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Hogsflesh Revisited

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This lecture was delivered to the Lamb Society at Swedenborg House, 4 December 1999.

THE NAMING of talks, like the naming of cats according to Old Possum, is a difficult matter. My choice today may recall Wordsworth's three poems about Yarrow, unvisited, visited, and revisited, or it may recall Evelyn Waugh's novel about Brideshead, or Mary Wedd's article in a recent Bulletin, or it may have other associations at which I cannot guess. In choosing it I am obviously proposing, as members of this Society will be expecting me to do, to look again at Charles Lamb's farce *Mr H*, though in revisiting that work I also propose to ramble around its neighbourhood and finish by arriving at his other farce, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*.

'Hogsflesh Revisited.' I am reminded of the debate about the picturesque and the beautiful in *Headlong Hall* (Chapter 4), where one speaker says, 'I distinguish the picturesque and the beautiful, and I add to them, in the laying out of grounds, a third and distinct character, which I call *unexpectedness*', and another retorts, 'Pray, sir, by what name do you distinguish the character, when a person walks round the grounds for a second time?' Writing to his friend Manning, then in China, the week before the farce's first night, Lamb says,

> Now you'd like to know the subject. The Title is "Mr. H." – no more, how simple, how taking! A great H. sprawling over the play bill & attracting eyes at every corner. The story is, a coxcomb appearing at Bath vastly rich – all the ladies dying for him – all bursting to know who he is – but he goes by no other name than Mr. H. – a curiosity like that of the dames of Strasburg about the man with the great nose - . But I won't tell you any more about it – yes I will – but I can't give you an idea how I have done it - . I'll just tell you that after much vehement admiration, when his true name comes out, Hogsflesh, all the women shun him, avoid him & not one can be found to change their name for him – that's the idea – how flat it is here – but how whimsical in the farce.[1]

'When his true name comes out.' As is remarked by everybody who discusses the play – not that there are many who do discuss it – it is a play in which the effect of the climax, as far as surprising any audience after the first performance is concerned, is unrepeatable. This is to walk round the grounds for a second time. I believe that the first audiences of Agatha Christie's play *The Mousetrap* were implored by the management not to reveal the denouement, and I dare say that its present audiences are still being sworn to secrecy. And yet I dare say also that many people have been to see it more than once. To have been surprised once does not mean that a sensation analogous to surprise – a sort of secondary surprise – cannot be experienced the second time around. But it will be objected that there are surprises and surprises, and that the surprise in *Mr H* is simply the revelation of a name, and a name about which the whole play hitherto has consisted in speculation. It is a play about a name, and the question is whether it is about anything else.

[1] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), Vol. II (1976), p. 246. The typography has been normalized.

I can imagine spirits sinking at the thought that a portentous analysis may follow that statement; but all I shall be trying to show is that it is a better play than is suggested by the index entry in Alfred Ainger's *Charles Lamb* in the 'English Men of Letters' series:

> Mr. H. (Lamb's farce), 64; its production, 65; its flimsiness, 65; its reception, 65; its poor humour, 66; its laboured dialogue, 66; its lack of constructive ability, 66.[2]

> The play opens on a full stage.
> SCENE. – *A Public Room in an Inn – Landlord, Waiters, Gentlemen, &c.*
> *Enter* MR. H.
> *Mr. H.* Landlord, has the man brought home my boots?
> *Landlord.* Yes, Sir.
> *Mr. H.* You have paid him?
> *Landlord.* There is the receipt, Sir, only not quite filled up, no name, only blank – 'Blank, Dr. to Zekiel Spanish for one pair of best Hessians.' Now, Sir, he wishes to know what name he shall put in, who he shall say 'Dr.'
> *Mr. H.* Why, Mr. H. to be sure.
> *Landlord.* So I told him, Sir; but Zekiel has some qualms about it. He says, he thinks that Mr. H. only would not stand good in law.
> *Mr. H.* Rot his impertinence, bid him put in Nebuchadnezzar, and not trouble me with his scruples.
> *Landlord.* I shall, Sir. (*Exit*)[3]

Five waiters, one after another, bring messages to Mr H, most of them involving his anonymity: the man that makes up the Directory ('Zounds, fellow, I give him a shilling for leaving out my name, not for putting it in'), a poet compiling his subscription-list ('Zounds, he is a poet; let him fancy a name'), Bartlemy, the lame beggar, wishing to return thanks for a private donation ('I warrant you, next he will require a certificate of one's good behaviour'), Mr Patriot with the county petition to sign, and Mr Failtime, the debtor, seeking bail ('Here is more of the plaguy comforts of going anonymous, that one can neither serve one's friend nor one's country'). There are also two letters:

> *Mr. H.* From ladies (*opens them*). This from Melesinda, to remind me of the morning call I promised; the pretty creature positively languishes to be made Mrs. H. I believe I must indulge her (*affectedly*). This from her cousin, to bespeak me to some party, I suppose (*opening it*) – Oh, 'this evening' – 'Tea and cards' – (*surveying himself with complacency*). Dear H., thou art certainly a pretty fellow. I wonder what makes thee such a favourite among the ladies: I wish it may not be owing to the concealment of thy unfortunate –

Lamb thus prepares for two later scenes, Mr H's interview with Melesinda and his evening appearance at her cousin's party, the latter to be the climax of the play.

[2] Alfred Ainger, *Charles Lamb* (London, 1909, with index; first published 1882, without index).
[3] The play is reprinted in *The Works in Prose and Verse of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford, 1908), Vol. II, pp. 737-61.

On his way to Melesinda's house, Mr H is accosted by his friend Belvil as 'My old Jamaica school-fellow, that I have not seen for so many years'. Each time Belvil is about to address him by his surname, Mr H stops his mouth, telling him that he has reasons to conceal it. A number of speculations from Belvil are in turn denied:

> To relieve you at once from all disgraceful conjectures, you must know, 'tis nothing but the sound of my name.

He is determined

> To engage the affections of some generous girl, who will be content to take me as Mr. H (. . .) To accompany me to the altar without a name – in short, to suspend her curiosity (that is all) till the moment the priest shall pronounce the irrevocable charm, which makes two names one.

By now, in the third scene, we are ready to meet Melesinda.

> SCENE. – *An Apartment in* MELESINDA'S *House*.
>
> MELESINDA *sola, as if musing.*
>
> *Melesinda*. H., H., H. Sure it must be something precious by its being concealed. It can't be Homer, that is a Heathen's name; nor Horatio, that is no surname; what if it be Hamlet? The Lord Hamlet – pretty, and I his poor distracted Ophelia! No, 'tis none of these; 'tis Harcourt or Hargrave, or some such sounding name, or Howard, high born Howard, that would do; may be it is Harley, methinks my H. resembles Harley, the feeling Harley. But I hear him, and from his own lips I will once for ever be resolved.
>
> *Enter* MR. H.
>
> *Mr. H.* My dear Melesinda.
>
> *Melesinda.* My dear H. – That is all you give me power to swear allegiance to, - to be enamoured of inarticulate sounds, and call with sighs upon an empty letter. But I will know.
>
> *Mr. H.* My dear Melesinda, press me no more for the disclosure of that, which in the face of day so soon must be revealed. Call it whim, humour, caprice, in me. Suppose I have sworn an oath, never, till the ceremony of our marriage is over, to disclose my true name.
>
> *Melesinda*. Oh! H., H., H., I cherish here a fire of restless curiosity which consumes me. 'Tis appetite, passion, call it whim, caprice, in me. Suppose I have sworn I must and will know it this very night.
>
> *Mr. H.* Ungenerous Melesinda! I implore you to give me this one proof of your confidence. The holy vow once past, your H. shall not have a secret to withhold.
>
> *Melesinda*. My H. has overcome: his Melesinda shall pine away and die, before she dare express a saucy inclination; but what shall I call you till we are married?
>
> *Mr. H.* Call me? Call me any thing, call me Love, Love! Aye, Love, Love will do very well.
>
> *Melesinda*. How many syllables is it, Love?
>
> *Mr. H.* How many? Ud, that is coming to the question with a vengeance. One, two, three, four, - what does it signify how many syllables?
>
> *Melesinda.* How many syllables, Love?

Mr. H. My Melesinda's mind, I had hoped, was superior to this childish curiosity.
Melesinda. How many letters are there in it?
Exit MR. H. followed by MELESINDA *repeating the question.*

These three dialogues give the tone of the play: not only the Bath setting but the vivacity of the exchanges make one remember Sheridan's *Rivals*. Mr H's Christian name is, of course, Jack (what else could it be?), and we never learn Belvil's, any more than we learn Faulkland's. Melesinda's soliloquy has something of Lydia Languish, especially when she sees herself playing Ophelia to Mr H's Hamlet, and when she compares him to Harley, the 'Man of Feeling' in Henry Mackenzie's novel; and the fresh breaking-out of her irresistible curiosity is delightfully managed.

Some low-life dialogues follow (like that of Fag and Thomas in Sheridan) at Mr H's inn. Two waiters are engrossed by the mystery:

First Waiter. Sir Harbottle Hammond, you may depend upon it.
Second Waiter. Sir Hardy Hardcastle, I tell you.
First Waiter. The Hammonds of Huntingdonshire.
Second Waiter. The Hardcastles of Hertfordshire.
First Waiter. The Hammonds.
Second Waiter. Don't tell me: does not Hardcastle begin with an H.?
First Waiter. So does Hammond for that matter.
Second Waiter. Faith, so it does if you go to spell it. I did not think of that.[4]

The landlord, in soliloquy, by insensible degrees works his own curiosity up to the point of unlocking Mr H's box, but is interrupted by our hero and sent about his business. Then '*Enter two Footmen.*'

First Footman. You speak first.
Second Footman. No, you had better speak.
First Footman. You promised to begin.
Mr. H. They have something to say to me. The rascals want their wages raised, I suppose; there is always a favour to be asked when they come smiling. Well, poor rogues, service is but a hard bargain at the best. I think I must not be close with them. Well, David – well, Jonathan.
First Footman. We have served your honour faithfully –
Second Footman. Hope your honour won't take offence –
Mr. H. The old story, I suppose – wages?
First Footman. That's not it, your honour.

They believe that they cannot keep up their credit among other footmen if they do not know their master's name, and when he refuses to tell them they give notice: 'We don't chuse to serve Mr. H.' Then, with the play's second and final act, we are back to high life:

[4] 'The Hardcastles of Hertfordshire' (alluding to Goldsmith's comedy *She Stoops to Conquer*) is typical of Lamb, as is the naming of the pair of footmen in the next quotation.

> SCENE. – *A handsome Apartment well lighted, Tea, Cards, &c. – A large party of Ladies and Gentlemen, among them* MELESINDA.

Expectation is built up to Mr H's entrance, and then, '*While the Ladies are pressing about* MR. H. *the Gentlemen show signs of displeasure*', a stage direction which sets the mood for the moment when, telling a story against himself to illustrate his absence of mind, he illustrates his foible in practice by slipping out his name:

> *Mr. H.* Lord Squandercounsel, who is my particular friend, was pleased to rally me in his inimitable way upon it next day. I shall never forget a sensible thing he said on the occasion – speaking of absence of mind, my foible – says he, my dear Hogs—
> *Several Ladies.* Hogs—what – ha –
> *Mr. H.* My dear Hogsflesh – my name – (*here an universal scream*) – O my cursed unfortunate tongue! – H. I mean – Where was I?

The ladies are scandalized, the gentlemen exultant:

> *First Gentleman.* Good time of day to you, Mr. Hogsflesh.
> *Second Gentleman.* The compliments of the season to you, Mr. Hogsflesh.
> *Mr. H.* This is too much – flesh and blood cannot endure it.
> *First Gentleman.* What flesh? – hog's-flesh?
> *Second Gentleman.* How he sets his bristles!
> *Mr. H.* Bristles!
> *First Gentleman.* He looks as fierce as a hog in armour.
> *Mr. H.* A hog!

He '*severally accosts the ladies, who by turns repel him*', and '*Exeunt all, either pitying or seeming to avoid him*', while Melesinda, who has fainted, is presumably carried off:

> *Third Lady.* A smelling bottle – look to Miss Melesinda. Poor thing! it is no wonder. You had better keep off from her, Mr. Hogsflesh, and not be pressing about her in her circumstances.

The scene changes to 'MR. H.'s *Apartment*', where we find him in extravagant soliloquy about what his name *might* have been – anything better than what it *was* – and then, with a shift of register, moving into apostrophe:

> Farewell the most distant thoughts of marriage; the finger-circling ring, the purity-figuring glove, the envy-pining bridesmaids, the wishing parson, and the simpering clerk. Farewell, the ambiguous blush-raising joke, the titter-provoking pun, the morning-stirring drum.

The model is, of course, *Othello*. The landlord now entering, and being told that his guest is packing to depart, we learn the inn's name: 'Hope your Honor does not intend to quit the Blue Boar'.

For the final scene we are once more in Melesinda's apartment, where her maid is reasoning with her:

> If he's hog by name, he's not hog by nature, that don't follow – his name don't make him any thing, does it? He don't grunt the more for it, nor squeak, that ever I hear; he likes his victuals out of a plate, as other Christians do, you never see him go to the trough –

Mr. Hogsflesh, as we may now call him, arrives, and the maid leaves him alone with Melesinda:

> *Mr. H.* Melesinda, you behold before you a wretch who would have betrayed your confidence, but it was love that prompted him; who would have tricked you by an unworthy concealment into a participation of that disgrace which a superficial world has agreed to attach to a name – but with it you would have shared a fortune not contemptible, and a heart – but 'tis over now. That name he is content to bear alone – to go where the persecuted syllables shall be no more heard, or excite no meaning – some spot where his native tongue has never penetrated, nor any of his countrymen have landed, to plant their unfeeling satire, their brutal wit, and national ill manners – where no Englishman – (*Here Melesinda, who has been pouting during this speech, fetches a deep sigh.*) Some yet undiscovered Otaheite, where witless, unapprehensive savages shall innocently pronounce the ill-fated sounds, and think them not inharmonious.
>
> *Melesinda.* Oh!
>
> *Mr. H.* Who knows but among the female natives might be found –
>
> *Melesinda.* Sir! (*raising her head*).
>
> *Mr. H.* One who would be more kind than – some Oberea – Queen Oberea.
>
> *Melesinda.* Oh!
>
> *Mr. H.* Or what if I were to seek for proofs of reciprocal esteem among unprejudiced African maids, in Monomotopa.

A servant announces Belvil, who arrives with a copy of the *Gazette* for his distressed friend to read. 'The King has been graciously pleased to grant unto John Hogsflesh, Esq., of Sty Hall, in the county of Hants, his royal licence and authority that he and his issue may take and use the surname and arms of Bacon . . .' Our hero is in every sense translated:

> *Mr. H.* Bacon, Bacon, Bacon – how odd it sounds. I could never be tired of hearing it. There was Lord Chancellor Bacon. Methinks I have some of the Verulam blood in me already – methinks I could look through Nature – there was Friar Bacon, a conjuror – I feel as if I could conjure too –

Three of Melesinda's lady friends, who come to enquire after her health, and are shocked by the presence of 'Mr. Hogsflesh', are told by Belvil,

> Very true, the name of this gentleman was what-you-call-it, but it is so no longer. The succession to the long-contested Bacon estate is at length decided, and with it my friend succeeds to the name of his deceased relative.

They have to make their hypocritical compliments, to which, at Belvil's prompting ('Mortify them a little, Jack') he replies in kind, ending his speech and the play with couplets:

> Ladies all, with this piece of advice, of Bath and you
> Your ever grateful servant takes his leave.
> Lay your plans surer when you plot to grieve;
> See, while you kindly mean to mortify
> Another, the wild arrow do not fly,
> And gall yourself. For once you've been mistaken'
> Your shafts have miss'd their aim – Hogsflesh has saved his Bacon.

If I may briefly turn back from Mr Bacon's final glee to Mr Hogsflesh's melancholy visions of exile to non-English-speaking regions of the globe, I wonder if you wondered, as I did, *why Monomotopa*? or even, as I also did, *where that*? Otaheite (Tahiti) was an obvious enough choice, given the fame of Captain Cook's voyages some forty years before, but how would Lamb, or his audience, know about Monomotapa (as it ought to be spelled), which is modern Zimbabwe? I think the answer may lie in Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*, which was very much read for its abundant out-of-the-way information. In the third edition (1793) D'Israeli has a section 'On the Custom of Saluting after Sneezing' – a subject which might well have served for an Elia essay:

> Some writers . . . give us an amusing account of the ceremonies which attend the sneezing of a King of Monomotapa. – Those who are near his person, when this happens, salute him in so loud a tone, that those who are in the antechamber hear it, and join in the acclamation. Those who are in the adjoining apartments do the same, until the noise reaches the street, and becomes propagated throughout the city: so that, at each sneeze of his majesty, results a most horrid cry from the salutations of many thousands of his vassals. (I, pp. 225-6)

The story of the play's failure at Drury Lane has often been told, in Lamb's letters and elsewhere, and I shall not repeat it here. Notwithstanding an excellent pair of leads, Robert William Elliston, then aged 32, who had played Charles Surface, and Harriot Mellon, then aged 29, who had played Lydia Languish, it was hissed, and, at Lamb's own request, not repeated. E.V. Lucas, more generous than Alfred Ainger, writes:

> As a matter of fact, "Mr. H." was an unusually clever play of its kind, and it still reads well; but there were reasons enough for its failure. To a public fed on the broad dramatic fun of Colman and O'Keeffe there was nothing satisfying in a farce the chief humour of which turned on a grotesque surname. The audience looked for comic situations and droll horseplay, and were offered only a literary jest. Moreover to many of them it cannot have been considered worthy even of the name of jest. No visitor to the theatre, for example, who took an interest in cricket at that day can have been in the least degree amused by the name of Hogsflesh, since the famous Hogsflesh of Hambledon, the bowler, was a household name among all who followed the game.[5]

[5] E.V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (London, 5th edition, revised, 1921; first published, 1905), Vol. I, p. 341.

Lucas also points out that Hogsflesh was one of the two innkeepers at Worthing, the other being Bacon, and quotes a contemporary rhyme on the two names. Perhaps Lucas is too sensible of the dignity of cricket to find the name of a wellknown cricketer amusing. Hogsfleshes are still to be found in telephone directories (eight in Southampton, four in Guildford, one in each of Bournemouth, Mid-Dorset, and Horsham) – and who knows how many may be ex-directory? Yet the name figured in a list of curious Sussex surnames given in a letter to *The Times* in 1953 (along with Devil, Pitchfork, Slybody, Beatup, Wildgoose, and others), and I think that most people would find it risible.[6] Leigh Hunt, who 'thought that had the name been "Mr. Horridface, or Mr. Hangman, or Mr. Hornowl or Hellish," etc., the effect would have been better', clearly had the wrong sow by the ear.[7] What puns or proverbs could Lamb have hung on any of those names? – to say nothing of the question of contriving the denouement. More to the point is the testimony of *Cranford*:

> Their parents were respectable farmers, content with their station. The name of these good people was Hoggins. Mr Hoggins was the Cranford doctor now; we disliked the name, and considered it coarse; but, as Miss Jenkyns said, if he changed it to Piggins it would not be much better.[8]

Nearly twenty years after the failure of *Mr H*, Lamb composed a second farce, *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*. He wrote to Southey on 19 August 1825,

> For literary news, in my poor way, I have a one-act farce going to be acted at the Haymarket; but when? is the question. 'Tis an extravaganza, and like enough to follow "Mr. H."'

and at about the same time (only a fragment of the letter is extant) he wrote to the dramatist Samuel James Arnold,

> Liston is going to bring out a certain Pawnbroker's Daughter, whom some folks were so delicate about. She will take!

From this second letter, it seems that the theme of the farce had been criticized by some of Lamb's friends, and, in spite of the confident final sentence here, the first letter suggests that Lamb himself also had doubts as to its succeeding. In the event it never was performed, as a third letter (to Bernard Barton, in July 1829) makes clear: 'In the ensuing Blackwood will be an old rejected farce of mine.'[9] *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*, a two-act farce like *Mr H*, was published in the January 1830 number of *Blackwood's Magazine*.

The plot turns upon a casket of jewels, which Reuben Flint has acquired in the course of his business, and which in the opening dialogue he entrusts to the care of his daughter Marian:

[6] Letter from Mr Aytoun Ellis, 17 January 1953, in *The First Cuckoo. Letters to 'The Times' since 1900. Chosen and introduced by Kenneth Gregory* (London, 1976).
[7] *The Life, Letters, and Writings of Charles Lamb*, ed. Percy Fitzgerald (London, 1882), Vol. I, p. 62 note.
[8] Elizabeth C. Gaskell, *Cranford* (1853), The World's Classics (London, 1907), pp. 76-7 (Chapter 7).
[9] *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas (London, 1935), Vol. III, pp. 23, 12, 225.

> They are all yours, Marian, if you do not cross me in your marriage. No gentry shall match into this house, to flout their wife hereafter with her parentage.[10]

No sooner has he left than Lucy, Marian's maid, rushes in:

> *Lucy*. Miss, miss, your father has taken his hat, and is stept out, and Mr. Davenport is on the stairs; and I came to tell you –
> *Marian*. Alas! who let him in?
> *Enter Davenport*.
> *Davenport*. My dearest girl –
> *Marian*. My father will kill me, if he finds you have been here!
> *Davenport*. There is no time for explanations. I have positive information that your father means, in less than a week, to dispose of you to that ugly Saunders. The wretch has bragged of it to his acquaintance, and already calls you *his*.
> *Marian*. O heavens!
> *Davenport*. Your resolution must be summary, as the time which calls for it. Mine or his you must be, without delay. There is no safety for you under this roof.
> *Marian*. My father –
> *Davenport*. Is no father, if he would sacrifice you.
> *Marian*. But he is unhappy. Do not speak hard words of my father.
> *Davenport*. Marian must exert her good sense.
> *Lucy (as if watching at the window)*. O, miss, your father has suddenly returned. I see him with Mr. Saunders, coming down the street. Mr. Saunders, ma'am!
> *Marian*. Begone, begone, if you love me, Davenport.
> *Davenport*. You must go with me then, else here I am fixed.
> *Lucy*. Aye, miss, you must go, as Mr. Davenport says. Here is your cloak, miss, and your hat, and your gloves. Your father, ma'am –
> *Marian*. O, where, where? Whither do you hurry me, Davenport?
> *Davenport*. Quickly, quickly, Marian. At the back door. –
> (*Exit Marian with Davenport, reluctantly*; in *her flight still holding the jewels*.)
> *Lucy*. Away – away. What a lucky thought of mine to say her father was coming! he would never have got her off, else. Lord, Lord, I do love to help lovers.
> (*Exit, following them*.)

Lucy and Davenport find Marian a lodging on the upper floor of a set of apartments owned by Cutlet, a sentimental butcher whose share of the plot is much smaller than his share of the dialogue. Probably Lamb hoped that Liston himself would take the role. The ground floor is occupied by another young single lady, a friend of Marian Flint; her name is Maria Flyn. In the third scene a new element of the plot, and the central element, is introduced:

> SCENE III. – *A Street*.
> (DAVENPORT, *solus*.)
> *Davenport*. Thus far have I secured by charming prize. I can appretiate, while I lament,

[10] The play is reprinted in Hutchinson (ed.), *Works*, Vol. II, pp. 762-84.

> the delicacy which makes her refuse the protection of my sister's roof. But who comes here?
>
> (*Enter Pendulous, agitated*.)
>
> It must be he. That fretful animal motion – that face working up and down with uneasy sensibility, like new yeast. Jack – Jack Pendulous!
> *Pendulous.* It is your old friend, and very miserable.
> *Davenport.* Vapours, Jack. I have not known you fifteen years to have to guess at your complaint. Why, they troubled you at school. Do you remember when you had to speak the speech of Buckingham, where he is going to execution?
> *Pendulous.* Execution! – he has certainly heard it. (*Aside.*)
> *Davenport.* What a pucker you were in overnight!
> *Pendulous.* May be so, may be so, Mr. Davenport. That was an imaginary scene. I have had real troubles since.

He has, he informs Davenport, been tried for a felony:

> A confounded short-sighted fellow swore that I stopt him, and robbed him, on the York race-ground at nine on a fine moonlight evening, when I was two hundred miles off in Dorsetshire. These hands have been held up at a common bar.
> *Davenport.* Ridiculous! it could not have gone so far.
> *Pendulous.* A great deal farther, I assure you, Mr. Davenport. I am ashamed to say how far it went. (. . .) In short, the usual forms passed and you behold me here the miserablest of mankind.
> *Davenport* (*aside*). He must be light-headed.
> *Pendulous.* Not at all, Mr. Davenport. I hear what you say, though you speak it all on one side, as they do at the playhouse.
> *Davenport.* The sentence could never have been carried into – pshaw! – you are joking – the truth must have come out at last.
> *Pendulous.* So it did, Mr. Davenport – just two minutes and a second too late by the Sheriff's stop-watch. Time enough to save my life – my wretched life – but an age too late for my honour.

The delicacy, not to say touchiness, which Pendulous feels about his misfortune leads him to insist that Maria Flyn shall break off her engagement to him. When Marian Flint now asks her to return the casket of jewels for her, and a police officer sent by Flint to arrest his daughter mistakes the two names, Maria seizes the opportunity to be tried on a criminal charge and thereby bring herself down to her unfortunate lover's level. Everyone assembles before a justice, Flint relents and accepts Davenport as a son-in-law-to-be, and Maria Flyn and Pendulous agree to marry, he exclaiming,

> False delicacy, adieu! The true sort, which this lady has manifested – by an expedient which at first sight might seem a little unpromising – has cured me of the other.

In his book *Charles Lamb and the Theatre* Wayne McKenna gives most of his space to a comparison of Flint and Marian with Shylock and Jessica, adding,

> Lamb wrote a good-humoured play with a happy ending, and again he exploited plays on words as well as the occasional literary joke. When Pendulous was arrested as a pickpocket he gave a false name, that of James Thomson.[11]

- and that is all he says about the Pendulous plot, possibly because he feels the subject to be an indelicate one. Members of this Society will already have noted that Lamb was returning to a theme which he had treated as early as 1810: 'On the Inconveniences resulting from being Hanged', a letter to the editor of *The Reflector*, signed PENSILIS, and published in March 1811.[12] In its range of reference, its wit, and its feeling, that letter seems to me equal to Lamb's best performances. It is not to be expected that in the dialogue of a farce he himself could equal that; but what he *could* do may appear from the scene at Maria Flyn's when Pendulous calls on her. It opens with a dialogue between her and her maid Betty, whose colloquial remarks are a series of unconscious allusions to Pendulous's disaster: 'If his neck is whole, his heart is so too, I warrant it'; 'Then I guess the whole business. The wretch is unfaithful. Some creature or other has got him into a noose.' Maria gives Betty his letter by way of explanation, and Betty retires to the window to read it ('Lord, I am so glad. Now I shall know all'), thereby ignoring Pendulous's arrival. Her hearty response to the matter – quite devoid of sensibility – brings him and her into collision:

> Ha! ha! ha! What a funny story, madam; and is this all you make such a fuss about? I should not care if twenty of my lovers had been – (*seeing Pendulous*) – Lord, Sir, I ask pardon.

Pendulous is indignant towards Maria:

> 'Tis mighty well, madam. 'Tis as it should be. I was ordained to be a wretched laughing-stock to all the world; and it is fit that our drabs and our servant wenches should have their share of the amusement.
> *Betty*. Marry come up! Drabs and servant wenches! and this from a person in his circumstances!
> (*Betty flings herself out of the room, muttering.*)

If we should feel uneasy that Lamb could joke at all on such a theme, we might bear in mind that when he read a wholly serious short story, called 'Le Revenant', on just this subject, published anonymously in *Blackwood's Magazine* three years before *The Pawnbroker's Daughter*, he wrote to William Hone that it was 'MOST AFFECTING indeed' (his capitals).[13] I suppose that it must have been because of the subject of *The Pawnbroker's Daughter* that his friends had misgivings about it, and that he had misgivings himself, and that his farce was

[11] Wayne McKenna, *Charles Lamb and the Theatre* (Gerrards Cross, 1978), p. 68. Actually, as a footpad, not as a pickpocket.
[12] Reprinted in Hutchinson (ed.), *Works*, Vol. I, pp. 74-83.
[13] *Letters*, ed. Lucas, Vol. III, p. 78. See also Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick (ed.), *Tales of Terror from Blackwood's Magazine* (London, 1995), pp. 73-87 (story), 289 (note).

rejected. Yet I for one am glad that he did not shrink from publishing it, nor the editor of Blackwood's from accepting it.[14]

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[14] The play has many felicities that a brief account such as this cannot bring in. Besides the whole of Cutlet's part, and the scene in which Maria Flyn and the police officer are at cross purposes, there are lines of blank verse in Flint's prose speeches before the Justice: ''Tis not the silly baubles I regard'; 'Deep in some pit first I would bury them'; 'I prate when I should act. Bring in your prisoner.' His daughter has an infantile tendency to speak of herself in the third person ('Marian is no judge of these things.' 'You are Marian's kind and careful father. That is enough for a child to know.' 'You frighten me, father. Do not frighten Marian.' 'Stay at home with Marian. You shall hear no ugly words to vex you.'), a mannerism which in the final scene she unexpectedly drops:

> *Flint*. I can forbear no longer. Marian, will you play once again, to please your old father?
> *Marian*. I have a good mind to make you buy me a new grand piano for your naughty suspicions of me.

The Snowdon Incident: Visions and Revisions

By Penny Bond

> *I am at present in the seventh book of this work, which will turn out longer than I ever dreamt of. It seems a frightful deal to say about one's self and of course will never be published . . . till another work has been written and published, of sufficient importance to justify me in giving my own history to the world . . .*[1]

TO TALK ABOUT *The Prelude* is a difficult matter. What can safely be said about it? It is a poem without a title, without a clear plot or formal structure, which the author himself claimed had no validity in isolation from the greater work, which he never wrote. Full of ambiguities and aposiopesis and the vagaries of the visionary, perhaps the least contentious claim regarding the over 8000 lines of text might be Wordsworth's own statement: 'It seems a thing unprecedented in literary history, that a man should talk so much about himself'.

But by far the greatest problem facing anyone wishing to approach *The Prelude* is that it refuses even to present the reader with one unified polished text to grapple with: it exists in multiple versions, of differing lengths, styles, philosophies and, most contentiously, of quality. The two main contenders for the title of 'genuine article' are the thirteen and fourteen book *Preludes*, published in 1805 and 1850 respectively. For a long time, Wordsworth's own final revision of 1850 was the accepted text, but ever since de Selincourt published the 1805 text in 1926, debates as to the relative merits of the two versions, the respective rights of author and editor, the validity and desirability of revision, and the as yet rather platonic possibility of an 'ideal text' have never been far from discussions of *The Prelude.* Is there anything wrong with preferring a different version of a text to the one the author himself chose to publish? Do an author's revisions always improve the work in question? Are there absolute values in poetry, such as tightness and economy of style, which always improve a work? Might a poet change a poem because of possible political repercussions or personal vendettas rather than a desire to improve the quality of his work? If so, would this give the revisions less credibility? When faced with conflicting versions of a text, who decides which is the 'correct' one and how?

Most arguments in favour of the 1850 version centre around those of stylistic superiority, claiming that Wordsworth condensed, edited and otherwise sharpened the 1805 text to bring out a clearer meaning, and 'poeticised' otherwise prosaic or 'unpoetical' lines,[2]--which was indeed Wordsworth's own intention, as his friend Isabella Fenwick wrote in 1839:

> Every evening that the weather would permit of it he has been here and has told me of his day's work – of the difficulties he has had, and how he had overcome

[1] William Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Ed. Ernest de Selincourt *et al*. 2nd ed., 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967-1993) 1: 470 (Letter to Richard Sharp, 29 April 1804).

[2] Critics such as F.R. Leavis, Mary Burton and R.D. Havens have come down strongly in favour of the 1850 version. Havens attacks, for example, the earlier version for its 'frequent diffusness, obscurity, awkwardness, and prosiness', R. D. Havens, *The Mind of a Poet*. 2 vols. (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1941) 1:xiv.

> them, of the *beautiful* additions he had made, and all the why and wherefore of each alteration….[3]

But other critics have been more wary of the merits of some of these *beautiful* additions and instead lament the changes which 'overlay and obscure that naïve immediate expression,'[4] claiming for example, that:

> . . . the middle-aged Wordsworth who revised the Prelude was betrayed by the ineradicable weakness of civilized man; he had to explain, to rationalize, to moralise. Moreover, since he was not only a civilised, but a deeply religious man, and a devout adherent of the Anglican Church, he had to translate his thought into the terms of an orthodox Christian creed.[5]

While Darbishire's judgements are perhaps extreme, writing as she is from an early twentieth century irrationalist background, she is not alone in preferring the 1805 version to the one Wordsworth himself prepared for publication. Most critics who favour the earlier text, however, are not so much concerned with the ideological changes, as the stylistic ones. As Lindenberger points out, careful and repeated revision of a work such as *The Prelude*, a poem which deals with the growth of a mind and all the wandering and uncertainty and spontaneity that this entails, can cause the author to lose sight of the philosophy that informed his work in the first place: 'The poetry . . . sustains great loss. We no longer follow the waywardings of the thinking mind'.[6] Richard Schell agrees, particularly given Wordsworth's self-proclaimed doctrine of the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' as the basis for poetry:

> Revision, if it is to be enhancing, has to be similarly imaginative. It must be accompanied by a re-experiencing of the mood in which composition originally took place – a mood that was itself a reliving of earlier experience. Revisions carried out over many years, as they were in key passages of *The Prelude*, are not likely to meet this requirement.[7]

Of course, revisions are not always for the worse, and the 1805 *Prelude* is by no means impervious to improvement. Lindenberger admits that 'spontaneity can make for banality', and wishes that Wordsworth had at times pruned his 'untrammelled natural growth'.[8] Yet there are also times when the spontaneous, sometimes prosaic tone of the 1805 version seems infinitely preferable, indeed, fundamental to the very nature of Wordsworth's meaning. This is perhaps most obvious in many of the 'spots of time' passages in the poem. These often depend for their full effect on a slow build-up of intensity of feeling and significance. The bold poetic or mystical claims about the nature of the universe seem somehow more effective and more convincing

[3] Isabella Fenwick, in a letter to Henry Taylor dated 28 March 1839 and quoted in *The Prelude*, *The Four Texts*, Ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995) xlvi.
[4] Helen Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949) 123.
[5] Darbishire, 133-4.
[6] Herbert Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth's Prelude* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963) 297.
[7] Schell, Richard, 'Wordsworth's Revisions of the Ascent of Snowdon Passage', *Philological Quarterly* 54 (1975): 655.
[8] Lindenberger, 299.

when they follow on from a sound, sometimes even prosaic, base of time and place. Read on the factual level, the spots of time tend not to involve particularly remarkable events or incredible occurrences; they are situations that readers would have little trouble imagining for themselves. Their significance and power come, instead, from what the poet reads and feels behind the surface of things, as in 'Tintern Abbey' where he 'feels' a 'motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought / And rolls through all things'.[9]

In his best poetry, Wordsworth recreates the very *process* of his own realisation or epiphany in the mind of the reader. The spots of time passages progress from a state of ordinary unthinking consciousness which the reader can relate to, through a process of gradual revelation, till through the *process of reading* a glimpse may be caught of that indeterminable 'sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused'[10] whose essence he tried, time and time again, to capture with words. His simplicity of diction, meter, and feeling was a key technique in making his often mystical claims seem self-evident and true. When the simplicity gave way to 'a more decorative, more conventionally literary form',[11] something was often lost. As Lindenberger claims,

> . . . in the process of tidying up stray phrases here and there, he had forgotten that much of the success of the poem – especially of the mystical passages and those of inner turmoil – depends on the conversational tone, the off-handedness, the struggle towards definition which he was trying to portray.[12]

But we cannot afford to depend on generalisations in the case of a poem as extensive as *The Prelude*. We need to consider every passage in its own right, if we are to arrive at a nuanced sense of what has been improved and what has been worsened by Wordsworth's revisions. This passage focuses on the climactic spot of time in *The Prelude*: the ascent of Mount Snowdon. It will look more closely at the rhythm, phrasing and poetic effects in this passage than has perhaps previously been done and it will conclude that on balance Wordsworth's changes in the Snowdon scene were not for the better.

The incident begins the conclusion of the poem, and as in much of *The Prelude*, the actual events narrated are fairly unremarkable: the poet starts out one night from Bethgelert with two companions to climb Mount Snowdon to see the sunrise. The excursion itself takes up almost seventy lines, and the sun itself is never mentioned; nonetheless, another fifty lines are required for the exegesis of the experience. The sunrise is obviously something more than a sunrise, just as the gibbet in book eleven was more than a gibbet and the bird-nesting incident of book one involved rather more than an ordinary small boy hunting for eggs. In fact, it is to be the restorative epiphany of the whole poem after the 'inner falling off' at Cambridge (book 3) and the existential confusion in London (book 6). From the visions Nature reveals to him on Snowdon, Wordsworth takes away a sense of the awesome power of the creative mind and the regenerative imagination.

The 1805 version opens in a conversational, prosaic tone, with relatively simple diction and a fairly interrupted iambic meter. No clues are given as to the intensity of the experience which is

[9] William Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797*-1800, Ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992) ll. 101-103.
[10] Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', ll. 96-7.
[11] Darbishire, 121.
[12] Lindenberger, 298.

to follow, as the poet describes in simple sentences his intended walk up Snowdon. The 1850 version on the other hand, injects grandiose sentiments into this introductory section, leaving the reader in little doubt as to the import of what is to follow:

> In one of those Excursions (may they ne'er
> Fade from remembrance!) Through the Northern tracts
> Of Cambria ranging with a youthful Friend (*1850*, 14:1-3)[13]

Part of what makes the spots of time passages so remarkable is their very unexpectedness, both for the reader and, in narrative time at least, for the poet. And one of the most interesting things about *The Prelude* is the way Wordsworth gives the impression of detailing the progress of a poet's mind *as it develops*. Phrases like 'may they ne'er fade from remembrance', while in some ways more 'poetic' in tone, insist on the poet's distance from what happened to him and his own later considered analysis and evaluation of the experience.

The tone changes quite abruptly at line ten from a casual conversational one to a slower, more structured one. It is almost as if the poetry has started in earnest after a brief setting of the scene. The pace slows, due to the predominance of long vowels and stressed syllables:

> It was a Summer's night, a close warm night
> Wan, dull and glaring, with a dripping mist
> Low-hung and thick that cover'd all the sky,
> Half-threatening storm and rain (*1805*, 1:13:10-14)

These seem to reinforce the heavy, overcast atmosphere on the mountainside, punctuated only by the 'dripping' in line 11 with its plosive 'p' sound and the short vowels of 'drip' and 'mist' which form small droplets of sound, echoing the almost imperceptible movement of the drips in the heavy, almost oppressive landscape. The repetition of 'night' seems to add to the heavy, uninspired feeling of the mountain scene, as does the long drawn-out sentence structure, which keeps adding clause after clause without furthering the action in any way.

The first significant change to this heavy atmosphere comes at line 20 of *1805*, where the short vowels combined with the 's' sounds of 'breast the ascent, and by myself' create a tone almost expansive, compared with the preceding ten lines. They lighten and lift the lines, and might almost be said to mirror the travellers' upward progress towards their goal. This lightening of the tone also helps the lead-in into Wordsworth's second joke in almost 7000 lines of poetry, when the shepherd's dog discovers a hedgehog, 'round which he made a barking turbulent'. The almost epic tone of phrases such as 'did unearth' and 'barking turbulent' with regard to a dog chasing a hedgehog gently mock the formal tone and serve to disperse a little of the heaviness and tension induced by the thick and threatening mist.

Wordsworth himself realises this is scarcely a momentous event, but explains that it is the place and time that make it appear a 'small adventure'. The careful reader might begin to suspect that experiences above and beyond an ordinary sunrise might well be on the cards: 'In that wild place and in the dead of night'. The autoclesis of these lines, whereby the insistence upon the

[13] All references to the 1850 version are from *The Fourteen Book Prelude*, ed. W.J.B. Owen (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985); references to the 1805 version are from *The Thirteen Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed. 2 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991). Respective citations are indicated as either (1) *1850*: book : lines or (2) *1805*: vol.: book: lines.

swiftness with which the strange event was forgotten of course serves to fix it all the more firmly in the mind of the reader, further increases the rising sense of anticipation.

The pace then fluctuates throughout the following lines, now speeding up with the repetition of 'eager' in 'I panted up / With eager pace and no less eager thoughts' (32) and the plosive 'p's which add vibrancy and energy; now slowing down, with the predominantly iambic singsong of:

> Thus might we wear perhaps an hour away,
> Ascending at loose distance each from each,
> And I, as chanced, the foremost of the band, (*1805*, 1:13:33-5)

which echoes the contemplative steady climbing of the group. Then comes a subtle shift at line 36 with the three stressed syllables in a row: 'when at my feet the ground appear'd to brighten'. The extra syllable of 'brighten' also marks a change in pace by slightly hurrying the end of the line and pushing on to the next, where three unstressed syllables continue to raise the pace and create a feeling of suspense as to what is about to happen: 'And with a step or two seem'd brighter still'. The repetition of the syllable 'bright', as well as lightening the tone through the high 'i' sounds, also adds to the impression of cumulative anticipation—the poet cannot stop to think of another word or way of describing the scene: his senses are pushing him swiftly on and the experience rises correspondingly in intensity.

'Nor had I time to ask the cause of this' (*1805* 1:13:38) continues this feeling; the assonance of the 'i' sound is continued with 'I' and 'time' which continues to lift the tone and the ten mono-syllables in a row accelerate the tempo and reflect the impression of a direct stream of consciousness far better than the version of 1850: 'Nor was time given to ask, or learn, the cause' (*1850* 14:37). The change is subtle, but the revised version gives a much more considered, reflective impression, through the more complex sentence structure, the additional heavy stresses, and the considered causal connection between 'ask' and 'learn'. Not only this, the phrase 'time given' shows the poet has thought even further outside his immediate experience to another presence in the universe with the power to give or take away time. One gets the feeling the 1805 Wordsworth is so immersed in his experience that he had room only for the immediate 'asking', not for considering the secondary 'learning' which might come from an answer and certainly not the existence of a being who might *give* him the time to acquire this knowledge.

Thus the 1805 seems a better lead-in to the suddenness of the next line: 'For instantly a Light upon the turf / Fell like a flash' (*1805* 1:13:39-40). The micro-pause after 'instantly' builds up the anticipation as to what will happen by slowing the pace; then the continued 'f' sound over the line break of 'turf / Fell' accelerates abruptly and lends an almost swooping sound to the lines, mirroring the sudden falling of the light. The repeated 'f' sounds also break in sharply upon the more gentle, regular meter which has preceded them, particularly at line 40, the first line in ten to have a strongly stressed first syllable. Then comes another sudden change, as line 40 (*1805*) slows abruptly in its second half —'I looked about, and lo!'— with the repeated long vowels, the resonating alliterative 'l' sounds and the almost biblical connotations of 'lo!' The tone has suddenly, in the space of five words, become weighty and solemn, almost sacramental in feel, particularly in the context of other 'flashes' in *The Prelude* and their significance: the Simplon Pass incident of book six for example:

> in such strength
> Of usurpation, in such visitings

> Of awful promise, when the *light of sense*
> *Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us*
> *The invisible world*, doth Greatness make abode,
> There harbours whether we be young or old.
> Our destiny, our nature, and our home
> Is with infinitude, and only there; (*1805*:1:6:532-9; the emphases are mine)

In this context, the emphasis given to the light on the turf is unlikely to be accidental, for as Darbishire points out: 'under the image lay for Wordsworth a living fact'.[14] Words like 'light' and 'wind' and 'flash' have a special power in *The Prelude*, not merely as symbols, but as actual spiritual and creative influences. Again, the 1850 revisions are subtle, but not necessarily improving; line 39 reads 'Fell like a flash, and lo! As I looked up'. The line is no longer divided in two and thus the solemn tone has no time to take hold before we are being rushed into the description of what he sees. 'Lo!' placed at the end of the line gives time for a pause, a breath, and the anticipation is built up to a higher pitch than if the line merely carries on into the next.

The first thing the poet sees after the flash in the 1805 *Prelude* is the moon 'naked in the Heavens', an anthropomorphic description in itself, but, in the 1805 version at least, the moon does not merely gleam or shine or even hang, it *stands* in the heavens. This sets the tone for the entire description of nature that is to follow: the mist *rests* 'meek and silent', the hills *upheave* their 'dusky backs', the vapours *shoot themselves*, the sea *dwindles and gives up* its majesty and the moon stands and *looks down* on it all. Such action verbs combined with the personification of the landscape create an almost mystical atmosphere of a power lurking in nature—one reminiscent of the 'huge Cliff' of book one which 'As if with voluntary power instinct / Uprear'd its head' (1:1:407-10) to frighten the young poet after the boat-stealing incident.

Powers reminiscent of those 'huge and mighty Forms that do not live / Like living men' (*1805* 1:1:426-7) seem to be at work in this passage also. Here however, the experience is not so much a terrifying one, as a spectacle shaped 'for admiration and delight' (*1805* 1:13:61), and this is evident in the language the poet uses to describe the scene:

> The Moon stood naked in the Heavens, at height
> Immense above my head, and on the shore
> I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
> Which meek and silent, rested at my feet;
> A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
> All over this still Ocean, . . . (*1805* 1:13:41-6)

The passage is remarkable for its complex sound patterning which not only links the lines, but builds up an impression of unity within the landscape itself and a sense of the interweaving relationships between the elements. The 'h' sounds of heaven, height, head, huge, for example, serve to link the first three lines and by doing so, subtly link the moon to the sea of mist. Then the 'h' sound returns with the 'hundred hills . . . upheaved' a line later and a connection between the air and the land and the sky, almost too subtle to identify, is thus woven through sound.

Sound also frequently reflects sense in a more direct manner, as in the long expansive vowels of 'huge sea' (43) and the gentle sibilance of 'sea of mist . . . silent, rested' (43-4). The hard

[14] Darbishire, 126.

almost abrasive sound of the 'k's in 'dusky backs' breaks into the diffuse aspirates of line 45 and the undulating sound of the iambic feet adds to the sense of the mountains rising up from the landscape, as does the long extended vowel sound of 'heaved'. The tone is solemn, and this is insisted upon in the formal structure of phrases such as 'height immense', instead of 'immense height', but the diction is relatively simple and in keeping with Wordsworth's predilection for the 'plainer and more emphatic language' of 'low and rustic life',[15] where 'the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature'.[16]

Nouns are usually given at most one adjective and many are not particularly 'poetic', such as 'huge', 'immense', 'still' and 'real'. In fact, as the passage progresses, Wordsworth begins to move into language which is almost non descriptive in character: 'beyond / far far beyond' and 'the Sea, the real Sea'. 'Far far beyond' does not really enlarge upon 'beyond' and 'the real Sea' differentiates the object as water rather than mist, but says little more about it. Some have criticised the vagueness of these phrases, and Wordsworth himself changed the 'real Sea' into the 'main Atlantic' in his 1850 version, but the repetition can also be seen as a reflection of the immediacy of the experience. It can also be seen as a reflection of the difficulty of expressing overwhelming or mystical experience in language. The impression often given by the 1805 Prelude of searching and struggling for the right words adds to the sense of sincerity and truth.

The tone of the 1850 is passage is quite different. The simple nouns and adjectives give way to more 'literary' terms: azure, firmament, hoary mist, ethereal vault, encroachment none, sovereign elevation, billowy ocean, full-orbed moon, and the sentence structure becomes more complex and less direct. The simple sentence 'Meanwhile the Moon look'd down upon this shew / in single glory' (*1805*:1:13:52-3) becomes: 'Not so the ethereal Vault; encroachment none / Was there, nor loss; only the inferior stars had disappeared, or shed a fainter light / In the clear presence of the full-orbed Moon; / Who, from her sovereign elevation, gazed / Upon the billowy ocean . . .' (*1850*:1:14:50-5). As Jonathan Wordsworth claims in his preface to *The Four Texts*, 'details plain and visible to the mind's eye are padded out to form a strained and disembodied dialogue'.[17] The lines no longer seem a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, but rather a considered stream of literary language and Miltonic allusions.

The 1805 version also seems to be more at ease with the human element in the scene: the viewers do not intrude upon the landscape, but nonetheless take more of a part in the unfolding natural drama. The moon back at line 41 was described with reference to the viewer's perspective, a detail removed from the 1850 version and at line 53, the 1805 *Prelude* returns to the travellers and their place in the landscape after the majestic string of heavy stresses in line 52: 'Meanwhile, the Moon looked down upon this show'. The pace has been slowed with the line of long vowels and the resonant alliteration of 'm' and the tone is one of hushed awe and wonder, when all of a sudden, a kind of solemn lightness appears: 'and we stood, the mist / Touching our very feet'. The tone takes on a certain delicacy with the alliteration of 'st' and 't', which almost trip off the tongue and gently punctuate the smooth sea of sound around them: a fitting change of tone to mark the contrast between the sublime landscape and the delighted, but comparatively insignificant spectators. The pace then speeds up a little:

[15] William Wordsworth, Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800, quoted in J. P. Ward, *Wordsworth's Language of Men* (Sussex: Harvester, 1984) 55.
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] Jonathan Wordsworth, xlv.

and from the shore
At distance not the third part of a mile
Was a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place thro' which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice. (*1805*:1:13:54-9)

The harsh 'k' sounds of 'chasm' and 'fracture' break into the gentle tone preceding them, as do the double stresses on 'blue chasm', emphasising the rift it causes in the calm and unified mountain scene. The rising regular iambs of line 58 build up the tension as to what this chasm might contain, as well as imitating a rather ominous slow rising and falling of breath, both through rhythm and the heavy voiced consonants 'd', 'g', 'b' and 'p'. The enjambment into the forceful consonant 'm' of line 59 continues the strong upward lift and is followed by another string of stressed long vowels which follow directly on to the climax 'Innumerable' and the triumphant 'roaring with one voice'.

There is the sense that the roaring waters have overwhelmed the senses, for what they might mean or what their voice is saying remains at this point a mystery. It seems that Wordsworth can go no further in describing what he sees, but is compelled to make some hurried generalisations, which seem somewhat out of keeping with the rising intensity of the previous lines. 'Admiration' and 'Delight' seem somehow insufficient emotional responses to this scene of power and perfection Wordsworth has described for us. He is unable to continue for long in this prosaic vein before he is drawn back to the roaring waters, but when he again observes them, his utterances are still cryptic, though filled with the same compelling power as before:

but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thorough-fare had Nature lodg'd
The Soul, the Imagination of the whole. (*1805* 1:13:62-5)

J.P. Ward has explained this kind of power with regard to Wordsworth's literary technique: 'Wordsworth's lexicon has to be explained by the way that the passage's syntax gives the words not so much meaning as energy, and energy which however yields even stronger charges of meaning'.[18] We are not told *how* Nature has lodged the Soul and/or Imagination within this chasm, or what kind of soul or imagination, or whose, or whether they are separate entities or one and the same. But somehow, none of this seems to matter. The experience is important and credible through its very intensity, achieved by the energy of the poetry. In this case, carefully judged metre creates a stately, almost reverent tone, the interspersion of heavy stresses within the regular iambic pentameter slowing the pace and giving each word a special significance. Sound patterning of plosive 'b's in 'But . . . breach and 'd's in 'dark deep . . . lodged' add force to the syntax and, after twelve preceding books in which the concepts of 'Nature', 'Soul' and 'Imagination' have been explored and examined like nowhere else in literature, the resonance of the words themselves is hugely powerful.

[18]Ward, 93.

But the Wordsworth of the 1850 *Prelude* obviously felt uneasy at the mystical nature of this last passage and removed all talk of Nature lodging Souls or Imaginations, anywhere. The roar of waters rises and the most he is willing to claim is that it was 'Heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour / For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens'. The loss of energy from the 'so it seemed' clause is enormous and the sense of climax, or epiphany, is to a great degree lost. The need for another 70 lines to explain the experience is less obvious here than in the 1805 version, where something inexplicable was patently at work on the side of Mount Snowdon that night.

The revisions do not get any better in the second half of the passage, where Wordsworth reflects upon his experience in calm thought and tries to discern the meaning behind the scene. To examine these changes in any detail is beyond the scope of this paper, but other critics have lamented what they see as a timid retreat from the fearless claims of his youth. Johnathan Wordsworth for example, despairs that 'we watch as the Climbing of Snowden, great climax of the Prelude, is fudged into unmeaning by a Wordsworth frightened at the boldness of his earlier self'.[19] In both passages, Wordsworth sees an emblem of a 'mighty mind' (1805) or 'majestic intellect' (1850), but his interpretation differs as to whether the mind broods over itself or over something outside itself. The claims of the 1805 version are the more radical, for they insist that the abyss that the mind broods over could be a variety of things: 'an underpresence, / The sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim / Or vast in its own being' (*1805*:1:13:71-3). The vagueness of these lines unsettles some critics, who prefer the greater clarity of the 1850 abyss. However, in a sense this vague formulation of something 'dim and vast' is most fitting for the sort of mystical experience Wordsworth was trying to portray. As Darbishire writes:

> The central experience of the mystic is something he himself can never describe; it is his plunge into the eternal Being, the merging of his spirit with the divine spirit – and that divine spirit has its life, as Wordsworth says, in 'unimaginable things'.[20]

Experiences such as these cannot be adequately conveyed in a scientifically or philosophically valid manner. The poet has his or her imagination to fill the gap of nothingness of the mystic, but in order to convey the sense of the mystical, he or she must also convey a sense of the indescribable, something the younger Wordsworth was obviously more comfortable with than the older one.

The 1850 *Prelude* is of course not without strengths of its own. And for those who prefer a more rigorous and accurate philosophical description of Wordsworth's thought, and a greater economy of style, it will always be the favoured version. Fortunately, we have both *Preludes*. And as Lindenberger has pointed out, it is in a way peculiarly fitting that there should be no agreement as to the final copy of the poem. As a document of the growth of a human mind, with all the twists and turns, backtrackings and leapings ahead that this entails, its multiple versions make it one of the most veristic and accurate pictures of the complexities of the human imagination in existence:

> The serious reader is left where he was when De Selincourt published his monumental edition: he will continue moving across the page from one version to

[19] Jonathan Wordsworth, xlvi.
[20] Darbishire, 100.

> the other, or read through each version alternately – an appropriate enough procedure for the first major imaginative work to deal centrally with the nature of the creative process.[21]

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[21] Lindenberger, 299.

Earthly Freight: Wordsworth's Poetry of Childhood, 1804-1812

By John Powell Ward

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH IS THE KEY Romantic poet of childhood, and arguably childhood's major poet in the English language. His main poetry of childhood was written in the six years spring 1798 to spring 1804. That period produced 'Nutting', 'The Idiot Boy', 'We Are Seven', 'Anecdote For Fathers', the description of the Pedlar's early years (*The Excursion* I 108-96), 'The Winander Boy', the Lucy poems, the sonnet 'It is a beauteous evening', 'Gathering Flowers', 'The Pet Lamb', 'The Idle Shepherd-Boys', 'Alice Fell', 'Lucy Gray', all the childhood 'spots of time' in *The Prelude*, and, right at the period's end, the *Immortality Ode* and a few further *Prelude* childhood passages.[1]

Then, suddenly, the poetry of childhood more or less ceases. It becomes highly infrequent and seemingly random for eight years, until he completes the small group of grief-stricken poems resulting from the deaths of his two infant children, Catherine and Thomas, in 1812. Furthermore, as to the writing of childhood, the early spring of 1804 was a high-intensity moment rather than the end of a slow denouement. The completion — in fact the major writing — of the *Immortality Ode* coincided with the writing of *Prelude* Book V, which, as it then stood, dwelt much on formal education and the child's contrasting responses to nature. This fifth book of the autobiographical poem was to conclude the work. It contained the damning description of the over-educated infant prodigy, the 'dwarf man' of 'monstrous birth' (*Prelude* 1805 V 290-369), which was then, at once, contrasted by the refreshing picture of the Winander Boy imitating the hoots of owls and, after their response, seeing the lake in the ensuing silence. Thus was nature infused into the boy's senses of ear and eye. And near the book's end were the two major 'spots of time' passages from the 1799 version—the murderer's gibbet and the waiting-for-the-horses (*Prelude* 1805 XI 278-327; 344-88)—which revealed the impact of scenes on the child's growing mind as hauntingly as any other passages of the entire period.

Much has been written about this sudden change in Wordsworth's inspiration. My rather different question, in this article, is to consider what happened to the poet who had so powerfully treated this subject. His belief in childhood didn't decline, even if the genius by which he evoked it seemed to have left him. Surely he would have made at least some attempt to continue on this path; I believe it can be shown that he did; and, even though the results are not as impressive as the earlier work, they are at lowest interesting, and on occasion rise to something memorable enough. Perhaps more important, they tell us much about his later development, and how it emerged most in a couple of later milestones, most obviously *The White Doe of Rylstone* in 1807 and the group of elegiac poems of 1812, mentioned above.

However, to consider this we must briefly go back to the starting-point. The *Immortality Ode* may have troubled Wordsworth for nearly two years. In spring 1802 he wrote the first four stanzas. But his sister Dorothy records him as writing '*part of* an ode' (my emphasis) at that time.[2] So perhaps he had already intended to continue it later. When he did resume in March

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Wordsworth's poetry in this article come from *William Wordsworth: The Poems* ed., John O. Hayden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977); *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*. Ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (London: Norton, 1979; *Home at Grasmere*. Ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977).

[2] There is no record in Dorothy's journal of William continuing the poem in the next three weeks, even though she commonly names poems of the time he is working on. *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* Ed. Mary Moorman

1804, what are usually held to be the rather obscure middle stanzas, v-vii, were followed by the huge climax of the final four stanzas, viii-xi, where the child born 'trailing clouds of glory' is seen as 'Eye among the blind', 'Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!' The child already holds truths 'which we are toiling all our lives to find', yet which remain as 'master light of all our seeing' in our later lives. Despite, even at its close, its foreboding that time is passing, still the 'primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be' will stay with us 'in the faith that looks through death'. That is to say, the end of human existence is faced, even as its beginning is extolled. The near-desperate depression Wordsworth had felt in spring 1802 gets some kind of resolution through growth of the renewed optimism that can grow with maturity. By general critical agreement,[3] the poem mourns and perhaps triumphs over, not the loss of poetic power, but the loss of childhood and youth.

Doubtless there seemed little to add to this majestic effusion and vision. And, almost immediately, as he had in March 1804, Wordsworth also changes his mind about *The Prelude*. It becomes a much longer work, stretching well into early manhood, university, city, travel and first adult political experience. Book V, seen by Mary Moorman as 'a poetic essay on education', remains in that position even while the whole poem grows to well over twice the five-book length. The 'spots of time' certainly go forward to nearly the end (Book xi) of that longer version, but that too is all in place by mid-1805. Reasons for the change of strategy may be clear enough.[4] But a new, key and much-quoted passage was written at the same time. It may be clue to Wordsworth's state of mind on the matter for some time previously:

> Oh mystery of man, from what a depth
> Proceed thy honours! I am lost, but see
> In simple childhood something of the base
> On which thy greatness stands – but this I feel,
> That from thyself it is that thou must give,
> Else never canst receive. The days gone by
> Come back upon me from the dawn almost
> Of life; the hiding-places of my power
> Seem open, I approach, and then they close;
> I see by glimpses now, when age comes on
> May scarcely see at all; and I would give
> While yet we may, as far as words can give,
> A substance and a life to what I feel:
> I would enshrine the spirit of the past
> For future restoration . . . (*Prelude* 1805 XI 328-42)

These seem profoundly telling lines. It is highly important that they were written almost certainly *after* the great Ode of childhood was completed.[5] Otherwise, we might have thought the

(Oxford UP, 1971) p. 106. Jared Curtis believes the Ode may have been continued in part in June the same year. *Poems, in Two Volumes.* Ed., Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983) p. 271.

[3] For example, Lionel Trilling, 'The Immortality Ode' in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) pp. 136-65; Thomas McFarland, 'Wordsworth's Best Philosopher' in *The Wordsworth Circle,* Vol. XIII No 2, Spring 1982, pp. 59-67.

[4] Cf. Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) pp. 246-7.

[5] Cf. *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850* p. 434 n.; Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: A Biography: The Later Years 1803-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965) p. 20.

expressed wish (to 'give . . . a substance and a life to what I feel') was then achieved by the Ode itself; equally that his feeling of being 'lost' had been alleviated. Instead, the characteristic Wordsworthian contrast between elusive 'depth' and firmer 'honours', and the urgent psychological detail—' . . . the hiding-places of my power / Seem open, I approach, and then they close'—suggests that the matter is still unresolved. The lines were placed in *The Prelude* as a bridging passage between the two major 'spots of time' alluded to already. And it all leads us to ask the wider question, of how a poet carries on when, in such perplexity, just as Wordsworth in the Ode himself asks how humans carry on as childhood slips away, 'farther from the east' and finally into 'the light of common day'. Despite his supposed decline in the mid-1800s, Wordsworth's tropes, images, turns of elusive phrase and tentative aspiration or lost longing, remain with him all his life. His problem in 1804 was, I think, a huge dilemma. How could the vision of childhood simply depart; yet how, if we must all grow up, could it continue?

To discover Wordsworth's answer to this difficulty, we need then to consider how Wordsworth continued, as far as childhood is concerned, and with what results. About a hundred and thirty poems, long and short and on all subjects, were written between March 1804 and June 1812, when the four-year-old Catherine died. A careful reading of all 130 poems turns out to be revealing. Only fourteen of these make any allusion whatever to children or childhood, and only six of that fourteen could be said to make the topic central. This tally omits the last two books of *The Excursion* (VIII and IX) written in 1811, but, in those, Wordsworth turns fully toward the older child, factory labour, and the need for universal education as a political matter. The fourteen poems are: 'Address to My Infant Daughter, Dora' (September 1804), 'Vaudracour and Julia' (probably autumn 1804), 'The Kitten and Falling Leaves' (autumn-winter 1804-5 or winter 1805-6), 'The Blind Highland Boy' (between spring 1804 and spring 1806), 'The Waggoner' (January 1806), 'To the Sons of Burns' (first draft autumn-winter 1805-6), 'Home at Grasmere' (passages added summer 1806), 'Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle' (between October 1806 and April 1807), 'The Force of Prayer' (September 1807), *The White Doe of Rylstone* (mainly autumn 1807), 'Elegiac Stanzas Composed in the Churchyard of Grasmere' (April 1808), the two sonnets 'In due observance of an ancient rite' and 'Feelings of a Noble Biscayan . . .' (both probably 1810), and the 'Epistle to Sir George Howland Beaumont, Bart' (August 1811). The list is deliberately exhaustive. There are no others.

Furthermore, four of the six poems, *directly* on childhood, were the first four of the whole fourteen to be written (the other two are the 1810 sonnets, discussed below). This might suggest that at first Wordsworth wanted to go on writing about childhood or that the habit had become ingrained, to fade away rather quickly. Either way, all these early four have features which divert them from that continuity. The first was 'Address to My Infant Daughter, Dora, on Being Reminded That She Was a Month Old That Day, September 16'.[6] The unwieldy title prefigures the poem. The poem—nearly eighty lines of pentameters—seems committed to giving the subject the closest attention, yet this leads the poet into curious uncertainties. He is first relieved that she has even survived (lines 1 and 6) for one 'life' of the moon's monthly cycle, and that comparison continues through the whole poem. But for twenty lines there is another comparison, with an imagined Indian babe of the same age; and that double comparison, with both moon and Indian babe, prevents the poem ever taking off as a single effusion. The Indian babe picture—

[6] Dora was born on 16 August 1804. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805*, arranged and edited by Ernest de Selincourt; second edition revised and edited by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967) p. 496.

'maternal sympathy' but 'a joyless tie / Of naked instinct' (lines 36-8), seems artificially drawn from Wordsworth's always frequent travel reading,[7] and halfway through the poem, he drops it.

But the comparison with the moon, which lasts throughout, is sought overtly too; 'resemblances, or contrasts, that connect, / Within the region of a father's thoughts, / Thee and thy mate and sister of the sky' (lines 43-5). The poetic and prosaic intermingle. 'Fair are ye both, and both are free from stain', yet the moon's cycle is 'renovation without end' while Dora has an evolving lifetime of uncertainty ahead. This, too, provokes only difficulty. At first the response is merely 'Alas!' Quickly, however, Dora's 'smile forbids the thought'—but then again the poet wonders 'shall those smiles be called / Feelers of love . . . ?' with a final uncertain hovering between 'strait passage intricate and dim' and a rather formal 'Joy' to end on. This pervading vacillation may well have led to the distancing sub-title, 'on Being Reminded . . .'. But there is also a note on the poem in the Preface to *Poems (1815)*. Wordsworth states there why, in that edition, the poem was placed right at the end of the section on Fancy, so as to lead easily to that of Imagination.[8] It seems more likely that he was not sure which it belonged to, and my argument here is that he did not know where it stood as a childhood poem, more generally.

The second poem of the four here considered was 'The Kitten and Falling Leaves'. In this poem, the poet and his infant daughter smile at a kitten at play. The poet can only hope that something of her innocent delight 'laughing in my arms' will carry over to himself, despite the inevitable sadnesses of adulthood. The autumnal setting gives a marked contrast to the springtime of the *Immortality Ode*. But the Ode's despair, renewal, and huge final surge are also replaced entirely here by, surely, an echo of the more formal Joy-Melancholy balancing of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. The eight-foot rhyming couplets, the comparable length (Milton's pair only a little longer), terms like 'blithe' and 'mirth', and the frequent tendency to avoiding end-stopping too sharply—all these features evoke the Miltonic sound:

> And I will have my careless season
> Spite of melancholy reason,
> Will walk through life in such a way
> That, when time brings on decay,
> Now and then I may possess
> Hours of perfect gladsomeness. (111-116)[9]

The poem's main passages, the dance of the kitten among the autumn leaves, make the poet merely a wistful spectator.

Thirdly we have 'The Blind Highland Boy', a lyrical ballad somewhat recalling 'The Idiot Boy' in tone and type of story. The blind boy uses a prized turtle-shell as a kind of coracle and floats out on to the lake near his home. A rescue party takes a boat out, grabs him unawares, and brings him back to shore and his distraught mother. The result, that 'though his fancies had been wild, / Yet he was pleased and reconciled / To live in peace on shore' (243-5), leaves his romantic sally into the unknown a qualified one. But our question has to be what appealed to

[7] Cf. Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) pp. 17-41.
[8] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* in 3 vols. Ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974) III 37, note.
[9] William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*. Ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983).

Wordsworth in this story.[10] The child, in the Ode 'thou Eye among the blind', is himself now blind. Physical blindness could place greater emphasis on vision as spiritual; yet, here it seems rather to place the Highland boy's imagination in the sadder light of rash inexperience.

And a key factor here is the poem's date, perhaps as late as spring 1806. For, in February 1805, the poet's mariner brother John was drowned at sea, immersing William and Dorothy in a grief that darkened their lives for years to come. One outcome was an overt absorption with mortality later in the decade but before the deaths of his own infant children in 1812; and the *Essays Upon Epitaphs*, all written in 1810, show Wordsworth having attended to the subject with his whole mind for a long period. A couplet in 'The Blind Highland Boy' strikes one as a brief backward glimpse of his brother's fate:

> Woe to the poor blind Mariner!
> For death will be his doom. (104-5)

If the poem was written before February 1805, this is coincidence. But 'will', in the context, seems pronounced. Whatever the truth here, the fact that the poem may have been intended simply to entertain the children[11] suggests that Wordsworth is subduing distressing thoughts, whether of his brother's death or as to childhood itself. Yet, again, the great majestic vision of children, so strong from 1798 to 1804, seems modified, and replaced by bewilderment.

In the remaining early poem focusing directly on childhood, 'Vaudracour and Julia', childhood provides the situation on which the story turns. A Romeo-and-Juliet couple in France (Shakespeare's play is cited at line 91) are forced to elope when an infant is conceived. But when the mother retires to a convent, the illegitimate babe dies 'by some mistake / Or indiscretion of the Father' (279-80), a far cry indeed from the Ode-child's birth trailing clouds of glory. The hapless father becomes a recluse of 'imbecile mind' (306), where the poem ends. Of course, it was written, in autumn 1804, as part of the 1805 *Prelude* (though quickly withdrawn from it), and this may well have been, as often said, to quieten Wordsworth's own mind as to his own illegitimate daughter in France. But is this not a straight inversion of the facts, namely, that Caroline Vallon was *born* through 'some mistake / Or indiscretion of the Father'? It is notable that the other three early poems, just discussed, all refer to Indians ('Address to My Infant Daughter, Dora' 8-38; 'The Kitten and Falling Leaves' 30-32; 'The Blind Highland Boy' 107). Is Wordsworth half-recalling the Forsaken Indian Woman and her hapless babe, one of the 'abandoned women' poems of the early 1790s, which Emile Legouis was so certain spoke of Annette Vallon?[12]

We now move on to the poems where childhood is mentioned only marginally. Certainly, after John Wordsworth's death most reference to childhood in the poems is brief. Commonly, too, the poems' children are growing older. At Canto I 180-204 of *The Waggoner*, there is a hint of the Winander Boy's experience of nature's loud sounds; but it stands alone, and the poem is nearly nine hundred lines long. 'To the Sons of Burns' grew out of a visit to that poet's grave, which for Dorothy Wordsworth only recalled the loss of her brother. Wordsworth could be thinking as much of his own infant son John as of Burns's sons, in his warning that even honest men 'of your Father's name will make / A snare for you'. At the close Burns's sons are

[10] Wordsworth recorded later that he first heard the story from an eye-witness of the event. *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*. Ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993) p. 27.
[11] Moorman, *Biography: The Later Years*, p. 97.
[12] Emile Legouis, *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon* (Archon Books/J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1967) pp. 58-61.

'admonished' (that recurring Wordsworthian term) to 'think, and fear!' Again childhood is now exposed to the relentless real world. In summer 1806, *Home at Grasmere*, mainly drafted in 1800, was taken up again. This was a renewed assault on *The Recluse*, and we recall that that project was the subject of Wordsworth's anxious attention the very moment the childhood poems of spring 1804 were finished.[13] The added passages of 1806 do retain such childhood motif as *Home at Grasmere* possesses, but they force it sideways. If, as Kenneth Johnson says,[14] the idyllic perfection of Grasmere village and lake in 1800 had already turned out to lack something — symbolized no doubt by the oft-cited two swans gone missing (322-57) — then, Wordsworth may have felt the rapturous beginning of the poem in 1800 needed qualifying, too. There, the boy, Wordsworth himself, aged about eleven, had exclaimed, 'What happy fortune were it here to live!' on seeing the beautiful and peaceful valley of Grasmere below. But in 1806 there is a modifying addition:

> While yet an innocent little-one, a heart
> That doubtless wanted not its tender moods,
> I breathed (for this I better recollect)
> Among wild appetites and blind desires,
> Motions of savage instinct, my delight
> And exaltation. (*Home at Grasmere* 910-15)

These 'appetites' included some disobedience, and imagining ships in battle 'matched in deadly fight' (930). It is as though, if fleetingly, his lost mariner brother jostles his own unhealthy compulsions in disconcerting coalition. Childhood seems less fully admirable than it had previously. The 'mighty prophet, seer blest' of the 1804 *Immortality Ode* is now admitted to harbour disturbing instincts. In another passage inserted in 1806 (533-606, esp. 546, 598) a responsible-eldest-daughter figure—though still a child—precurses the unmentioned daughter of the 'Elegiac Stanzas Composed in the Churchyard of Grasmere' (also one of our fourteen poems and to which we will come in due course). But this girl in *Home at Grasmere* embodies just one aspect of the rural community families, appearing here, which were to figure so strongly in *The Excursion*. As both Johnson and Beer point out, *The Recluse* foundered because Wordsworth could seldom generalize beyond his own experience of these small communities. His philosophizing always brought him back there, as *The Excursion* showed, to Coleridge's regret.[15]

* * *

Then, in 1807, there is a change. We come next to what might be termed the *White Doe* group. These are 'Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle', 'The Force of Prayer' and *The White Doe of Rylstone* itself. The young are present in all three, but again they are now older. The poems are newly notable for their castle and abbey settings, as though Wordsworth is beginning to tie nature into human history. The most ancient artifacts sink into their surroundings, but in such a way as to force nature into an arena of large-scale human conflict. Trips with Dorothy in

[13] Seeking much-needed advice and support, Wordsworth wrote desperately to Coleridge just before the latter left for Malta at the end of March. *Letters: Early Years*, p. 452, 6 March 1804.
[14] Kenneth R. Johnson, *Wordsworth and The Recluse* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) chapter 6, esp. pp. 217, 231.
[15] Johnson ibid. p. 219; John Beer, *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* (London: Macmillan, 1978) p. 170; *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* in 6 vols. Ed. E.L. Griggs (Oxford UP, 1956-71) IV 574-5.

June and Mary in August and September 1807 took Wordsworth to Bolton Abbey, Brougham Castle near Penrith, Lowther Castle, and Egremont Castle near Whitehaven.[16] Internal references to characters and places tie the three resulting poems together, though all can be read independently.

In 'Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle', a minstrel celebrates the restoration of the young Lord Clifford to his lands at the end of the Wars of the Roses. He had been raised as a shepherd-boy in the hills, taken there by his mother to escape the Yorkists. His father had murdered one of their number in battle and retribution seemed certain. The minstrel proclaims that now, twenty-four years later, Clifford will return to war on the wider national scene and defeat both Scots and French (Hayden II 1022). But the minstrel is wrong: Clifford's Pedlar-like upbringing has attuned him to the softening influences of books and nature, making him a peace-loving leader, for which his people are grateful. The minstrel's confident cry, that Clifford 'hath thrown aside his crook / And hath buried deep his book' (140-1) is premature. The poem works because, to show quietly what really happened to the young man, Wordsworth switches near the end from the eight-foot line to pentameter quatrains recalling Gray's *Elegy*:

> Love had he found in huts where poor men lie;
> His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills.
>
> In him the savage virtue of the Race,
> Revenge, and all ferocious thoughts were dead:
> Nor did he change; but kept in lofty place
> The wisdom which adversity had bred. (161-8)

In particular, here, the second stanza has the timbre of Gray's poem.[17] The elegiac sense is general, broadening across all life, to what child and youth alike will eventually face in the course of things. From the point of view of childhood, the other Doe-group poem 'The Force of Prayer' is even more adventitious. Young Romilly's age is unclear (both 'boy' and about to be married; lines 33, 45), but he dies, an event which tradition ties to the founding of Bolton Priory itself, where much of *The White Doe of Rylstone* is set.

And so we turn to *The White Doe of Rylstone*, in which, it seems to me, Wordsworth consciously, or otherwise, faces all that has been happening to his childhood vision, and all that has so deepened, aged, and shaken it. This poem, I suggest, is Wordsworth's attempt to preserve what he can of childhood as a near-transcendental feature of human life but at the cost of inevitably laying his earlier originary optimism to rest. Certain patterns of symbol and imagery work out to achieve this. The poem is far the longest of the period under discussion; it seems like a new start (the 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes* had been published in April), and Wordsworth saw it, in conception at least, as the highest work he ever produced.[18]

[16] *Letters: Middle Years I 1806-1811*, arranged and edited by Ernest de Selincourt; second edition revised by Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969) pp. 158, 164; Moorman, *Biography: The Later Years*, pp. 108-110.

[17] Dorothy had been reading Gray's *Life and Letters* the previous autumn. The Wordsworth's reading was commonly shared, even if sometimes only in discussion. Gray's *Elegy* was one of Wordsworth's favourite poems. *Letters: Middle Years I*, p. 101.

[18] Quoted in Moorman, *Biography: The Later Years*, p. 113.

The bald narrative can be summarized. Father and eight young sons of the Norton family go to join the Catholic Rising of the North against Elizabeth in 1569. But the ninth and eldest son, the Clifford-like Francis, resists, and stays at Rylstone Hall (the family seat) with his sister Emily, the only daughter. Herself a Protestant, by persuasion, if not by upbringing, Emily has also been forced by her father to embroider a banner showing the five wounds of Christ. Francis then partly changes his mind, joins his fighting family, and is rejected by his father, but remains near the action. After mixed events, the eight sons and their father are killed. Francis retrieves the banner and escapes, but on his way home is also overtaken and killed, and is buried by neighbours in Bolton Priory. Emily has heard the main news from an old messenger. Now left alone in the world, she is rejoined by a white doe which she had befriended over the years and which now leaves its herd on recognizing her in her roaming. They wander the countryside together for many years until Emily's own death, when she is buried in Rylstone churchyard. The white doe has come to Bolton Priory every Sabbath day since. It becomes legend, it appears in Thomas Whitaker's *History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven* (1805), and that is where Wordsworth found it.

But the Doe's own story takes up nearly a third of the poem. It occupies the first and last of the seven cantos, and six hundred lines out of nineteen hundred. The poem's most widely-remembered passage evokes the animal's weekly appearance to the Priory's congregation at the end of divine service; that is to say, when all the poem's main events are long over. The passage comes near the start. What matters is the animal itself:

> When soft! – the dusky trees between,
> And down the path through the open green,
> Where is no living thing to be seen;
> And through yon gateway, where is found,
> Beneath the arch with ivy bound,
> Free entrance to the church-yard ground –
> Comes gliding in with lovely gleam,
> Comes gliding in serene and slow,
> Soft and silent as a dream,
> A solitary Doe!
> White she is as lily of June,
> And beauteous as the silver moon
> When out of sight the clouds are driven
> And she is left alone in heaven;
> Or like a ship some gentle day
> In sunshine sailing far away,
> A glittering ship, that hath the plain
> Of ocean for her own domain. (I 49-66)

Thereafter, we never quite forget this milky whiteness of the Doe. The contrasting dark foliage of 'dusky trees' and 'ivy' outline it, and its liquid movement (55-58) and the allegorical similes following leave no everyday objects of comparison which can share its world. The rest of the poem is flashback. The Doe appears fleetingly to Emily and Francis in the forest during the main story of the Rising, and then in the long last cantos it accompanies Emily's lonely wanderings. This lovely 'milk-white' Doe (202-972) joins a line of pure-white literary creatures: Dryden's

'milk-white hind' in *The Hind and the Panther*, Una's 'milk-white lamb' in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* alluded to by Wordsworth in his poem 'Personal Talk', and, of course, his own 'milk-white swans' in *Home at Grasmere* (323), which we have already mentioned. And so the question here is of what this white doe meant to Wordsworth, and how she so stirred his imagination.

The *White Doe* has never been greatly popular. Few critics stay long with it today. At the time, Lamb said that the principal characters 'do nothing', while, for Coleridge, the two aspects of the Doe and the rebellion itself (the 'business parts' as Coleridge called the latter), were too separate. Wordsworth himself came to accept Coleridge's point. As he himself said, 'the mere physical action was all unsuccessful; but the true action of the poem was spiritual'. But his answer to Lamb was that 'gross and visible action' was inappropriate, where 'the Poet is to be predominant over the Dramatist'. That is to say, the entire poem is really about the Doe; in Wordsworth's terms again, 'everything tends to account for the weekly pilgrimage of the Doe'.[19] And the beautiful creature impressed at least some influential readers. In 1841 Tennyson walked the river by the Priory with his mind 'inflamed' by the poem, while in the 1880s the Duke of Devonshire, owner of the estate in which the ruin stands, attempted to introduce a real white doe as a tourist attraction. J.W. Inchbold's painting of the White Doe hangs in the Leeds City Art Gallery.[20]

In his comment on the poem, Geoffrey Hartman suggests that Wordsworth was, in effect, looking for a Protestant imagination to stand in for the iconic forms and signs of Catholicism.[21] The Norton family are an ancestral line of the church's tradition while Francis and Emily are nearer to their individual consciences. Hartman can therefore bring out how the Doe softens Emily's spiritual state in her desolation at the end of the story. Certainly the contrast between the Doe and the Banner as symbols is deliberate. But Hartman also sees the whole poem as marking the end of Wordsworth's fruitful years, just as in autumn 1798 'Nutting' began them (Hartman is as exact as that).[22] And my own feeling is, that by presenting his most melting and luminous extended symbol since the Ode-child 'trailing clouds of glory', Wordsworth effectively and finally marks, too, the end of his long absorption with the newborn child. That child, in the Ode, was itself an embryo-image which seems precursor to this 'milk-white Doe' that moves ethereally through the trees under the moonlight.

John Beer, if less explicitly, seems to be suggesting something similar. What Beer calls the Doe's 'intimations of sublimity'—a clear echo of the Ode's title—raises the matter of just what the Doe stands for. Wordsworth saw her as 'the Apotheosis of the Animal', as though she rises to the human state. But Beer's view seems preferable, namely, that she is not only human but humans at their highest; indeed, she is more than human, 'an emblem of the finer tone which can be glimpsed from time to time in humanity itself'.[23] So the Doe's innocence, its heavenly provenance, appear intuitively close to that of the Ode-child; her sway and presence move in the same 'celestial light'. Yet there is a difference. For the child must change, it must eventually go forward into 'common day'; but the Doe can 'to her peaceful woods / Return . . . be in heart and soul the same / She was before she hither came' (560-63). And it is moonlight, rather than

[19] *Letters: Middle Years I*, pp. 221-2, 19 April 1808; *Coleridge Letters* III 98; Moorman, *Biography: The Later Years*, p. 113.
[20] Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) p. 1. Inchbold's painting adorns the cover of Gill's book.
[21] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964) pp. 326-329.
[22] Hartman ibid 324-31.
[23] Beer op. cit. pp. 174, 172.

sunshine or 'the light of common day', the moon hanging over Bolton Priory (938-61), so like the Doe's unblemished and unchanging whiteness, which most suggests this permanence.

There is a kind of embalming, furthermore, of the Doe, as symbol, which communicates itself to the poem's other main symbols. These are the Moon, the Banner, and the Priory. In the Ode, the frequently used images were never repeated. The 'tabor's sound', 'single Field', 'Pansy', 'prison-house', 'imperial palace', 'frost', 'embers', 'Children sport(ing) on the shore', 'race', 'palms' and the rest, appear and are gone in a forward-moving surge. In *The White Doe of Rylstone*, the four main items, deliberately countering each other, are frequently and statically repeated. They set an allegorical scene that is four-square and timeless. The Doe is to Emily what the Banner is to the family, with the Moon and the Priory underpinning each respectively. That is to say—and if this doesn't sound too fanciful — they amount to a kind of mausoleum in which the story functions. And the poem's conclusion points, I suggest, to what this most deeply implies and which holds the key to the poem's place as a marker for where Wordsworth's poetry of childhood has gone to. For, in his final two lines, Wordsworth makes a rather desperate attempt, it seems, to align Emily with the Ode-child:

> 'Thou, thou are not a Child of Time,
> But Daughter of the Eternal Prime!' (1909-10)[24]

This 'Eternal Prime' clearly evokes the 'primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be' near the Ode's close too. But Emily is *dead*. Whiteness is milky, but also like moonlight and 'the lily in June'; it becomes sepulchral. In short, there has been a displacement symbolically, poetically, and it is the ethereal, other-worldly White Doe that is left central. Near the start of the poem, when we are shown the tourists visiting the churchyard to see the Doe, a mother points it out to her small boy. Seeing it he 'blushed for joy, / A shame-faced blush of glowing red!' (I 182-3).[25] The Doe has all the attention, leaving the child who was life's very origin in the Ode now a mere spectator.

* * *

As far as childhood is concerned, then, I take *The White Doe of Rylstone* to mark the end, however subliminally, of Wordsworth's birth-obsession. From here, until the deaths of the infants in 1812, he will mainly write countless sonnets and make one last desperate attempt at *The Recluse* in 'The Tuft of Primroses'. Time is moving on; he has been a family man for half a decade and is now nearly forty. His brother's death still hung heavy, as many letters show. But there were other events. Soon to follow—art maybe anticipating life—were the near-fatal illnesses of his son John and of Sara Hutchinson in spring 1808. Coleridge's own health was commonly poor, and Wordsworth increasingly felt he should help him with the journal *The Friend*, edited from Allan Bank in 1809. Coleridge's own sons were growing up. Taken up to Keswick as playmates for the Wordsworth children, they naturally enough began to reveal the

[24] In fact it is not entirely clear whether 'thou' is Emily or the Doe. The Doe's weekly visits are to Bolton Priory (I 1, 58, 169) but Emily is buried in Rylstone churchyard, seven miles away (VII 1869-70). Yet it is clearly Emily's actual grave that the Doe seeks out (1898); it would hardly seek that of Francis, who was buried at Bolton Priory (1540-7). Either Wordsworth made a simple mistake of detail, or he intends a spiritual fusion between woman and animal.

[25] One might well ask why the boy should be 'shame-faced'. I take this to be Wordsworth's young son John, then four-and-a-half, and for years ahead distressingly shy himself.

un-Ode-like rumbustuous tendencies that Molly Lefebure's no-nonsense accounts vividly recount for us. Too, the 1807 Poems achieved a poor press, and this perhaps fuelled the turn toward prose at the same time.[26] There were most obviously the book-length 'pamphlet' on the Convention of Cintra and the *Essays Upon Epitaphs*. But this last-named is the next step in these years' events, and we note the total change of emphasis, in terms of attention to human life, that has taken place. The *Immortality Ode*, culminating the childhood poems of 1798-1804, is about birth. The *Essays Upon Epitaphs* are about life's close.

Certainly, we have to be guarded. Wordsworth had been aware of mortality, for child and adult alike, all his life, including through the great period, as many poems show: the Winander Boy in *The Prelude*, 'We are Seven', 'Lucy Gray', 'The Brothers', 'The Ruined Cottage', 'The Sailor's Mother' and others. But the *Essays Upon Epitaphs* still imply a major shift away from the Ode's first premise. Their immediate occasion was Wordsworth's reading and translations of the epitaphs of the Italian poet Gabriello Chiabrera in the winter of 1809-1810.[27] The first sentence of the opening essay focuses tightly on the topic: 'It need scarcely be said, that an Epitaph presupposes a Monument, upon which it is to be engraven'. But there immediately, and rather surprisingly, follows a brief subtext from the *Immortality Ode*, only to disappear just as quickly. Wordsworth opens by adducing the common 'intimation' which stems from early childhood, that 'some part of our nature is imperishable' (p. 50). He has more than once previously tied this sentiment to both the Ode and 'We Are Seven', two poems he was known always to associate with each other.[28] He then points to the 'early, obstinate, and unappeasable inquisitiveness of children upon the subject of origination' (p. 51). This anticipates Freud's view that a high degree of such inquisitiveness in a small child is a reliable sign of intelligence—a 'best philosopher' perhaps. Finally, this tendency valuably counterbalances the thought of death, for without its 'genial warmth, a frost could chill the spirit' (p. 52)—evoking the Ode's eighth stanza, 'Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!' Yet these clustered echoes of the Ode depart at once, and in all three essays Wordsworth then scrupulously analyses the epitaph as cultural trope in close detail. Epitaphs are about mortality but, by their permanence, touch on immortality; are not too exact on individual character; can speak in the dead's own voice; give praise, but as to humility, piety, and faith, rather than worldly achievement; and touch on the deceased's good and bad life-fortune.

The marked echoes of the Ode in the first two pages of the *Essays Upon Epitaphs*, and then its equally total disappearance from them, again imply that the Ode's mythology in Wordsworth's own intellectual frame has now been settled. Perhaps he was briefly trying to reactivate it, or was conveniently resorting to familiar material. Whatever the truth of that, from our point of view, there is an important outcome. We said at the start, that of the fourteen poems of the 1804-1812 period that touch on childhood, only six do so centrally or directly, and we have discussed the early four of these already. The remaining two now follow quite soon after the *Essays Upon Epitaphs*. And they too are now about death. Doubtless from his reading on Cintra, Wordsworth wrote a handful of sonnets on Spain and Portugal: here is the crucial one:

[26] *Letters: Middle Years I*, pp. 213-5, 18 April 1808; Molly Lefebure, *The Bondage of Love* (London: Gollancz, 1986) p. 193; Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) p. 266.

[27] The *Essays Upon Epitaphs* appear in *Wordsworth: Prose Works* II 43-119. The editors question what led Wordsworth to Chiabrera in the first place (p. 45). In fact, Wordsworth had been conversant with Italian since Cambridge days; that familiarity, plus the events just listed seems, the answer.

[28] *Letters: Middle Years I*, p. 334, 5 May 1809; *Letters*, Middle *Years II 1812-1820*, arranged and edited by Ernest de Selincourt; second edition revised by Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) p. 189; Fenwick Notes op. cit. p. 61.

> In due observance of an ancient rite,
> The rude Biscayans, when their children lie
> Dead in the sinless time of infancy,
> Attire the peaceful corse in vestments white;
> And, in like sign of cloudless triumph bright,
> They bind the unoffending creature's brows
> With happy garlands of the pure white rose:
> Then do a festal company unite
> In choral song; and, while the uplifted cross
> Of Jesus goes before, the child is borne
> Uncovered to his grave: 'tis closed, -- her loss
> The Mother *then* mourns, as she needs must mourn;
> But soon, through Christian faith, is grief subdued:
> And joy returns, to brighten fortitude.[29]

Not only has the infant's 'glorious birth' vanished; this sonnet's child is dead before the poem even starts. (Is there an unknowing pun here —'the child is *borne* / Uncovered to his grave . . .'? It's possible.) The pair-sonnet which follows ('Feelings of a Noble Biscayan') is more politically partisan on the same matter, taking the 'awful light of heavenly innocence' nearer the world's power-centres. Both poems are little read.[30] But if this first one is rather moving, it is surely in the calm reportage and (*pace* the orthodox concluding credits) neutral acceptance of a tiny life ended so soon that it scarcely has characteristics. 'Sinless' and 'vestments white' are spiritual and physical aspects of the one feature. That whiteness again, 'vestments white' and 'pure white rose', points to the death-rite, cognate with the Essay's concern with epitaphs; and childhood itself, although it remains the focus, is hollowed out. After the triumph of life's beginning in the Ode, here at least childhood is associated with mortality.

It seems, then, that of the six poems of the whole 1804-1812 period to dwell on childhood centrally and directly, four were written quite soon after the Ode itself, and the other two, much later, are solely about infant mortality. Of the rest of our whole starting list of fourteen poems, only two remain to consider. Early in 1808 a Grasmere couple, George and Sarah Green, died crossing the fells in a blizzard. For a day and two nights, their six frightened children awaited their return, unaware of what had happened. The eldest—another potential Wordsworthian 'responsible eldest daughter'—heroically consoled her siblings and portioned out sparse food. The Wordsworths became leaders in raising a fund to help these orphans and took one of them into service themselves; Dorothy even wrote a pamphlet on the story. Yet Wordsworth's resulting poem, 'Elegiac Stanzas Composed in the Churchyard of Grasmere' barely mentions the children at all. He is stirred by the new churchyard grave and the bond between the parents, and his now current concern is with the marriage-bond—his own clearly behind this—which lasts until death in a lifetime companionship. One can only reflect on how differently Wordsworth would have seen this subject if he had written the poem ten years earlier. The 'Epistle to Sir George Rowland Beaumont, Bart', written in August 1811, is a seemingly light-hearted poem in

[29] William Wordsworth, *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*. Ed. Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989) pp. 69-70.
[30] But the hymnwriter Arthur Baring-Gould may well have, if a couplet in his much-sung 'Onward Christian Soldiers' echoes the lines 'while the uplifted cross / Of Jesus goes before' as it seems to. The couplet is 'With the cross of Jesus / Going on before'.

heroic couplets about a family journey to the Cumbrian coast. But they went there because of the increasingly worrying health of little Catherine and Thomas, 'those Infants dear, / A Pair who smilingly sat side by side', and the poet's levity may well be a deflection.[31] In nearly three hundred lines, only eight (112-119) touch the pair at all. The children now aren't even dead; they scarcely enter the picture, even when they seem most relevant to it. And this is the very last of these sparse poems of childhood, in whole or part, before those works that followed the sad events of 1812.

* * *

When Catherine and Thomas died in June and November 1812, aged three and six, respectively, Wordsworth experienced a brief but real resurgence of poetic power. It is now elegiac; yet it came from more than the appalling grief that shook the family. Of course he felt that shatteringly, as his correspondence shows.[32] But he was now poetically prepared, in ways not overtly sought, for any such sad purpose. The result was at least one major poem, the sonnet 'Surprised By Joy', and a group of most moving other pieces with it. The turn to prose, the growing family, his enlarging public eminence,[33] and the near-terminal quarrel with Coleridge, all had taken him gradually further from any pressing sense of childhood innocence as his chief poetic matter. The deaths of his children finally swung his poetic thrust into a channel for which he had, unwittingly, long been prepared.

We can offer only a few remarks on these elegiac poems here. They share an indirection, as though to stave off the jagged contrast between slow reflection on mortality and then its terrible immediacy in the event. 'Surprised By Joy' earns its place in the English literary memory by rendering its shock askance. The poet's surprise—'I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom / But Thee . . .'—comes not from the death itself but at recalling it when thinking of something wonderful. 'Maternal Grief' has lines matching 'The Ruined Cottage' for poignant microscopic detail; but it is the poet's own wife and infant son that he is looking at. 'Characteristics of a Three-Year Old Child' recalls the fluent wandering of 'Three years she grew', with the addition that Catherine, though dead when the poem was written, seems to be still living. And in one untitled poem, sadly almost never read now, the poet turns right away from his grief into calm contemplation of the sky above his lakeland home as night falls. The opening phrase, 'Come ye that are disturbed', suggests what nature is being called upon finally to tranquillize. The day settles, in an allegory of what Wordsworth most needs. The motionless close ends, with a last image of the poet himself still resisting death's total silence:

> Cloud follows cloud
> As thought succeeds to thought, but now ensues
> A pause – the long procession seems to end,
> No straggler left behind – not one appears.

[31] *Letters: Middle Years I*, p. 507, 28 August 1811. For Dorothy Wordsworth's pamphlet, cf. Robert Gittings and Jo Manton, *Dorothy Wordsworth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) p. 168.

[32] 'For myself dear Southey I dare not say in what state of mind I am; I loved the Boy with the utmost love of which my soul is capable, and he is taken from me – yet in the agony of my spirit in surrendering such a treasure I feel a thousand times richer than if I had never possessed it. God comfort and save you and all our friends and us all from a repetition of such trials – O Southey feel for me'. *Letters: Middle Years II*, p. 51, 1 December 1812.

[33] There was some political difficulty, too. Pressure to explain his retreat from radicalism was compounded with attacks from the other side; unpopularity, perhaps mild risk, from the conservative establishment.

> The breeze that was in heaven hath died away,
> And all things are immoveably composed
> Save here and there an uncomplying Star
> That twinkles in its station self-disturbed.[34]

The fifth line of this excerpt, 'the breeze that was in heaven hath died away', surely recalls, and gently and with some finality, puts aside, the optimistic opening of *The Prelude*; the 'gentle breeze' that 'seems half conscious of the joy it brings', one now so reversed in the direction of its energies.

We are left wondering what is the right inference as to the outcome of the first childhood vision. Perhaps it is this: if all births are, in one sense, the same, yet all the lives that ensue are different and quite unpredictable, then there can *be* no standard follow-up to the childhood vision. Child-death certainly, but also blindness, 'appetites', growing up, fighting in battle, getting pregnant in your teens, losing your own parents, poverty, and indeed young Clifford's 'wisdom' too—all these are the 'earthly freight' the young child must look forward to; and each may spring unawares at any place, any time. The one changeless item is the *Immortality Ode*, surviving two centuries later. The sad irony for Wordsworth was that the deaths of his own infants imposed a kind of artificial end-point for this story. Yet the poetic resolution was (I have argued) *The White Doe of Rylstone*, and Wordsworth's increasing sense, thereafter, of mortality in general, already in place, left him ready to cope with its sudden and arbitrary intervention in his own home in 1812 with unique new power.

Horton Kirby, Kent

[34] These are lines that, in part, de Selincourt states, 'form the basis of' *Excursion* Book IV, 1158-87; see *Wordsworth's Poetical Works*. Ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940-49) V: pp. 429-30.

Reviews

ANDREW MOTION. *Wainewright the Poisoner*. London: Faber and Faber, 2000. Pp. xiii + 305. Illustrated. ISBN 0-571-19401-X. £20 hardback.

AS SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN FASCINATED by T.G. Wainewright for thirty years, I come to this 'experiment in biography' by the Poet Laureate with strong reservations. Who, I ask myself, could add much to Jon Curling's excellent biography or even Jack Lindsey's version of events? More to the point, why should anyone try? Wainewright, though seriously underestimated as a writer on art, is still a peripheral figure in the Romantic movement, and there is a case for arguing that as Romantic anti-heroes go, he has had far too much attention from novelist and biographers down the ages. His principle attraction, of course, is his unique status as the world's only art critic who was also a serial killer, and this extraordinary distinction has proved irresistible to a particularly morbid and, I'm afraid, vulgar type of literary mind. Motion hints as much in his Afterword and rightly observes that of all those who have plundered his life only Wilde recognized him as a critic and connoisseur of originality and sensitivity. The problem is that Motion, like all others before him, is too much in thrall to the idea of the man of letters and murderer and, though he demonstrates an adequate knowledge of art history, is not able to take up the challenge offered by Wilde to explore more deeply Wainewright's achievement as an art critic.

Instead, what we get is Motion pretending to be Wainewright and not doing this decidedly difficult act of ventriloquism very well. Instead of a straight biography, we are offered a version of what a confession by the artist might look like; the problem is that someone such as Wainewright who, after all, was quite capable of murdering innocent members of his family in cold blood, was not the sort of man who would be likely to compose the sensitive and often poetic autobiography that Motion gives us. Wainewright did, of course, leave us a short early 'Confession', and in Australia wrote a sort of apology for his life; but what sort of suspension of disbelief must we employ to somehow convince ourselves that imagery so patently twentieth century as his description of the incoming tide as a 'clash of silver spear-points' could have been penned by an earlier Victorian dandy exposed for so long to the argot of a prison camp? Peter Ackroyd, an altogether cleverer imitator of antique voices, does this sort of thing so much more convincingly.

Notwithstanding Motion's ill-conceived idea, *Wainewright the Poisoner* does add to our knowledge of the artist. For instance, I was pleased to learn something of Theodore von Holst, who resembles Wainewright in many ways, and perhaps deserves to be better known. The pages of notes at the end of each chapter are useful and scholarly and in an impressive bibliography that acknowledges much new writing on Wainewright *post* Curling and Lindsey; it is good to see the name of one of the few real dandies of our own time—the extravagantly mustachioed Stephen Calloway, late of the V&A. R.M. Healey

FELICIA HEMANS, *Records of Woman, with Other Poems*. Edited by Paula R. Feldman. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999. ISBN 0-8131-0964-7. Pp. xxxiii + 214. Paperback $17.95.

'HAS MRS HE-MANS (double masculine) done anything pretty lately?', Lamb asked Procter on 22 January 1829. We don't know what Procter said in reply, but the correct answer would

have been 'yes'. Just over six months before she had published the most impressive of her many volumes, *Records of Woman*, which was enthusiastically greeted by no less than Francis Jeffrey:

> It may not be the best imaginable poetry, and may not indicate the very highest or most commanding genius; but it embraces a great deal of that which gives the very best poetry its chief power of pleasing; and would strike us, perhaps, as more impassioned and exalted, if it were not regulated and harmonized by the most beautiful taste.

Jeffrey was not risking much; the *Literary Chronicle* had hailed her in 1826 as 'the first poetess of the day', and she was already a bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic, her first collected *Poems* being published in America in 1828. She remained popular until the first World War, when she more or less vanished from sight—though most readers will remember 'Casabianca' ('The boy stood on the burning deck'). The renewal of interest in her work during the last decade owes much to such scholars as Paula Feldman, who has now produced a single-volume edition of *Records of Woman*.

It is good to have this volume back in print, newly set, the poems presented in the order in which they first appeared. Feldman includes all 19 of the 'Records of Woman' sequence along with the 'Miscellaneous Pieces' that appeared with them. She has also selected 13 illustrations, including reproductions of Victorian engravings designed to accompany the poems, and in one case, part of the musical setting for 'Graves of a Household'. But the glory of this edition is its annotations, which are detailed and fulsome. Hemans deserves serious scholarly treatment, and in Feldman, she has found an appropriately thorough editor. Even the epigraph and the dedication page are given the full works. This is much needed, partly because Hemans alludes to and quotes from a wide range of sources. Like so many women of her time she did not benefit from a formal education, but was fortunate in having a highly erudite mother, who first awakened her interest in modern languages. By the time she reached adulthood, Felicia was multi-lingual, adept in Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German. Authors quoted here include Pindemonte, Schiller and Tasso, and Feldman not only supplies accurate translations but also provides information about the context from which they are taken.

Hemans often published her poems in periodicals prior to collecting them in volume form; this was partly because it meant she would receive payment for them twice over. As a single mother with five children to raise she depended on her writing for a living. Feldman accordingly provides original places and dates of publication for each poem where applicable, and has taken the trouble of providing textual variants. Her introduction to the volume includes everything most readers would wish to know about Hemans' life and a listing of major critical articles about her work.

She has done an excellent job, and it is hard to imagine anyone doing it better. The only thing that might have improved the book is a subject index to the notes and introduction, but that is a minor suggestion from someone over-attached to indexes. Her successful execution of this project whets one's appetite for the Broadview *Siege of Valencia*, to be edited by Susan Wolfson.

Every institutional library worth its salt should acquire this volume, but that is not to suggest that it is good only for private study. If Romantic women poets are ever to break into the University syllabus, it would be difficult to imagine a better basic text, or indeed starting-point, than this edition of *Records of Woman*.

Duncan Wu

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH. *Early Poems and Fragments, 1785-1797*. Ed. Carol Landon and Jared Curtis. Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornel University Press, 1997. Pp. xxiii + 891. ISBN 0-8014-3318-5. $115.00 hardback.

IN 1987, POET LAUREATE SENT ME a characteristically generous-spirited letter about my 1981 Cornell edition of Wordsworth's *Benjamin the Waggoner*. I quote from it here as applying in general to the Cornell Wordsworth series, and with particular force to the *Early Poems*:

> *The whole thing is like a Wordsworth prism— whichever way you look into it, at whatever page, it opens new lights & perspectives away in every direction.*
>
> *For me — and I'm sure I'm not so peculiar — this sort of treatment of a text makes it endlessly alive. You're no longer surveying a work of art — you've sunk through its skin and are wandering about in Wordsworth's nervous system. A different kind of thrill — and as I say, to me, more inexhaustibly fascinating. And this poem lent itself particularly well to the treatment….*
>
> *Ted Hughes*

Hughes is referring here to the Cornell policy of providing absolutely complete transcriptions of all textual variants, in a format in which their sequence of composition can be followed. This is coupled with the extensive provision of photographs of the more difficult and important manuscripts, which implicitly invites the reader to measure his or her own reading of the manuscript against the transcription of the Cornell editors. Although Hughes has clearly been roaming among the transcriptions, easily followed reading texts are also given.

Early Poems is an extraordinary achievement. The Wordsworth archives of this period are characterized by a high proportion of missing and incomplete manuscripts, and by many of the worst examples of the Poet's notoriously illegible handwriting. Many of the surviving verses are fragmentary, and their relationships to one another are often far from obvious. Carol Landon and Jared Curtis have done a remarkable job of deciphering, ordering and elucidating this mass of unruly material. Much of the poetry is conventional and rather inept, but this is hardly important. From its confines we can see emerging one of the greatest seers and poets of the age.

One small grumble: the editors might have been more meticulous in documenting those few who have preceded this volume in textual studies of Wordsworth's juvenilia. De Selincourt is incomplete and, in places, mistaken; but his achievement was notable and should be acknowledged. Much of the limited work since de Selincourt has been in the form of doctoral dissertations: the first third of my own (Cornell 1965), and more important those by Robert Woof and Carol Landon. Even Landon's own dissertation can barely be detected: "In the earlier stages of her work on Wordsworth's juvenilia Carol Landon received advice and information at many points from the late Professor Geoffrey Tillotson (xiv)." Some of Duncan Wu's publications have been cited, but his distinguished and extensive 1990 Oxford D. Phil thesis ("A Chronological Annotated Edition of Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose 1785-1790") seems to be unnoticed.

Cornell's implicit invitation to second-guess the editors by checking the photographs against their transcriptions is always inviting. One comes away from this challenge with confirmed admiration for the high degree of cunning and skill exercised by the editors. No volume in this series has posed a higher percentage of intractable problems. Inevitably, there will still be disagreements and doubts. These examples are from the "Dirge" drafts.

Some are minor:

> 575, ll. 43-4 "dreary" is a variant to "mournful" (l. 43); placing it at the end of l. 44 seems misleading.
>
> 577, ll. 57-8 The interlinear "[?]" seems to be "a flow[er]," with "a" then overwritten "on."

Others are hypothetical:

> 571 Wordsworth's redundant title "Songs — Sung by a Minstrel" is probably a slip of the pen rather than intentional. Subsequent annoyance may explain why he broke off this new fair copy after two lines.
>
> 575 "The significance of the asterisks here [24r, l. 29] and beside l. 49 on 25r is not clear; there is no obvious justification for any insertion or rearrangement of stanzas at these two points." Actually, the two asterisks may be related. Wordsworth may be considering either placing ll. 49-60 between ll. 28 and 29 or, more likely, replacing as a conclusion the vaguely pagan ll. 29-48 ("shrill small wailings," unhuman "frequent feet," and "soft Fays"] with the naïve but rather more Christian ll. 49-60 ("prayer," "learn thy deathbed to revere," and "a flower of God's").

Such minor differences of opinion should not obscure the editors' extraordinary achievement under difficult circumstances.

The Cornell Wordsworth series is aimed primarily at a "fit audience" which is likely therefore to be "few," yet it will be an essential resource for all future scholarship in this field. Every academic library should possess the series, and most do. The enlightened individual who wishes to experience the "different kind of thrill" of "wandering about in Wordsworth's nervous system" may also wish to consider a purchase. *Early Poems and Fragments* may be worth the price of purchase for *The Vale of Esthwaite* texts alone. This tangled poem foreshadows *The Prelude* in a few passages, and Drs. Landon and Curtis have managed to go far beyond de Selincourt in unknotting it. For this and for many other fascinating revelations, they deserve our thanks.

Paul Betz

Society Notes and News From Members

NOTES AND NEWS FROM MEMBERS

In Memoriam

With great sadness, we wish to acknowledge the death of Dr. Reginald Watters. The comments of two of our members, Mary Wedd and Paul Cheshire, follow:

Reggie Watters (1932-2000)

I first met Reggie in 1972 at Christ's Hospital, where he was Head of the English Department for eighteen years. He had organized a memorial week-end for Coleridge's Bicentenary and Basil Savage and I went to Horsham, where we were generously entertained by members of staff and heard superb lectures by distinguished scholars, including Kathleen Coburn on 'Coleridge's Walks', a subject cleverly chosen to suit an audience largely of schoolboys.

In November 1984, when the school commemorated the sesquecentennial of Lamb and Coleridge and the birthday of Leigh Hunt, I travelled to Horsham again at Reggie's request to talk about Lamb to the boys. This time Reggie and Shirley kindly put me up and the occasion cemented a friendship which had been growing during the intervening years and continued to do so.

After leaving Christ's Hospital Reggie taught for some years at Ryukoku, a Buddhist University in Kyoto, from which he and Shirley kept in touch by means of cards and letters with suitably Japanese views and decorations. It was apparent that this was an experience that Reggie greatly appreciated.

On retirement, Reggie and Shirley went to live in Nether Stowey. There they kept a specialist bookshop, 'Coleridge Books', for seven years, through which they enjoyed meeting other enthusiasts. They also became leading lights in the recently formed 'Friends of Coleridge' and in the running of their delightful study week-ends at Kilve. They often attended the Wordsworth Winter School at Grasmere, where I remember once teasing Reggie for being an 'unrepentant Leavisite'. It was true that he had been a student of Leavis at Cambridge but most unfair to hold it against him, as he had all the virtues of the school, close reading of and respect for a text, but without the vice of dismissing half of English Literature as not worthy of notice. This was well illustrated by his knowledge and love of Lamb. He was a faithful member of the Society and made sure that the *Bulletin* was displayed in the Christ's Hospital library. He several times lectured to the Society and was guest-of-honour twice at the Birthday Luncheon, most recently in 1999.

When I was reading Coleridge with students, top of my list of books for them to consult was always Reggie's 1971 volume in the Literature in Perspective Series. He had the gift of making the most difficult and abstruse ideas seem crystal-clear, yet without any damaging over-simplification. Perhaps his discussion of the work 'while this study was forming' with Grecians and Deputy-Grecians of Christ's Hospital may have had something to do with it and may provide an example to be followed, but in the main it was his own admirable qualities of mind. Both I and my students were heart-broken when it went out of print.

In addition to his own writing, Reggie was instrumental in the reprinting of works which had long been unavailable. One such was favourite reading in Lamb's schooldays, and listed by him among those 'classics of our own', namely *The Fortunate Blue-Coat Boy*, a charming Cinderella story but with a male protagonist. Another was the invaluable *Thomas Poole and his Friends* by

Mrs. Sandford, for which, before, one might search in vain for years. This edition is enriched by Reggie's Introduction, which fills in from his research the life and character of Mrs. Sandford herself.

He wore his scholarship lightly but it was no less profound and wide-ranging for that. Above all, we remember Reggie's personality, joyous, vital, modest, generous and kind. He must have been a wonderful teacher and I am sure generations of his pupils have reason to be grateful to him. As for us, we have lost a very dear and much respected friend. Mary Wedd

Reggie Watters Service of Remembrance 7 July 2000

The church was full—there were a few faces from Friends of Coleridge but the congregation consisted mostly of Reggie's family, friends and ex-colleagues. Shirley, his widow and Coleridgean co-worker (but how unColeridgean their marriage!) seemed strong for the occasion; she sat at the front with two daughters and small grandchildren who teemed over two pews, newly-minted life oblivious to the mortality that we were trying to come to terms with. The service was interspersed with music (a moving performance of Nigel Dodd's setting of *A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal*) and various speakers who gave readings and shared their memories of Reggie: his schooldays—cricket and an early acting role as Ratty in a production of *Wind in the Willows*; scholarship to Cambridge; the new schoolmaster leavening a stiff 1950's Public School world with his drama clubs and ability to reach and inspire disaffected pupils; Kyoto University where he taught Shakespeare to Buddhist students; and finally the Nether Stowey years with Coleridge Books and the Friends of Coleridge—the Reggie that we knew.

In addition to his unaffected scholarship, his gift for reading verse was repeatedly mentioned and we learned to see this in the context of a career in which the theatre played an important part. Reggie was also a skilled director of plays, and friends from all stages of his career spoke of his capacity for spotting unrealized talent and challenging his protégés to overcome diffidence and fulfil themselves. Yet Reggie himself seemed to shy away form the pursuit of his own glory in service of something finer: the greatness of literature that he could see and convey so well to others. His reluctance to have his theatrical productions commemorated by photographs suggests a tendency to avoid the self-reflective trophies of personal achievement. I remember him streaking out of the room at Kilve, too moved to stay and receive the group's applause, after David Fairer made a heartfelt tribute to him at the end of the Study Weekend last summer. It was both endearing and frustrating for us that he couldn't bask in the admiration he deserved. The living Reggie would have been extremely uncomfortable at St Mary's Church, Nether Stowey between 12 and 1 p.m. on 7 July 2000 when our regard and feelings for him were made so explicit. Paul Cheshire

The Bulletin Board (announcements and queries of interest to Elians)

Addicts of the Wordsworth Winter School at Grasmere may like to know that the next will be held from the 4th to the 9th of February 2001. Members of the Lamb Society who are not yet addicts may consider sampling the winter school. While it preserves a high standard of scholarship, one does not have to be an international scholar to enjoy it, merely a lover of literature. Enquiries should be made to Mrs. Jessica Wordsworth, c/o Dove Cottage, Grasmere, Cumbria LA22 9SH, U. K.

Some Noteworthy Dates in the History of the Romantic Period

October-December

October

1 October 1791 – French Legislative Assembly established.
4 October 1781 – Coleridge's father dies.
4 October 1795 – Coleridge marries Sara Fricker.
4 October 1802 – Wordsworth marries Mary Hutchinson; Coleridge's 'Dejection' published in *Morning Post*, in version addressed under pseudonym, to Wordsworth.
19 October 1784 – Hunt born in Southgate, Middlesex.
21 October 1772 – Coleridge born in Ottery, St. Mary, Devon.
21 October 1805 – Battle of Trafalgar, death of Nelson.
31 October 1795 – Keats born in Bishopsgate, London.
October 1783 – Wordsworth goes up to St. John's College, Cambridge.
October 1791 – Coleridge goes up to Jesus College, Cambridge.
October 1797 – Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan' and first version of *The Ancient Mariner*.

November

28 November 1757 – Blake born in Piccadilly, London.
November 1805 – Wordsworth, 'Solitary Reaper'.

December

7 December 1816 – Suicide of Harriet Shelley
16 December 1775 – Austen born in Steventon, Hampshire.
30 December 1783 – Wordsworth's father dies.
30 December 1816 – Shelley marries Mary Godwin.
December 1812 – Thomas Wordsworth dies at age of six.
December 1815 – Austen, *Emma*.

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