> This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
> But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

The whole poem illustrates and reinforces Wordsworth's theme. Here it is:

> When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
> The rich proud cost of outworn buried age,
> When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed,
> And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
> When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
> Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
> And the firm soil win of the wat'ry main,
> Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
> When I have seen such interchange of state,
> Or state itself confounded to decay,
> Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,
> That Time will come and take my love away.
> This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
> But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

One can see immediately how the reference to this enriches our reading of the passage; but some sort of methodical progress through English Literature is necessary to enable readers to recognize passages from any period. If you don't happen to have 'done' that 'module' . . .

Or there is the reference at line 44 which came to me at once, long before I acquired any annotated edition, where blind Milton makes blind Samson say,

> why was the sight
> To such a tender ball as the eye confin'd
> So obvious and so easy to be quench'd . . . ? (*Samson Agonistes*, 93-5)

Wordsworth laments,

> Oh why has not the mind
> Some element to stamp her image on
> In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
> Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
> Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail? (*1805* v. 44-8)

Nevertheless, he says of the stone and the shell in the dream, 'Nor doubted but that they both were books'. He did not envisage in his worst nightmare the disappearance of books altogether, but such was the forecast of an American professor friend of mine, who told me that her students do all their essays with the help of the internet and do not read books at all. Judging by the number of new titles appearing every year, it does not seem that disaster is yet immanent. Perhaps 'the great sea' is at the moment 'at safe distance'; but beware 'the bore'. I do not think the Arab Quixote needed to worry quite so much about the stone, do you? Though research funding

may be inadequate. Science and technology seem to be able to look after themselves. But the shell is less secure. The powers that be tend not to see the point of it, though Wordsworth called it 'a god, yea many gods' that 'Had voices more than all the winds, and was / A joy, a consolation and a hope' (*1805* v. 107-9).

Such, then, was Wordsworth's message, his vision of an apocalyptic destruction of western culture and civilization and the preservation of at least some of its values by a few courageous spirits. I have often wondered who now will take the place of the monks who kept learning alive in a previous Dark Age. Such was the vision—but the symbolic clothing in which it was conveyed was the matter-of-fact reality of Morecambe Bay.

There is one more measurement that Havens objects to that I cannot resist mentioning before I close. It is in that description of the ascent of Snowdon that Wordsworth kept for the place of honour at the opening of the last book in the Five-Book version and in the 1805 and 1850 texts. Incidentally, the little matter-of-fact incident of the dog unearthing a hedgehog, which Coleridge might have censured, though Havens does not, again serves to anchor us to reality. About the lines describing the travellers' dogged trudge up the mountain, Havens wisely says, 'This rather commonplace passage contributes, as an unimpressive foreground may, to the grandeur of the scene that lies beyond' (l. 610). I would add that, without it, we would not feel the full shock of 'For instantly a light upon the turf / Fell like a flash!' One has the sense of their standing on the very edge of a sheer precipice, like a sea-cliff, but shrouded in mist.

> Meanwhile, the moon looked down upon this show
> In single glory, and we stood, the mist
> Touching our very feet. And from the shore
> At distance not the third part of a mile
> Was a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour . . .

In 1850, instead of 'the third part of a mile' Wordsworth wrote, 'Not distant'. Havens calls this 'An interesting illustration of Wordsworth's elimination of matter-of-fact details. He wrote three versions of this line . . . before he realized that it did not matter how far the chasm was from his feet'.[22] The three versions he gives were: 'not distant more perchance than half a mile' (W), 'at distance not the third part of a mile' (A), 'Not twice the measure of an arrow's flight' (A3), and finally 'not distant'. Which of these do you think is best? Or perhaps, which is *least* satisfactory? I would put them roughly in descending order of composition, though I prefer the 1805 version as simpler than the earlier one. To me, 'not distant' is vague and unimpressive. The 'arrow's flight' seems archaic and artificial. 'At distance not the third part of a mile' is economical yet its matter-of-fact approximate measurement persuades us of its nearness and again gives immediacy to the experience. Havens is right, of course, that it does 'not matter how far the chasm was from his feet'. It is the effect on the reader that matters, and so which version conjures up best the sense of the scene, and this must in the end be a subjective judgment.

Wordsworth himself expresses repeatedly the relationship he felt there was between 'the vulgar forms of present things / And actual world of our familiar days' and 'A higher power' (*1805* xiii. 361-2). For it was 'A store of transitory qualities' which led on to the solitary communion with rocks and winds, hearing 'The ghostly language of the ancient earth' and 'Thence did I drink the visonary power' (*1805* ii. 309, 328, 330). Or he tells how amid 'those fits of vulgar joy' and 'that giddy bliss' of 'child's pursuits' he 'felt / Gleams like the flashing of a

[22] Havens ii 612 and i.13.

shield. The earth / And common face of nature spoke to me / Rememberable things' (*1805* i. 609, 611, 613, 615).

At the very beginning of *The Prelude*, when he describes the autumn walk which John Alban Finch demonstrated was almost certainly from the Clarkson's House at Eusemere at the Pooley Bridge end of Ullswater to Grasmere to arrange to rent Dove Cottage,[23] there is a little touch of matter-of-fact which for me is the making of the whole scene. He has paused for a rest on his long trek at 'a green shady place where down I sat / Beneath a tree' (*1805* i. 71-2). He indulges in a dream of the future and his poetic achievements at Grasmere until he falls into a kind of visionary trance.

Thus long I lay
Cheered by the genial pillow of the earth
Beneath my head, soothed by the sense of touch
From the warm ground, that balanced me (else lost
Entirely), seeing nought, nought hearing, save
When here and there, about the grove of oaks
Where was my bed, an acorn from the trees
Fell audibly and with a startling sound. (*1805* i. 87-94)

I wouldn't trade in that acorn for all the tea in China—and as a tea-addict I am saying something. The 'warm ground that balanced me' has an ally in that small nut, which resonates both literally and metaphorically amid the silence. I have a blind friend who comes to stay with me about twice a year and we always time her autumn visit when the acorns are falling in Knole Park because then we can get near the deer she can sense but not see, as they congregate under the oak trees so intent on feeding that they do not notice us. She can also hear the small explosive sounds that the acorns make as they fall. Mundane facts like these are only rarely matter-of-fact irrelevances in Wordsworth's poetry. Havens translates 'balanced me' as 'Preserved my mental balance' and refers us to the Fenwick note to the *Immortality Ode*, 'I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality'.[24] The matter-of-fact serves both to anchor the poet and so to persuade the reader of the truth of his vision and, often, to provide the jumping-off place for the vision itself.

Coleridge, speaking (at last) of Wordsworth's excellencies, says that 'without his depth of feeling and his imaginative power his sense would want its vital warmth and peculiarity; and without his strong sense, his mysticism would become sickly—mere fog and dimness!'[25] Let us end, as we began, with Havens, who provided me both with the impetus and the framework for this talk. I have occasionally differed from him in matters of individual judgment but his general scholarship and good sense I greatly admire. He quotes the above sentence from Coleridge and also, while warning us not to be put off by the 'pietistic moralizing tone of the letter', gives a passage from the Wordsworth of 1845, where he says to Henry Reed that 'what I should myself most value in my attempts' is 'the spirituality with which I have endeavored to invest the material

[23] See John Alban Finch, 'Wordsworth's Two-Handed Engine', *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Ithaca, NY, 1970).
[24] Havens ii. 292.
[25] Watson, p. 263.

Universe, and the moral relation under which I have wished to exhibit its most ordinary appearances'.[26]

'Now this,' says Havens, 'requires sight as well as insight. The imaginative transmutation of reality rests upon observation and does not consist in throwing a cloud of idealism around objects valuely seen and imperfectly understood'.[27]

Sevenoaks

[26] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: VII. The Later Years Part 4 1840-1853* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised by Alan G. Hill (Oxford, 1988), p. 688.
[27] Havens i. 25.

Wordsworth's London

By DUNCAN WU

> On the roof
> Of an itinerant vehicle I sat,
> With vulgar men about me, vulgar forms
> Of houses, pavement, streets, of men and things,
> Mean shapes on every side . . . (*Thirteen-Book Prelude*, vii. 693-7)[1]

THE POETRY IS EMPHATIC. In line 695, 'vulgar', twice repeated by Wordsworth, takes the stress; in fact, the line breaks in half with that repetition: 'With vulgar men about me, / Vulgar forms'. The other important word is 'men', repeated in lines 695-6; this is particularly significant, as the subtitle of this book is 'Love of Nature leading to Love of Man'. Humanity is equated with meanness, vulgarity, an unspecified but generally acknowledged commonplace quality. Almost immediately, however, Wordsworth steps back:

> but at the time
> When to myself it fairly might be said
> (The very moment that I seemed to know)
> 'The threshold now is overpassed'—Great God!
> That aught external to the living mind
> Should have such mighty sway, yet so it was. (ll. 697-702)

One of Wordsworth's virtues is the way in which his blank verse appears sometimes to mimic the rhythms and quirks of the spoken word. This is one such moment. He is describing something extraordinary, something sublime and ineffable, but it steals upon him unawares, and that sense of being overwhelmed, overtaken by something other, with a determining will far greater than one's own, is perfectly evoked. That perceiving self, which has just noted the lowliness and vulgarity of the rural suburbs of London seen from the rooftop of the Cambridge to London stagecoach, is allowed a complacent enough observation, 'The threshold', that into central London, I think, 'is overpassed', when the cozy, self-fulfilling assumptions behind its impatient wish to sweep by are blown apart. That breakdown is matched by the syntactic disruption at line 700:

> Great God!
> That aught external to the living mind
> Should have such mighty sway, yet so it was.

Not only does the poet's failure to complete his sentence mimic the impact of the inner experience, it makes the unfolding drama compelling by its refusal to answer, only to ask, questions of the reader. What is going on? What external power has overturned the lazy judgements passed in the first half of the sentence? But there is another surprise too—the poetry has suddenly modulated from the banal to the sublime. It is the characteristic Wordsworthian shift, from a bough of wilding, a bottle of elder sticks, a peasant girl in a field—to what lies beyond. From the roof of the London stage we have had a fine view, but all the devices by which it was framed

[1] All quotations from the *Thirteen-Book Prelude* are from the text in my *Romanticism: An Anthology* (Oxford, 1994) (hereafter *Romanticism*).

have been removed at a stroke, and we find the lay of the land to be utterly different from what we thought.

> A weight of ages did at once descend
> Upon my heart—no thought embodied, no
> Distinct remembrances, but weight and power,
> Power growing with the weight. (ll. 703-6)

From the 'houses, pavement, streets', vulgar as they are, our gaze, and that of the poet, has been redirected to the inward landscape of the mind. Its susceptibility is not, on this occasion, to a precise image or recollection; instead, again by virtue of repetition, Wordsworth credits 'weight' — the 'weight of ages'— and 'power'. What is this 'weight of ages'? History? The thing will not be dumbed down into an easy paraphrase; Wordsworth's terminology is at once too vague, and too monumental, to allow it. What we can say is that the power and the weight are nothing to do with physics: this is the language of the spirit. Its imprecision, with its all too knowing denial of our readerly quest for clarity and resolution, is, I think, what pulls the poet himself up short:

> Alas, I feel
> That I am trifling; 'twas a moment's pause,
> All that took place within me came and went
> As in a moment, and I only now
> Remember that it was a thing divine. (ll. 706-10)

The verse imitates the tentative, faltering steps taken by the poet's mind; the calculated irregularity in his use of run-on-line; the conspiratorial, but only half-acknowledged, address to the reader; and, to begin with, the confession of failure: 'Alas, I feel / That I am trifling.' Wordsworth, of course, is doing nothing of the sort: the verse is at this point masterful in its manipulation of tone. The phrasing is imprecise: the experience remains 'a thing divine'—as evanescent, as resistant to definition, as before. His one concession to conventional narrative logic is to vouchsafe the knowledge that the 'thing divine' occupied no more than a 'moment'; and yet that is a snippet of hard fact that serves only to compound our difficulties. The 'weight of ages', so biblical, so elemental in its associations, has taken only a moment to register. In fact, a series of paradoxes, deliberately laid by the poet—'That aught external to the living mind / Should have such mighty sway', 'A weight of ages', ''Twas a moment's pause'—have been assembled so as to intrigue, while giving away the minimum of information. The genius of the verse resides in its understatement, its determination not to betray the essence of the thing, to enshrine the experience in words that preserve the freshness and intensity of the original. Understatement brings us closer to the unexpectedness of the first encounter, as well as to the poet in his own displaced fictional present, making a new discovery about the past even as he relives it: 'I only now / Remember that it was a thing divine' (l. 710).

With that, we are brought to a crisis. Wordsworth has already despaired of his ability to describe what happened, and yet the diction, evocative but vague, leaves him no choice but to conduct us over the threshold.

> As when a traveller hath from open day
> With torches passed into some vault of earth,
> The Grotto of Antiparos or the Den
> Of Yordas among Craven's mountain tracts . . . (ll. 711-13)

As if in answer to Wordsworth's own rigorous analysis of the preceding lines, the extended simile is literally, and figuratively, preoccupied with enlightenment, and the problem of seeing. And yet it is, with its exotic locations, a surprise, at first glance removing us far from the young man approaching London from the great north road. It is the figure of the traveller that guarantees the simile, confirming that it is no digression, but a re-vision, a second glance at the earlier experience. The traveller is more, though, than a thematic ligature; he is also a traveller in time, because he echoes the Wordsworth who, in May 1800, visited the cave of Yordas in Yorkshire with his brother John. I don't know who told Wordsworth about the Grotto of Antiparos,[2] but its naming opens up an avenue into the world of myth. For a moment the traveller echoes Orpheus as he descends into the underworld in search of Eurydice; but Wordsworth is about to rewrite that tale of grievous loss:

> He looks and sees the cavern spread and grow,
> Widening itself on all sides, sees, or thinks
> He sees, erelong the roof above his head,
> Which instantly unsettles and recedes . . . (ll. 715-18)

As it emerges from darkness, the cavern seems to grow in size, one illusion replaced by another, as it then ripples overhead. Its unsettling gives away the traveller's state of mind. In fact, the perceived image is an index of mood; this is because Wordsworth's metaphor has, in some strange way, taken us inside his own brain. The traveller is no longer atop the roof of a coach, but within, looking up at that overhead almost as if in some surreal cartoon his eyes were gazing up at the interior of his own skull. This is compounded by the underworld vision that ensues:

> Substance and shadow, light and darkness, all
> Commingled, making up a canopy
> Of shapes and forms and tendencies to shape
> That shift and vanish, change and interchange
> Like spectres . . . (ll. 719-23)

The roof of the cavern is replaced for a moment by a canopy 'Of shapes and forms and tendencies to shape', but it is not to be trusted; they 'shift and vanish, change and interchange / Like spectres'. It is the Orphean underworld, in which what is passionately loved can evaporate from one's clutches at a whim; it is the unsettled universe in which summary judgements as to the shabbiness of our surroundings may be blown away at a second glance. It is the antithesis of that idealised Wordsworthian universe, in which concrete objects, embodying our emotions, aspire to permanence. Here, despite the semblance of vitality, everything is deliquescent, tending to shapes 'That shift and vanish'. Its falsehood, its meretricious attraction, makes it the prototype of the Wordsworthian hell.

[2] On this point I am grateful to Jane Renfrew, who informs me that the Cave of Antiparos was the scene for the celebration of midnight Mass in the middle of the night, Christmas Day 1673, by the Marquis de Nointel, and that a Latin inscription on the base of a sort of pyramid used as an altar, records the event. The Marquis de Nointel was the French Ambassador to the Porte. He was also an archaeologist who travelled widely and enriched the French museums with his collections. He spent three days over Christmas 1673 in the Cave accompanied by 500 persons. The cave was illuminated by a hundred large torches of yellow wax and four hundred lamps burning night and day, and trumpets sounded to announce the Mass to the world. Fortunately there was a spring of fresh water in the cave. The whole event is described in Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un Voyage du Levant* (2 vols., Lyons, 1717). It is possible that, as John Spedding suggests to me, Wordsworth read Tournefort's volume in France.

> . . . ferment quiet and sublime
> Which, after a short space works less and less,
> Till, every effort, every motion gone,
> The scene before him lies in perfect view,
> Exposed and lifeless as as written book. (ll. 723-7)

Proofed, printed, bound in red morocco, what was once imaginatively potent is reduced to no more than a physical object, subject to the same fate as all things. The printed volume represented to Wordsworth the final exhaustion of artistic vitality; he preferred, whenever possible, not to publish. Where it could not be avoided, he returned compulsively to emend the printed text in later editions, as if the continuing susceptibility of his words to revision somehow guaranteed their poetic life. That anxiety—the fear of death—has underwritten the simile up to this point. The echo of Virgil, 'aut videt, aut videsse putat', at lines 716-17, 'he sees, or thinks / He sees', refers us to Aeneas' encounter with Dido's spectre in Hades. And it may be significant that that meeting precipitates a terrible guilt when Aeneas realises that he is to blame for her death. Guilt resonates through *The Prelude* too.

But the parallel that springs most forcefully to my mind is that with *Point Rash Judgement*, one of the poems on the naming of places published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). It describes how, in late June or July 1800, Coleridge, Wordsworth and his sister, while walking round Grasmere lake, caught sight of a man fishing:

> with one and the same voice
> We all cried out, that he must be indeed
> An idle man, who thus could lose a day
> Of the mid harvest . . . (ll. 55-8)

However, on approaching closer they realise that the man is sick and starving, and

> was using his best skill to gain
> A pittance from the dead unfeeling lake
> That knew not of his wants. I will not say
> What thoughts immediately were ours, nor how
> The happy idleness of that sweet morn,
> With all its lovely images, was changed
> To serious musing and to self-reproach. (ll. 70-6)

Wordsworth understates a shift of vision that is nothing short of traumatic. It is against the natural world, which here adopts a Hardyesque complexion, impervious and unresponsive to the needs of humanity, that Wordsworth expresses a piety born of guilt. Its emotional roots remain obscure—Wordsworth refuses even to say 'What thoughts immediately were ours'—but it must stem in part from the insight that the solitary angler, far from being idle, is struggling for his life, and for that of his family. Only when the poet looks into his face does he realise how ruthlessly nature has dealt with him. It is an extreme situation, but only a step from our own; that recognition is the fuel burning within the emotional crucible of the poem, and my point here is that it is to be found in the *Prelude* cave.[3]

[3] For further comment see my article, 'Wordsworth's Fisher King', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* NS 98 (April 1997) 54-63.

The arrogant undergraduate looking down on the outskirts of London from the roof of the Cambridge stage is also guilty of rash judgement; he sees 'vulgar men about me, vulgar forms / Of houses, pavement, streets, of men and things, / Mean shapes on every side' (ll. 695-7). And just as admonishment had been delivered by the sight of the angler's drawn and haggard face, so the youthful poet is also silenced by the 'weight of ages' that descends upon him. That the shift in perspective is not purely aesthetic is confirmed by the cave simile, which conducts us on a journey into the bleak hinterland of loss. Those 'shapes and forms' that 'change and interchange / Like spectres' necessarily invoke all the unexorcised ghosts encountered in the course of the poem: the discharged soldier in Book IV, the Arab Quixote and Winander boy in Book V, and the blind beggar in Book VII. But what about that other ghost, that of Dido, whom I mentioned earlier? Aeneas is permitted to meet Dido in Hades so as to explain, fruitlessly, what had happened, as a means of pleading forgiveness; Wordsworth had known Christopher Pitt's translation of the *Aeneid* since his schooldays[4]—this is how he translates the relevant passage in Virgil, which describes what happened after Aeneas has spoken:

> Nought to these tender words the fair replies,
> But fixt on earth her unrelenting eyes,
> The chief still weeping: with a sullen mien,
> In stedfast silence, frown'd th' obdurate queen.
> Fixt as a rock amidst the roaring main,
> She hears him sigh, implore, and plead in vain.
> Then, where the woods their thickest shades display,
> From his detested sight she shoots away;
> There from her dear Sichaeus in the grove,
> Found all her cares repaid, and love return'd for love.
> Touch'd with her woes, the prince with streaming eyes
> And floods of tears, pursues her as she flies. (vi. 649-60)

Pitt's translation deliberately plays up Aeneas' need to explain, and Dido's dismissal of him. Her sullenness, frowning, and subdued hostility are largely Pitt's addition to the Latin text. As a way of emphasizing the point, Pitt supplies an interpretive commentary: 'she scorns to hold conference with him, who, in her own opinion, had basely forsook her; and, by her silent retreat, shews her resentment, and reprimands Aeneas more than she could have done in a thousand words'.[5] Aeneas goes on his way unforgiven—without expiation, without even the succour of mutual recognition; Dido's separation is absolute, and the underworld journey is resolved only with his painful recognition of its finality.

Richard W. Clancey has demonstrated, through an analysis of the techniques by which Wordsworth was educated, that, in his reading and interpretation of classical texts Wordsworth was highly dependent on the translations and commentaries at his disposal.[6] There is every reason to believe that for Wordsworth, as for Pitt, Aeneas' encounter with Dido in Hades was saturated with guilt—a guilt unrelieved by her bitter rejection of him. That emotional drama resonates with many episodes in the *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, particularly the waiting for the horses in Book XI,

[4] Wordsworth's copy is now in the possession of Paul F. Betz. See, for more detail, my *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 140-1.

[5] *The Works of Virgil* tr. Christopher Pitt and Joseph Warton (4 vols., London, 1763), iii. 164.

[6] For further detail see Professor Clancey's useful volume, *Wordsworth's Classical Undersong* (forthcoming from Macmillan).

line 345. Wordsworth, aged thirteen, is waiting above Hawkshead for horses to take him and his brothers home for the Christmas holidays.

> The event,
> With all the sorrow which it brought, appeared
> A chastisement; and when I called to mind
> That day so lately past, when from the crag
> I looked in such anxiety of hope,
> With trite reflections of morality,
> Yet in the deepest passion, I bowed low
> To God, who thus corrected my desires.

As the boy's memory retraces the events leading up to his father's death, his vigil on the rocks above Hawkshead acquires a sinister, unwanted significance. His trite reflections, felt with the deepest passion, become, horribly, the cause of his father's death. It is against reason; the impatience of the son to return home cannot have led to his father's death. But as the past is seen through the reordering prism of the imagination, God's vengeful anger at the boy becomes the hinge that connects two utterly distinct phenomena. Why should the recollecting mind have imposed this twisted logic on the past? Why, in remembering his impatience for the horses, should he have connected it with his father's death? The only plausible explanation is the one suggested by Wordsworth himself: guilt, an unspecified feeling of guilt related to his father. Like Hades in Virgil, the spot of time confronts the protagonist with his deepest anxieties. Like Aeneas, Wordsworth is plagued by guilt. He assumes the blame for his father's death, just as Aeneas admitted responsibility for that of Dido.

Virgil's text, as translated by Pitt, leaves Aeneas not only bereft, but in the throes of intense, passionate, and unmitigated grief:

> Touch'd with her woes, the prince with streaming eyes
> And floods of tears, pursues her as she flies.

The 'streaming eyes' and 'floods of tears' do not appear in Virgil; they are Pitt's interpolation, designed to elucidate emotions merely implied by the Latin text. What I wish to suggest is that this emotional drama (Virgil as amplified by Pitt) provided Wordsworth with a model, a way of translating his own emotional development into literary form. The thinking is so sophisticated that you might almost, like so many critics, forget that Wordsworth had read neither Freud nor Jung nor any other practitioner of the twentieth-century sciences of the mind. Instead, he had at his fingertips the wisdom of the classical poets, especially Virgil, whole Books of whose *Aeneid* and *Georgics* he had memorised as a schoolboy at Hawkshead.

If, as I am suggesting, Virgil is an important model for Wordsworth's treatment of his own psychological growth, it is one which Wordsworth feels no obligation merely to repeat. The Virgilian drama is, in essence, a tragic one. Aeneas' pleas for forgiveness are futile, and he is abandoned to the unappeased and relentless pain of grief. Had Wordsworth ended the Waiting for the Horses episode with his supplication to the avenging deity who 'thus corrected my desires', it would have conformed precisely to that pattern. But Wordsworth's vision—at least in *The Prelude*—is not tragic. The passage continues:

> And afterwards the wind and sleety rain,
> And all the business of the elements,
> The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,

And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
The noise of wood and water, and the mist
Which on the line of each of those two roads
Advanced in such indisputable shapes—
All these were spectacles and sounds to which
I often would repair, and thence would drink
As at a fountain. And I do not doubt
That in this later time, when storm and rain
Beat on my roof at midnight, or by day
When I am in the woods, unknown to me
The workings of my spirit thence are brought.

From the early belief that God had punished him for his 'trite reflections' by killing his father, Wordsworth goes on to mimic the action of the imagination as it goes back over the past. The day, 'Stormy, and rough, and wild', has already been described, in some detail, but Wordsworth is compelled to describe it again, and this time it is subtly different. As if in answer to the boy's feeling of solitude and abandonment, the singlenesses of the sheep and the tree seem, companionably, to reflect his own. And the 'whistling' of the hawthorn in the earlier description has now been translated to the more exuberant 'music' of the wall, bleak though it is. This sympathetic responsiveness in nature is brought into sharp focus by the central feature of the landscape, barely mentioned first time round:

the mist
Which on the line of each of those two roads
Advanced in such indisputable shapes . . .

Jonathan Wordsworth has provided by far the most persuasive explication of these lines, in his invaluable *The Borders of Vision*, showing that they contain an echo of Hamlet's description of his father's ghost as a 'questionable shape' ('such indisputable shapes'):

Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane. O answer me! (*Hamlet*, I. iv. 43-5)

Why, Jonathan Wordsworth asks, should Wordsworth quote Hamlet in this context? 'The answer can only be that at some level the poet associated the "blank misgivings" and "high instincts" of childhood with his father's death, and with the guilt that has been taken over from the Ghost.'[7] It is crucial to Wordsworth's recovery from the acknowledgement of early guilt that he comprehends its positive effects in his imaginative development. Where in Virgil guilt is the cause of distress, in Wordsworth it becomes the fount of the creative impulse:

All these were spectacles and sounds to which
I often would repair, and thence would drink
As at a fountain.

Guilt, self-blame, even grief, become in the Wordsworthian equation, the root not of subsequent pain, but of poetic vigour. Not only that, but their eminence within the spots of time sequence makes them crucial to Wordsworth's belief that he was qualified to compose *The Recluse*.

[7] Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982), p. 64.

And I do not doubt
That in this later time, when storm and rain
Beat on my roof at midnight, or by day
When I am in the woods, unknown to me
The workings of my spirit thence are brought.

So redolent of the period when they were first written, at Goslar in the freezing winter of 1799, which the Wordsworths believed to be the coldest of the century, these lines claim the waiting for the horses episode, with all its ensuing, traumatising consequences, as the ultimate source of Wordsworth's later insight into 'The workings of my spirit'.

My point here is that, in contradistinction to Virgil, Wordsworth endows the terrible experience of loss with a redemptive power: it provides a reservoir of 'spectacles and sounds' that replenishes his creativity, and gives him the acuity to make sense of his own psychological and spiritual universe. Wordsworth is, in the best sense of the term, a well-adjusted, self-aware poet. He has suffered appalling grief—that of losing both parents in childhood—but that early experience provides a fund of intensely perceived objects and sounds, and their absorption into his spiritual economy has enabled him to inculcate the analytical instruments with which to comprehend, and discuss, his inner world.

So, you may be asking, why is this relevant to the cave simile in Book VIII? Because in some sense the experience within the cave parallels that in the waiting for the horses episode in Book XI. In its own unsettling way, the cave simile both alludes to Aeneas' encounter with Dido, and rewrites it. The passage, up to line 727, follows the contours of Virgil's narrative exactly; descending into the underworld, the Wordsworthian protagonist has an audience with those 'shapes' and 'forms' that 'change and interchange / Like spectres'. In the mythic terms of the poetry, they *are* spectres, but before the protagonist can extend his arm to reclaim those dearest to him, who are restored for just a moment,

The scene before him lies in perfect view,
Exposed and lifeless as a written book. (ll. 726-7)

The dead remove themselves from him, and he is left gazing up at the arid, unyielding surface of the rocky cavern. The fineness of the verse resides partly in its continuing understatement of this emotional subtext, which is nonetheless implicit in the disappointment expressed in line 727: 'Exposed and lifeless as a written book'. As in the waiting for the horses passage, Wordsworth extends the mythic pattern found originally in Virgil. The hallmark of the Wordsworthian (if not Romantic) sensibility is to reverse the classical model, favouring retrieval to loss, plenitude to dearth:

But let him pause awhile and look again
And a new quickening shall succeed, at first
Beginning timidly, then creeping fast
Through all which he beholds. The senseless mass
In its projections, wrinkles, cavities,
Through all its surface, with all colours streaming
Like a magician's airy pageant, parts,
Unites, embodying everywhere some pressure
Or image, recognized or new, some type
Or picture of the world; forests and lakes,

Ships, rivers, towers, the warrior clad in mail,
The prancing steed, the pilgrim with his staff,
The mitred bishop and the throned king—
A spectacle to which there is no end.

It is a breathtaking passage, all the more so for the way it answers the image of creative exhaustion that precedes it. The figures that emerge from the wrinkles and cavities of the 'senseless' rock are not as random and miscellaneous as they first appear. Their most obvious function is to provide a tableau of London society in medieval times, not unlike Blake's famous image of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims—a human embodiment of the 'weight of ages' that descends on the young poet at line 703. This, at least, is the reading demanded if the simile is to explicate, as it ought, Wordsworth's experience as he gazed at the 'vulgar forms' of suburban London. But its importance extends beyond its rhetorical purpose, for it resonates with images and characters encountered elsewhere in Wordsworth:

. . . forests and lakes,
Ships, rivers, towers, the warrior clad in mail,
The prancing steed, the pilgrim with his staff,
The mitred bishop and the throned king—
A spectacle to which there is no end. (ll. 737-41)

If the 'forests and lakes' refer us back to Cumbria, the 'Ships, rivers, towers' echo London as it appears in *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge*: 'Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie / Open unto the fields, and to the sky' (ll. 6-7). That vision was both static and heightened, like the figures in the cave. 'The mitred bishop and the throned king' have a similarly iconic quality that recalls the 'cross-legged knight, / And the stone abbot' at Furness Abbey in *Prelude* Book II. The 'pilgrim with his staff' is perhaps the most redolent; he invokes Chaucer, of course, and perhaps Bunyan, but he is also the travelling solitary who turns up as the leech-gatherer, Matthew with a bough of wilding, and the starving man in *Point Rash Judgement*. That said, the remarkable thing about the frozen procession of images is that they evade the self-consciousness of allusion. They *seem* to echo places and people in Wordsworth's poetry, while remaining distinct. They are like the raw material of poetry, alluding to the world of legend and fairytale in which the archetypal stories of loss and retrieval were forged. What in Virgil was the site of grief and self-excoriation is recast as that of imaginative strength—as an emblem even of creative process itself. In adapting Virgilian myth, Wordsworth has inscribed his own; it is central to the *Prelude* and is found throughout his poetry. It is also rooted in his earliest response to London as a place not of vulgarity and meanness but as

That great emporium, chronicle at once
And burial-place of passions, and their home
Imperial and chief living residence. (ll. 749-51)

Poetry is passion: it is the history of science of feelings, he had written in the 1800 Note to *The Thorn*. The respository of the emotions, London contains the ore from which poetry is mined. It is here that Wordsworth glimpses the father holding his sickly child, who provides the image of 'unutterable love' with which *Prelude* Book VIII concludes. London, the 'Preceptress stern' of line 678, exists to teach Wordsworth the value of the human heart; she humanises the 'vulgar shapes' he sees about him as he enters the city; in a sense, she humanises him. It is an important lesson, not just in *The Prelude*, but in the larger and more important project of *The Recluse*. I

mentioned earlier that the title of Book VIII is 'Love of Nature leading to Love of Mankind'. This was the great, original idea of *The Recluse*; it recurs in none of Wordsworth's sources nor in any of the classical writers cited by him as models.

The Recluse was the formulation of the *annus mirabilis* of 1797-8, and it seems unlikely that Wordsworth would have come up with it himself; its mastermind was Coleridge. For him, this was to be the poem of the millennium, Christ's thousand-year rule on earth; it would be written by the most prophetic and philosophical of modern poets, and would help bring the millennium to pass. The product of a sublime optimism, its insane ambition rendered in unwriteable, but Wordsworth would not realise that for nearly 40 years. In the meantime he would stake his reputation on its successful completion. Of the various statements made by both men about the poem, the pithiest is probably that by Coleridge in his *Table Talk*:

> Wordsworth should have first published his Thirteen Books on the growth of an individual mind, far superior to any part of *The Excursion*. Then the plan suggested and laid out by me was that he should assume the station of a man in repose, whose mind was made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy. He was to treat man as man—a subject of eye, ear, touch, taste, in contact with external nature, informing the senses from the mind and not compounding a mind out of the senses; then the pastoral and other states, assuming a satiric or Juvenalian spirit as he approached the high civilization of cities and towns; and then opening a melancholy picture of the present state of degeneracy and vice; thence revealing the necessity for and proof of the whole state of man and society being subject to and illustrative of a redemptive process in operation, showing how this idea reconciled all the anomalies, and how it promised future glory and restoration. Something of this sort I suggested, and it was agreed on. It is what in substance I have been all my life doing in my system of philosophy.[8]

On the face of it, that 'satiric or Juvenalian spirit as he approached the high civilisation of cities and towns' is the least Wordsworthian ingredient in this unlikely cocktail. But in 1797, when he moved to Alfoxden, Wordsworth had been working for two years on a translation of Juvenal with Francis Wrangham. Wrangham was one of the small coterie who knew Wordsworth and Coleridge separately before they first met (others included Wordsworth's brother Christopher), and may have discussed Wordsworth's abilities as a satirist with Coleridge. At any rate, Coleridge evidently knew by 1797 that Wordsworth was capable of satire, at least in the 'Juvenalian spirit'. The subject-matter too seems un-Wordsworthian; in dealing with 'the high civilisation of cities and towns' he would have depicted 'degeneracy and vice' before moving on to 'a redemptive process in operation'. The first half of the story is instantly recognizable to anyone who has seen *The Rake's Progress*; what marks it out as post-Augustan is the desire for redemption. But as in the cave simile, the emphasis here is on retrieval rather than loss. Redemption provides *The Recluse* with its *raison d'être*. The vice and corruption of towns and cities was nothing new, but the Hogarthian vision was relentless and irrevocable. It told a story of damnation. Wordsworth and Coleridge sought, instead, to describe deliverance. In 1839, Mary Shelley wrote of her late husband: 'The prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was that evil is not inherent in the system of creation, but an accident that might be expelled'. Similarly, a vision of universal brotherhood was the culminating vision of *The Recluse*, predicated on the notion that nature could teach human beings to love one another.

[8] *Romanticism*, pp. 595-6.

Prelude Book VIII was, therefore, a kind of dry run, in which the cave simile, as its central episode, was essential to its governing ideology. In the cave simile Wordsworth sought to give London the importance he knew it had to claim within the grandiose scheme of *The Recluse*—for it was in the metropolis, in the midst of vice, that Wordsworth would locate the first glimmerings of an all-embracing, redemptive love. The implied gravitas of the 'weight of ages' as it descends on the young Wordsworth comes as much from that as from a knowledge that he is laying the foundation for his great, as yet unwritten, epic. He comments repeatedly on the degradation of city life because it was vital to *The Recluse* that its prescription for millennial harmony be rooted in the real world. If Wordsworth and Coleridge have anything in common with the other great poets of the day— Blake, Byron, Shelley and Keats—it is their conviction that a better world is possible, not in the afterlife, but in the real, material world, in which they had their being. And that, it seems to me, is as a good a definition of Romanticism as any.

> Neither guilt nor vice,
> Debasement of the body or the mind,
> Nor all the misery forced upon my sight
> (Which was not lightly passed, but often scanned
> Most feelingly) could overthrow my trust
> In what we may become, induce belief
> That I was ignorant, had been falsely taught,
> A solitary, who with vain conceits
> Had been inspired, and walked about in dreams. (ll. 802-10)

London remains a stern preceptress to the last; misery, vice, debasement, and, intriguingly, guilt, are 'forced' upon him, presumably as part of his tempering as poet of *The Recluse*. They almost guarantee his sense of mission, his 'trust / In what we may become'. And yet it is impossible to ignore the note of self-doubt, the fear that he might be a madman who 'walked about in dreams'. Such admissions are essential to the nature of the poem: *The Prelude* is a sustained act of self-examination in which Wordsworth both questions, and establishes, his right to compose *The Recluse*. The irony is that although *The Prelude* is in those terms a success, highlighting Wordsworth's strengths as the poet of the vague, the indistinctly seen, and the half-intimated, it also reveals why *The Recluse* was beyond him. That work would have no room for doubt; it was to be a synthesis of poetry and philosophy that aspired, with biblical confidence, to the status of prophecy. *The Prelude* is the chamber in which Wordsworth conducts with himself the debate as to whether he is that prophet. His doubts are nowhere clearer than in the dream of the Arab Quixote in Book V, where the 'prophetic blast of harmony, / An ode in passion uttered',

> foretold
> Destruction to the children of the earth
> By deluge now at hand. (ll. 96-9)

The cataclysm denies the optimism of *The Recluse*, replacing it with a vision of divine disfavour that recalls the great flood in the Bible. As elsewhere in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth tests the validity of the Coleridge-derived manifesto against the fallibility of human nature. Here, by allusion to the Bible text, Wordsworth invokes God's rationale for bringing about the flood: 'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Genesis 6:5). This is the vision of humanity that constantly threatens to overwhelm *The Prelude*. It is the Hogarthian vision—in a sense, the Virgilian vision—that *The Recluse* was designed to invalidate; it resurfaces in the descriptions

of Bartholomew Fair and Sadler's Wells in Book VII, and intrudes even when, at the beginning of Book VIII, Wordsworth admits his indebtedness to nature:

> With deep devotion, nature, did I feel
> In that great city what I owed to thee:
> High thoughts of God and man, and love of man,
> Trimphant over all those loathsome sights
> Of wretchedness and vice . . . (ll. 62-6)

The Prelude is, above all, the work of a realist; those 'loathsome sights / Of wretchedness and vice' provide the necessary counterweight to its author's hopes for mankind. They guarantee his sincerity in professing universal salvation. If London is a 'Preceptress stern', it is partly because she so candidly confirms our fallen nature.

There was in Wordsworth, as in Shelley, a deeply messianic streak. Despite occasional questioning, he knew that he was the only person alive who was capable of writing *The Recluse*, and that understanding echoes throughout *The Prelude* like the beat of a drum. You can hear it in the stentorian tones occasionally exuded by the verse, and it is the rationale by which he constructs the bogus history that takes us from Cumbria to Cambridge, then to France, the Alps, and, finally Snowdon. Biographical fact is tailored to the conclusion that Wordsworth was uniquely qualified to compose the millennial epic of the age. The poem describes a trajectory—more fiction than fact—that sees *The Recluse* as the logical culmination of his creative existence. And it is the combination of realist and Messiah that explains why, when Wordsworth discusses love of nature leading to love of man in Book VIII, the verse oscillates between censoriousness and piety, between the world as it is, and as it might be. Even as he concludes Book VIII, Wordsworth turns from guilt, vice, 'Debasement of the body or the mind', to claim that, even in the city, he witnessed

> individual sights
> Of courage, and integrity, and truth
> And tenderness, which, here set off by foil,
> Appears more touching? In the tender scenes
> Chiefly was my delight, and one of these
> Never will be forgotten. 'Twas a man
> Whom I saw sitting in an open square
> Close to the iron paling that fenced in
> The spacious grass-plot; on the corner-stone
> Of the low wall in which the pales were fixed
> Sat this one man, and with a sickly babe
> Upon his knee, whom he had thither brought
> For sunshine, and to breathe the fresher air.
> Of those who passed, and me who looked at him,
> He took no note; but in his brawny arms
> (The artificer was to the elbow bare,
> And from his work this moment had been stolen)
> He held the child, and, bending over it
> As if he were afraid both of the sun
> And of the air which he had come to seek,
> He eyed it with unutterable love. (ll. 839-59)

The child's tenuous hold on life, and apparent fragility beneath the sun's glare, make it the perfect image of a species at odds with itself, ravaged by corruption, disease, and vice; the artificer who is to nurse it to health is, in another guise, the poet, educated by his preceptress stern to show compassion for his fellow man. It is symptomatic of the gravity with which Wordsworth invests his role as author of *The Recluse* that the other figure invoked by this urban icon may be that of Christ—the Unitarian Christ who is completely human, as susceptible, and fallible, as anyone else. But that association remains implicit, barely hinted at in the father's look of 'unutterable love'. What is important is that it is on the mean streets of the city that Wordsworth finds the emblem of his own destiny, as well as a symbol of promise for those he is to address. The artificer, who has no reason to collude with Wordsworth's grandiose vision, steps straight from the workshop onto the street; he is a representative both of the poet, and of everyman. He is, finally, evidence that Wordsworth's hopes for universal betterment are not misplaced.

At the same time, the artificer and his child look back to one of Wordsworth's models for *The Recluse*—Lucretius. Writing in 1815, Coleridge observed: 'Whatever in Lucretius is poetry is not philosophical; whatever is philosophical is not poetry—and in the very pride of confident hope I looked forward to *The Recluse* as the *first* and *only* true philosophical poem in existence'.[9] Wordsworth undoubtedly looked back to *De rerum natura* as his most important literary precursor; Lucretius was an evangelist for a particular brand of Epicureanism, and his poem was designed to convert. In a similar way, *The Recluse* aimed to change the way people perceived themselves and their relation to the world. But Wordsworth and Coleridge would have found Lucretius' ideas anathema. Lucretius regards nature as dead, and his universe is merely matter in motion. As a means of arguing against a designing principle in the world, he asks a series of questions that would have caught Wordsworth's attention (I quote from the translation of Lucy Hutchinson, the seventeenth-century writer whose *Memoirs* of her husband were so admired by Wordsworth and Coleridge,[10] and to whom Wordsworth's wife Mary was related):

> Why are such generall contagions bred
> When seasons of the yeare intemperate be?
> Why rageth such unripe mortallitie?
> Besides, when nature doth with paynefull throes
> A wretched infant first to light expose,
> He, like a ship-wrackt saylor cast on shore
> By raging billows, naked, helplesse, poore,
> With cries, which well his future woes become,
> Lies on the earth, cast from his mothers womb. (v. 237-45)[11]

Lucretius' case is that the innate hostility of the natural world to humanity disproves the existence of a nurturing divinity. Wordsworth takes the same image—that of the infant child—and uses it twice in Book VIII to argue the precise opposite. The second time it is used is in the passage describing the artificer. The first time is at the beginning of the Book, which features the Grasmere summer fair.

[9] *Romanticism*, p. 573.
[10] See my *Wordsworth's Reading 1800-1815* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 115.
[11] Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* tr. Lucy Hutchinson, ed. Hugh de Quehen (London, 1996).

What sounds are those, Helvellyn, which are heard
Up to thy summit, through the depth of air
Ascending, as if distance had the power
To make the sounds more audible? What crowd
Is yon, assembled in the gay green field?
Crowd seems it, solitary hill, to thee,
Though but a little family of men
(Twice twenty) with their children and their wives,
And here and there a stranger interspersed. (ll. 1-9)

It was as optimists for human nature that Wordsworth and Coleridge formulated the ideas behind *The Recluse*; they believed that humanity was engaged in continual progress up the ascent of being. How appropriate, then, that *Prelude* Book VIII, devoted to an elucidation of its central principle, should begin with an image of elevation. And as the noise of the crowd rises into the heavens, it becomes more, rather than less, audible, seeming to acquire power, in some sense analogous to the spiritual aspirations that provide Wordsworth with his ideal. The 'little family of men . . . with their children and their wives' is more than a random collection of people; the village community, close enough to comprise a single family, is an image of the larger society Wordsworth and Coleridge wanted *The Recluse* to help create. As he supplies further detail, the image of a close-knit group, bound by ties of mutual dependence, becomes clearer: the aged hawker is a regular visitor to the fair, the fruit-seller is a local girl, the old man becomes generous, and children rich. It is a glimpse of society devoid of illness, poverty, and deprivation —a rural paradise regained.

Immense
Is the recess, the circumambient world
Magnificent, by which they are embraced.
They move about upon the soft green field;
How little they, they and their doings, seem,
Their herds and flocks about them, they themselves,
And all which they can further or obstruct—
Through utter weakness pitiably dear
As tender infants are—and yet how great! (ll. 46-54)

In *Home at Grasmere* (composed 1800), Wordsworth had expressed the wish that 'here / Should be my home, this Valley be my World' (ll. 42-3); likewise, in *Prelude* Book VIII, Grasmere is a fully-realised microcosm of the millennial ideal, presided over by a benevolent landscape that literally embraces its inhabitants, 'Through utter weakness pitably dear / As tender infants are'. That nurturing relationship between the circumambient world and the villagers prefigures the artisan and his baby at the end of Book VIII, and echoes the image first used by Lucretius. It provides a living illustration of Wordsworth's theme: how the closeness of man and nature enables people to live in Edenic peace and childlike innocence. There is a pagan element too, reminiscent of the pantheism of the 1798 poetry:

For all things serve them: them the morning light
Loves as it glistens on the silent rocks;
And them the silent rocks, which now from high
Look down upon them; the reposing clouds,
The lurking brooks from their invisible haunts;

And old Helvellyn, conscious of the stir;
And the blue sky that roofs their calm abode. (ll. 55-61)

Everything is instinct with life—the light, rocks, clouds, brooks—bristling with affection for humanity. It is not unlike Ben Jonson's paradisal vision in *To Penshurst*, in which the fish are so attuned to the needs of humanity that they jump out of the river, begging to be caught. Natural things are humanised by Wordsworth's language: sunlight 'loves', clouds repose, brooks lurk. Old Helvellyn, the manifestation of an ancient, unnamed force in the earth, tacitly approves of the hubbub, while the blue sky provides the villagers with a 'roof'. That paradox, by which the sky relinquishes its power to threaten, and instead becomes a sheltering agency, looks forward to the passage with which we began, in which Wordsworth again looks up into a 'roof' and sees 'A spectacle to which there is no end'. For now, the vale of Grasmere and its bustling citizens are unified in a harmony that foreshadows the 'future glory and restoration' to be predicted by *The Recluse*.

University of Glasgow

Reviews

ROBERT M. RYAN, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature 1789-1824.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. xii + 292. ISBN 0 521 57008 5. £37.50 hardback.

> Romantic writing had been responsible for 'the spiritual awakening of spiritual wants . . . stimulating their [readers'] mental thirst, feeding their hopes, setting before them visions, which, once seen, are not easily forgotten, and silently indoctrinating them with nobler ideas, which might afterwards be appealed to as first principles'.

ROBERT RYAN'S CITATION of Newman touches upon the central focus of Ryan's recent monograph, *The Romantic Reformation.* This is a learned, well-argued work that convincingly demonstrates the relationship between religion and political reform in the writings of both Shelleys, Blake, Wordsworth, Byron, and Keats. Ryan omits Coleridge, noting that S.T.C. was the sole Romantic to offer a specific program of religious reform. In addition to these major figures, the work includes interesting insights into the thought of Paine, Hunt, and Godwin.

Although Ryan's work is a very admirable study, it has one or two areas that could stand either correction or refinement. Curiously, whether an oversight of a copy editor or of Ryan himself, there are several instances in which the incorrect form of the verb 'to affect' is used (as 'effect'), e.g., page 100. Yet, a comparison of the error with other grammatically identical situations reveals use of the correct form (see pp. 172, 183); thus, the anomalies seem even more curious. Ryan's reader would also profit from consulting his Introduction, 'The Religious Milieu' to his 1976 work, *Keats: The Religious Sense.* This introduction provides valuable insight into the period's background, some of which is not included in Ryan's current volume. Whether by natural humility or otherwise, Ryan does not specifically direct his reader to the earlier introduction. Otherwise, the structure of the current book, its annotation, introduction, and index are fine. Refreshingly, Ryan's bibliography is actually limited to works either cited in or consulted for the current study, sparing his reader's reference to every work that may have informed his entire intellectual history, a regrettable tendency of many contemporary monographs.

Anomalies aside, much that is most engaging as well as impressive in *The Romantic Reformation* stems from Ryan's careful scholarship and judicious argument. For instance, his chapter on 'Blake's Orthodoxy' convincingly demonstrates several indices of the poet's Christianity, among them, his regular use of dialectical argument 'in which different dramatic voices express conflicting theological views, so that the poetry can be quoted convincingly on both sides of any religious dispute'. Ryan's point, that elements of Blake's, at times, labyrinthine style can be eminently demanding for all commentators, is illustrated quite effectively. Ryan openly challenges Bloom's reading of Blake's sterile 'doctrine of Urizen' to constitute 'the Christianity of all the churches'. Ryan painstakingly leads us through a fair selection of Blake and concludes that, 'orthodoxy for Blake is not dogmatic or complacent; it is an active search, a dogmatic investigation'. This assertion not only illustrates the central contention of Ryan's work; it also has the distinct ring of truth.

Another interesting chapter that contains somewhat provocative observations focuses on Mary Shelley's 'Christian monster'. Such a chapter on Shelley, as part of a monograph considering the major Romantics, is not only welcome but still all too rare. Here, Ryan points out two trenchant points, namely, that, quite strikingly, 'Neither God nor demon has any role to play in this tale of curiosity, pride, and error, in which humanity has only itself to blame and fear'. Additionally, 'on

those occasions when traditional religion is introduced, it is not subjected to the kind of criticism or derision one might anticipate from a follower of Godwin. Ryan goes on to carefully trace scriptural references within Shelley's text, all the while offering some very interesting observations on the Godwinian milieu and system. He, Ryan, avoids facile conclusions, instead opting to examine the monster's 'strange metaphysical distress' with a fresh and thoughtful perspective.

Five additional chapters round out the volume. For anyone interested in appreciating the very complex role of the Christian religion in the Romantic attempt to reform the culture and politics of nineteenth-century Britain, Ryan offers us a comprehensively-researched work, crafted in vigorous prose. *Romantic Reformation* is a richly-developed study incorporating the thought of critics and commentators from both past and present with Ryan's own sound reasoning.

RICHARD S. TOMLINSON

MARGARET RUSSETT, *De Quincey's Romanticism: Canonical Minority and the Forms of Transmission*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. ISBN 0521 57236 3. Pp. xiv. + 295. £35 hardback.

FOCUSSING ON THE COMPLEX DYNAMICS of the relation between the canonical author and the 'minor' writer, Margaret Russett's study takes the career of De Quincey as a point of reference for a broader consideration of 'the tropology and psychoanalytics of cultural esteem'. It is an often engaging attempt to 'bring certain preoccupations of traditional literary history . . . into the domain of poststructuralism'. But Russett's claim that her book is 'about reading Wordsworth, repeating Coleridge, writing for magazines, and competing for popularity at least as much as it is about interpreting De Quincey' merely hints at some of the dense, 'perplexed combinations' (De Quincey's term) to come.

'Conversions: Wordsworth's gothic interpreter' centres on the correspondence between the eighteen-year-old De Quincey (the knowing 'minor') and his idol Wordsworth. Russett writes perceptively on the way in which De Quincey's 'extravagantly literary' letter of 14 March 1804 to Wordsworth appropriates literary voices to fashion an 'elaborate conversion narrative' pivoting on Wordsworth's 'minor' poem 'We are Seven' which redeems De Quincey from his 'frenzied gothicism'. The minor's strategic engagement with 'Tintern Abbey' and the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* are interestingly psychoanalysed, and Russet goes on to read the various 'tales of loss' that so powerfully characterise De Quincey's literary vision as negotiations with issues raised by 'We are Seven' here at the beginning of his literary 'career', when he presented himself to Wordsworth as a creature made in the image of his master's poetry.

'Both in my choice of De Quinceyan texts and in my deviations from them, I have embraced as Coleridgean method the eccentricities and errancies of the fragments I half-create', Russett announces. The book suffers in consequence, and remains uncompromisingly opaque in places. But it does have its more lucid moments. The second chapter, 'Transmissions: composing *The Convention of Cintra*', profiles the relationship between Wordsworth and his 'undersecretary', editor, and, ultimately, scapegoat, De Quincey, who oversaw the fraught passage of *Cintra* through the press and became, for Wordsworth, 'the personification of *material* resistance to the philosophic mind'. Russett also has some good things to say about the 'reverberations' of Wordsworth's political tract of 1808-9 in De Quincey's *The English Mail-Coach*, and is particularly interesting on the way in which Wordsworth read the historical debâcle of the Convention of Cintra in terms of a linguistic event.

Much the best chapter of the book, 'Impersonations: the magazinist as minor author', explores issues of identity, pseudonymity, originality and imposture by focusing on the magazine work

of Hazlitt, Lamb/ Elia and De Quincey/The Opium-Eater. The *London Magazine*'s pages are seen as the locus of heteroglossia, reflexive discourses and the sophisticated play of personae and Elian aliases. The ontological status of the author becomes ambiguous; successfully enlisting Foucault, Derrida, and Bakhtin, Russett shows how the 'relation between authorial persona and empirical writer undergoes strange inversions'. The periodical double, in Bickerstaffian fashion, takes on a disturbingly convincing autonomous life. Russett picks up here on De Quincey's lifelong fascination with the *doppelgänger*, but a more *extended* consideration of this figuration would have enriched (and perhaps clarified) her central thesis.

'Reproductions: opium, prostitution, and poetry' resurrects from relative obscurity De Quincey the disciple of David Ricardo and author of *The Logic of Political Economy* (1844). The discourse of political economy, aesthetics, and theories of cultural transmission and literary value are brought together here in a bewildering but thought-provoking marriage of Kant's transcendental philosophy and commercial exchange. Russett contends that De Quincey's *Logic* 'articulates a (pre)-materialist account of aesthetic value that is allegorized in the *Confessions* [*of an English Opium-Eater*]'. 'Aesthetic reception' is seen in terms of commodity consumption; the boundaries between artistic production and material circulation become permeable. De Quincey's 'transmission theory' is further explored by reading his account in the *Confessions* of Piranesi's *Carceri d'Invenzione* ('Imaginary Prisons') engravings as an 'allegory of transmission'. Finally, De Quincey himself is seen as a 'cultural capitalist' responsible for the transmission and canonisation of Wordsworth and Coleridge, reaping 'ineffable returns on his literary investments'.

De Quincey's *Lake Reminiscences* of 1834-40 are interpreted in the final chapter as 'explicit essays in canon-formation'. Russett gets to grips with the ethics of biography and with issues of 'literary property, mimesis and personhood'. She foregrounds De Quincey's 'unauthorised' use in his 1838 essay on Wordsworth of the 'Arab Dream' passage from Book V of *The Prelude* (whose 'complex textual history makes it a particularly slippery form of property') to investigate ideas of circulation, piracy, copyright law, buried autobiographies and larcenous biographers. Drawing parallels with the 'Lucy poems', Russett's final section analyses De Quincey's 'case history of poetic passion', transferred in the *Reminiscences* 'without mutation to an empirical person': his account of the 'hysterical illness' he suffered after the death of little Kate Wordsworth. In this portrait of the memorialiser's relationship with the poet he canonises, De Quincey appears as the 'cradle-robbing lover of Wordsworth's daughter'.

The epilogue, 'Minor Romanticism', is a defence of the book's punning subtitle ('minority' as diminutiveness ('I wish he were not so little', Southey once said of the five-foot Opium-Eater/ the child/ the non-canonical writer). Canonical minority, in all its meanings, is reconfigured here as power: 'Neither foil nor mirror, the minor *produces* majority'. The 'child' is father of the canon. Within the frame of Romantic dialectics, Russett calls for the minor writer's dealings with the canonical author to be viewed as powerfully constitutive rather than merely 'as testimony to an autonomous effect . . . Hazlitt's prose, one might say, *is* Coleridge's "canonicity", a term that designates the form of a text's transmission'.

Clearly, no one will come to this book for a broad account and critical purchase on De Quincey's masterpieces—the *Confessions*, *Suspiria de Profundis*, and *The English Mail-Coach*. Russett's is a dense and difficult study in which too much knowledge on the part of the reader is too often assumed. It pursues its labyrinthine course through (in De Quincey's words, quoted by Russett) 'a maze of inversions, evolutions, and harlequin changes'—changes that are often of 'specious plausibility' (to quote Russett herself). Its diffuseness and desultoriness dilute its often-glimpsed critical intelligence and sensitivity. But these dissatisfactions notwithstanding, *De*

Quincey's Romanticism: Canonical Minority and the Forms of Transmission is a highly original contribution which will certainly reconfigure our notions of Romantic 'influence'.

DAMIAN WALFORD DAVIES

Society Notes and News from Members

FROM THE HON. SECRETARY

1998/9 Programme

The speaker on Saturday 9 January at 2.30pm, Mary Ward Centre, will be Luisa Calé. She will speak on the subject, 'Lamb and Visuality'. Miss Calé, of Wolfson College, Oxford, is currently researching Fuseli's Milton Gallery and the literary galleries of the 1790s.

Saturday 10 April: suggestions for a theatre or museum visit will be welcome. It has not been possible to arrange a group visit on a Saturday to the Soane Museum.

Greta Hall, Keswick

In May we learned form the Lake Poets Society that sadly they had not succeeded in acquiring Greta Hall. In a long report they detail the tortuous negotiations to try to purchase this historic property and are grateful to all who supported the campaign. It is hoped to co-operate with the new owners in holding occasional artistic or literary events centred on Keswick.

Better news about another literary shrine! English Heritage have agreed to place a blue plaque on Lamb's Cottage, Edmonton commemorating Charles and Mary Lamb's residence. At the time of writing, it only remains to agree the final wording. Thank you, David Wickham, for all your efforts. As part of London's 'Open House' celebration on Saturday 20 September our members Sandra Knott and George Wilcox opened their home to pre-booked parties of visitors. In the 'Open House' brochure the cottage is described as 'Late C17 timber-frame house (Grade II*). Early 18C facade and period features. Last home of Charles and Mary Lamb'.

Richard Holmes

CLS members are invited to a reading by Richard Holmes from the second volume of his biography of Coleridge, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections*, at 7pm on Wednesday 21 October at the Royal Overseas League, Park Place, St James's Street, London SW1A 1LR (tel.: 0171 408 0214 ext. 219). Concessionary price £2.50 (including a glass of wine); tickets in advance from the League at the above address.

Lyrical Ballads

On 7 November at 4pm in the Purcell Room, Royal Festival Hall, three poets, including Tom Paulin, will discuss 'The *Lyrical Ballads* 200 Years On'. Tickets £6.50 (concessions £3.50) on 0171 960 4242.

Other Matters

CLS member Michel Jolibois has been in Cambridge and London working on his translation into French of *The Last Essays of Elia*, for his doctorate.

The summer 1998 issue of *The American Scholar* included a fascinating essay by Anne Fadiman entitled 'The Unfuzzy Lamb'. If anyone would like to borrow a copy please send me a large SAE. It is well worth reading!

Madeline Huxstep

NOTES AND NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Lamb on the Net

Charles Lamb loved theatre (and one theatre actress), and he would no doubt have been pleased to see an expansion of websites devoted to Romantic drama. Over the last year, several sites have appeared, and more are on their way, clearly showing that Romantic drama is making itself a place on the Internet.

A good place to start is the University of Texas' webpage devoted to Romantic drama (http://ww.en.utexas.edu/engl/romdrama/index.htm). Janice E. Patten's home page also provides some useful links (http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/patten/index.html), as does Michael Gamer's 'Index to Romantic-related Sites' (http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Romantic/index.html). The 'Women Writer Project' at Brown University (http://www.wwp.brown.ed) has several texts of Romantic plays.

Finally, under the general editorship of Tom Crochunis and myself, a new project entitled 'British Women Playwrights around 1800' offers a forum discussion on Romantic drama by women, a description of a forthcoming special session at the MLA on that topic, as well as links to other sites, and the full text (soon to annotated) of J. M. Scott's *Broad Grins or; Whackham and Windham*, a burletta in two Acts, with an introduction by Jackie Bratton.

Michael Laplace-Sinatra

From John Wardroper

I was pleased to see my book *The World of William Hone* noticed in your bulletin of July (see *Charles Lamb Bulletin* NS 103 (July 1998) 108), but I would like to comment briefly on R. M. Healey's summing up.

He wishes I had kept to the double-column small-type format used by Hone in his weekly *Every-Day Book* and its successors. He wishes too that I had not excluded most of Hone's antiquarianism (material largely lifted from various volumes, and partly superseded since). Small print and antiquarianism would, I think, have deterred the new readers I wished to introduce to Charles Lamb's industrious and innovative friend.

My purpose was to present attractively the best of what Hone himself, and the contributors he found all round Britain, wrote about the world they knew, and about what they recalled feelingly from their younger days. That varied material, together with the scores of original illustrations that I reproduce, does give 'the distinctive flavour of Hone and his times'; so I am surprised that in Healey's opinion the distinctive flavour 'has been entirely jettisoned'.

I hope that anyone who might like to discover Hone's world will not be deterred.

John Wardroper

50 Years Ago: from *CLS Bulletin* no. 86: November 1948

A Lamb Commonplace Book: We are happy to announce that an important relic has been rescued from 'export' abroad. At Sotheby's on 11 October [1948] Lamb's *Commonplace Book*, containing in his handwriting excerpts from Massinger, Webster, Fuller, Heywood, Herrick and other dramatists, together with original notes, criticisms and other interesting miscellaneous material by Lamb, was acquired for £220, against strong competitive bidding, by Mr Reginald L. Hine, FSA. This book was previously in the Rowfant Library and has F. Locker Lampson's bookplate. . . . These notes, etc., in their turn will no doubt be of considerable benefit to Mr Hine in completing his forthcoming book on *Lamb and his Hertfordshire*, which is likely to be published next summer. The Society is fortunate in having in its ranks such a public-spirited member as Mr. Hine, and we congratulate him on the possession of this Lamb treasure.