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Contents

Why Were Buncle's Eyes Closed? The 2001 Toast

By JOHN BEER

This is the text of John Beer's Elian toast on the occasion of the Society's birthday luncheon, held at the Royal College of General Practitioners, Kensington, on 17 February 2001[1]

AS YOU'LL REMEMBER, Lamb claimed that the world was divided into two great races, the borrowers and the lenders. You could tell the borrowers by their air of munificence, their evident generosity of spirit; whereas the lenders were lean and hungry men—eager to acknowledge you in the street because they still remembered the last small consideration with which they had had to oblige you. But there was a special subclass involved, which was the borrowers of books, who were responsible for those maddening gaps in one's collection: the single missing volume out of a set. For Lamb the most notable of such borrowers was Coleridge, that reader at once eclectic and voluminous; and he goes on in his description to list the depredations he has suffered from his friend's rapacity, ending with the observation, 'There in yonder nook, John Buncle, a widower-volume, with "eyes closed", mourns his ravished mate.'

If you once linger over this statement it proves particularly puzzling, and if you look up the notes to *Elia* in John Bate's admirable edition you will find that even he is silent at this point. The only reason that I can begin to provide an answer to it myself is that in my first year at Cambridge my director of studies drew our attention to this very same work as a prophylactic if we were in danger of thinking that we knew all about the eighteenth century once we had read Richardson and Fielding. *The Life of John Buncle* is an eccentric novel in two volumes of 1756 and 1766 by Thomas Amory, a Unitarian and general scholar, describing the adventures of a man similar to himself who sets out on his travels in search of interesting adventures and who in the course of them manages to meet a succession of unusually intelligent women, each of whom he marries. In the case of Miss Noel, for example, he is amazed by her erudition on the subject of the languages spoken before the Flood, and quotes a two-page speech of hers which ends with the words,

> The Aramitic was the customary language of the line of Shem. It was their vulgar tongue. The language of the old world, that was spoken immediately before the confusion, was called Hebrew, from Heber, which they reserved for sacred uses.

John Buncle continues,

> Here Miss NOEL ended, and my amazement was so great, and my passion had risen so high for such uncommon female intelligence, that I could not help snatching this beauty to my arms, and without thinking of what I did, impressed on her balmy lips half a dozen kisses. This was wrong, and gave great offence, but she was too good to be implacable, and on my begging her pardon, and protesting it was not a wilful rudeness, but the magic

[1] The response to Professor Beer's Toast, provided by Dr. Duncan Wu, appears in the preceding issue of this journal (n.s. 114), April 2001.

> of her glorious eyes, and the bright powers of her mind, that had transported me beside my self, she was reconciled, and asked me, if I would play a game at cards.

Since Amory is a moral and improving writer his plot-options are somewhat restricted, so it is not surprising that none of Buncle's intellectual beauties lasts very long in this life. Within a year or two of each of his marriages, his unalloyed happiness is broken into by their unexpected deaths. In the case of Statia, he recalls his subsequent sorrow: 'I sat with my eyes shut for three days, but at last I called for my horse to try what air, exercise, and a variety of objects could do'. In the course of his ensuing travels, Buncle meets ladies who astound him with their discourses on mathematics, or sea-shells and each time finds them happy to unite their fortunes with his own rather straitened resources--but always with a fatal after-event. Towards the end of his travels he meets with a doctor named Fitzgibbon, whose son he had earlier saved and who now promises to teach him physic and after two years allow him to inherit everything he has, including his nineteen-year old daughter. Buncle accepts gratefully, finding her more beautiful and gifted than any of her predecessors, and once again they are blissfully happy. But an unhappy fate awaits Julia, also:

> It was our wont, when the evenings were fine, to take a boat at the bottom of meadow, 'at the end' of our garden, and in the middle of a deep river, pass an hour or two in fishing; But at last, by some accident or other, a slip of the foot, or the boat's being got a little too far from the bank's side, JULIA was drowned. This happened in the tenth month of our marriage. The loss of this charming angel in such a manner sat powerfully on my spirits for some time, and the remembrance of her perfections, and the delights I enjoyed while she lived, made me wish I had never seen her. To be so vastly happy as I was, and be deprived of her in a moment, in so shocking a way, was an affliction I was hardly able to bear. It struck me to the heart. I sat with my eyes shut ten days.

Even ten days of grief are not enough, however, to restrain Buncle from calling for his horses so that he may set out to enjoy new scenes and, if possible, find a new wife. Needless to say, he does so and marries her; needless to say, she dies of a small pox two years later; and this time he decides to take a very long voyage.

Lamb, who wrote an essay on Valentines, and enjoyed the idea of them as much as he enjoyed old books, was evidently delighted by the adventures of John Buncle—all the more since it came from the pen of a good Unitarian like himself; so it is not predictable that he should have deprecated the loss of one of the volumes to S.T.C., and appropriate that he should have seen the other one as mourning its mate 'with "eyes closed"'. May I invite you to stand, close your eyes, and drink to THE IMMORTAL MEMORY OF CHARLES LAMB.

Wordsworth versus Malthus: The Political Context(s) of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'

By DAVID CHANDLER

This lecture was delivered at the Wordsworth Winter School at Grasmere, February 2001

'THE OLD CUMBERLAND BEGGAR' is one of the most obviously political poems in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), though it took critics a long time to engage with its political dimension – at least the historically specific politics, as opposed to certain ahistorical social attitudes which have been traced in the poem, definitions of which often provoke dissent. The location of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' in its historical context was largely an achievement of 1980s scholarship, and by the end of that decade it was finally possible to understand the poem, for better or worse, as 'essentially a political text written in response to contemporary political texts'.[1] The research done at that period by David Simpson, Gary Harrison and Mark Koch remains valuable and, indeed, these scholars may be said to have constructed a detailed 'background' against which subsequent political interpretations of the poem need to be assessed. Nevertheless, I wish to challenge some of their conclusions, particularly those deriving from their reading of Wordsworth's 1843 Fenwick note on the poem, and their tacit assumption that 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' presents a fairly straightforward account of Wordsworth's views on poor relief in the late 1790s.

The Fenwick note, to begin with that, reads as follows:

> [The beggar was] Observed & with great benefit to my own heart when I was a child — written at Race Down & Alfoxden in my 23^{d}. [a mistake for 28th] year. The political economists were about that time beginning their war upon mendicity in all its forms & by implication, if not directly, on Alms-giving also. This heartless process has been carried as far as it can go by the AMENDED poor-law bill, tho' the inhumanity that prevails in this measure is somewhat disguised by the profession that one of its objects is to throw the poor upon the voluntary donations of their neighbours, that is, if rightly interpreted, to force them into a condition between relief in the union poor House & Alms robbed of their Christian grace & spirit, as being *forced* rather from the benevolent than given by them, while the avaricious & selfish, & all in fact but the humane & charitable, are at liberty to keep all they possess from their distressed brethren.[2]

Simpson, Harrison and Koch, as well as other critics, have variously read this note as an explanation of 'why' Wordsworth wrote 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'. 'This poem, as Wordsworth confirmed in . . . 1843 . . . was written in response to the political economists . . .', states Koch.[3] The poem, it may be recalled, was addressed to 'Statesmen' who wanted to change

[1] Mark Koch, 'Utilitarian and Reactionary Arguments for Almsgiving in Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar"', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 13 (1989), 18-33, p. 19 (hereafter Koch).
[2] *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London, 1993), 56.
[3] Koch 19.

the law respecting paupers, and on the strength of the poem alone one would suppose Wordsworth had politicians in mind. But taking the Fenwick note into account, or rather trusting to it entirely, Harrison claims that 'The statesmen Wordsworth had in mind, as he reminded Elizabeth [*sic*] Fenwick in . . . 1843 . . . were political economists like Bentham and Malthus . . .'.[4] This interpretation (for interpretation it is) of the Fenwick note has since been repeated by John Rieder: 'Looking back on "The Old Cumberland Beggar" in his conversations with Isabella Fenwick, Wordsworth said that the poem responded to "the political economists [who] were about that time [etc.]"'.[5] Some such assumption underlies most recent writing on the politics of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'.

Wordsworth, however, plainly did *not* tell Fenwick that his poem was a 'response' to the political economists. He simply noted that his poem was contemporaneous with the beginnings of the 'political economical' movement towards the 1834 New Poor Law. This claim, as will be shown in a moment, was historically precise. The assumption that the poem was a 'response' to the political economists inevitably leads most scholars pursuing the thesis to conclude that Wordsworth was attacking Bentham's pro-workhouse ideas: that is, mapping note onto poem, they look for a 'political economist' who was recommending workhouses in the 1790s. There is no evidence that Wordsworth was acquainted with Bentham's little-known ideas, however, and Rieder, taking issue with Simpson's description of the poem as 'anti-Benthamite',[6] rightly emphasises that 'It is most unlikely that Wordsworth was responding directly to Bentham . . .'.[7] Given the improbable nature of their conclusions, it may be the case that these scholars have simply misread the Fenwick note. Many of the Fenwick notes do not relate directly to the poems that inspired them. To take just one example, in the note on 'The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale', which follows that on 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', Wordsworth began with a brief statement that the materials of the poem came from Thomas Poole, then dictated a 200-word description of Poole himself. The relaxed context in which he supplied the notes encouraged this sort of digressiveness. The note on 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' is similarly digressive, I suggest, though it is a digressiveness which was fairly predictable. Wordsworth's thoughts may be said to have glanced off the poem, in a way which says more about what it had become than about his intentions in writing it.

Historical studies of the poor relief debate in the first part of the nineteenth century make it clear that 'political economists' was a class description usually (though not invariably) applied to the Malthusians. Malthus was, indeed, the authority most frequently referred to – by a very long way – during the period Wordsworth was reviewing in 1843: 'If we judge influence by fame, then Malthus's contribution to shaping opinion on pauperism was incomparable'.[8] The New Poor Law of 1834 was widely regarded as a triumph of Malthusian principles, and Malthus himself

[4] Gary Harrison, 'Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar": The Economy of Charity in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Criticism* 30 (1988), 23-42, p. 25 (hereafter Harrison).

[5] John Rieder, *Wordsworth's Counterrevolutionary Turn: Community, Virtue, and Vision in the 1790s* (Newark, DE, and London, 1997), 68-9.

[6] David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York and London, 1987), 172 (hereafter Simpson).

[7] Rieder 68. Bentham, it may be added, is not included in Duncan Wu's catalogue of *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge, 1993) (hereafter Wu).

[8] J. R. Poynter, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834* (Melbourne, London and Toronto, 1969), 109 (hereafter Poynter).

(who happened to die in 1834) 'the father' of this legislative achievement.[9] The fact that the new provisions actually had as much to do with Bentham's ideas is a quibble which Wordsworth probably knew or cared little about. Having long been hostile to Malthus, just as Coleridge and Southey were, he would have accepted conventional wisdom on the matter. When he made his most sustained response to the New Poor Law in 1835 it was very much Malthusian ideas that he was objecting to. Moreover the supposition that the Fenwick note is pointed at the Malthusians gives it historical precision: Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* first appeared in 1798, attracting a great deal of attention, the year 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' was completed, and two years before its publication. Duncan Wu suggests that Wordsworth probably read this epoch-making piece of 'political economy' in August 1798.[10] He cannot have missed the fact that in the period after 1815, when discussion of the old Poor Law climaxed, the debate was dominated by Malthusian theory. Although by the late 1820s most reformers had come to accept that Malthus's wish to abolish poor relief was always going to be politically impractical, they continued to cherish the main body of his thesis; Nassau Senior, who directed the Royal Commission investigation of 1832, preparing the way for the new Poor Law, considered his ideas to be 'fully in accord with Malthusian teaching' as late as 1828.[11]

'The Old Cumberland Beggar' cannot have been written as a 'response' to Malthus's *Essay*, of course, so I would suggest that in dictating his 1843 note Wordsworth's main concern was to dissociate his poem from Malthusianism rather than representing it as an attack on Malthus. His poem had, after all, presented an imaginative picture of a community in which there was no kind of institutionalised poor relief, and had applauded it, and Malthus was by a long way the period's most prominent critic of institutionalised poor relief. Superficially at least, the poem was as opposed to any form of relief except private charity as any Malthusian could wish. The bridge of similarity covered an abyss of differences, needless to say, but it was still there and Wordsworth worried about it. His concerns can be understood as informing the body of the Fenwick note.

Malthus considered poor relief to be a waste of resources. In 1798 he supported a very reduced version of the existing Poor Law provisions, believing that workhouses had a role in relieving cases of extreme distress. By 1803 he was for the gradual abolition of public relief altogether, and found a huge amount of support, especially in the period after 1815. Genuine distress, he believed, could always be relieved by private charity. Even private charity was not an unequivocal good, however, and needed to be properly guided so as to encourage the worthy and discourage the indolent. Malthus's opponents, indeed, often accused him of wanting to abolish private charity as well as public relief, and this is the relevant background to Wordsworth's suggestion that the 'war' waged by the political economists was 'by implication, if not directly, on Alms-giving also'. The 'AMENDED poor-law bill' as Wordsworth calls it, ultimately a compromise between abolitionists and champions of the old Poor Law, was, as every reader of *Oliver Twist* knows, aimed at reducing the enormous cost of the old system through more efficient administration and the introduction of the workhouse 'test'. The principle of 'less eligibility' was central to the reformed system: life as a pauper had to be less attractive than life as an independent labourer; the only way to ensure this was to promote 'indoor' relief, that is to say workhouses. As Dickens tersely put it, 'relief was inseparable from the workhouse and the

[9] Poynter 109, 145 n.106 and references.
[10] Wu 94.
[11] Poynter 303.

gruel; and that frightened people'.[12]

But the most arresting part of Wordsworth's note is his final suggestion that the new Poor Law 'force[d the poor] into a condition between relief in the union poor House & Alms robbed of their Christian grace & spirit, as being *forced* rather from the benevolent than given by them, while the avaricious & selfish, & all in fact but the humane & charitable, are at liberty to keep all they possess from their distressed brethren'. The statement, if accurately recorded, implies that Wordsworth believed that the new provisions encouraged a Malthusian selfishness, even among the 'humane & charitable'. It cannot simply be the case that he regarded the latter as increasingly reluctant to give when there was an institutional alternative to private charity, for this institutional alternative had been in place, in England, for a century and a half.[13] There is an apparent contradiction in Wordsworth's implied options, however: the 'avaricious & selfish' would presumably always give as little as possible, so only heavy taxation and a generous social security system could redirect their wealth to the good of the poor – but then there would seem to be no need of Christian alms. On the other hand, a system which relied on Christian alms would protect the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the 'avaricious & selfish'.[14] In fact, by 1835 Wordsworth had no faith in the sufficiency of private charity, and was committed to some sort of poor rate system:

> How discouraging . . . would be the sense of injustice, which could not fail to arise in the minds of the well-disposed, if the burden of supporting the poor, a burden of which the selfish have hitherto by compulsion borne a share, should now, or hereafter, be thrown exclusively upon the benevolent.[15]

By the time he dictated the Fenwick note, then, Wordsworth believed that the state needed to provide a model of generous treatment of the indigent if private individuals, in their own dealings with the poor, were to be generous likewise. That this still leaves some residual sense of contradiction in the note is perhaps best explained as an effect of the difference between Wordsworth's views in 1843 and those he held when writing the poem he was ostensibly speaking of. Wordsworth wanted to believe that his earlier model of private charity, if not practical, was at least better designed to encourage a general charitable spirit than Malthus's. In

[12] *Oliver Twist*, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford, 1966), 10.

[13] Poynter 3: 'it is apparent that in the century after 1660 payments under the Poor Law became almost everywhere the ordinary source of relief for indigence, with private charity a supplementary source of varying importance, called on for great efforts only in times of extraordinary distress'.

[14] Little has been written on this part of the Fenwick note. Harrison's gloss, '[Wordsworth] complains that the Poor Law Amendment Act, because it made charity compulsory, was robbing alms of "their Christian grace and spirit . . ."', seems to me a crude (over)simplification (Harrison 40 n.12). Michael Mason paraphrases Wordsworth's comment as 'the right quality of alms-giving could never flourish in a system in which the workhouse is an alternative: because the uncharitable cease to give alms (they have contributed as much as they see fit through the poor rate and thence to the workhouse) the charitable feel forced to, so that some paupers will remain unconfined' (Michael Mason (ed.), *Lyrical Ballads* (London and New York, 1992), 316). This is perhaps the best way of interpreting the comment if one wants to read it as containing no contradiction, but it fails to take into account the facts that workhouses were often an 'alternative' before 1834, that not all the 'charitable' were opposed to 'indoor' relief, and that Wordsworth emphatically contrasted '*forced* . . . from' with 'given', suggesting a feeling of reluctance rather than a spirit of obligation.

[15] 'Postscript, 1835' in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974), iii. 247 (hereafter *Prose Works*).

this, indeed, he was undoubtedly correct; there is evidence that Malthus's theories encouraged mean-spiritedness.[16]

When published in 1800, then, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' entered a debate increasingly dominated by Malthusian theory so Wordsworth's subsequent revisions and comments on the poem reflect a situation which the poem itself had not, of course, anticipated. The poem's political message when it was written was, as already noted, quite specifically addressed to 'Statesmen' who regarded pauperism as a problem and who would remedy it with compulsory 'indoor' relief (and, there is a slight suggestion, 'make work' schemes). One does not need to look into unpublished or little-known utilitarian philosophy to find a context for this. Between February 1796 and February 1797 William Pitt, the Prime Minister, was known to be pursuing a large scale reform of the old Poor Law. His proposals involved a more general application of 'indoor' relief, though not, as it happens, for the impotent (in which class Wordsworth's beggar can presumably be placed). There is no need to be concerned at the discrepancy, however. There was, generally, no very direct correspondence between the actual details of Pitt's (rather confusing) plan and the widespread response it engendered. The important point is that Pitt was known to be intent on changing the Poor Law, and this encouraged many individuals, including Wordsworth, to express their thoughts on the matter of poor relief. Most were hostile to 'indoor' relief, and Wordsworth was very much in the majority with his opposition to 'houses of industry'. J.R. Poynter suggests that Sir William Young's *Considerations on the Subject of Poor-houses* was the most representative anti-workhouse publication which appeared at this time,[17] and it affords several interesting comparisons with 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', while also giving some idea of the uniqueness of Wordsworth's vision. Young regarded workhouses as a profound threat to national prosperity and 'the British spirit'.[18] He did believe that institutions should be available for the very infirm, but he stressed that a person's natural and noble wish for independence should be respected as much as possible:

> Let it not be made matter of contract, but let us have to think – let us have to feel, whether we should eject the old labourer from his ancient cottage, in which his embers of industry, fanned by the proud breath of independence, and sustained with the vigilance which local attachment inspires, may be satisfied with little aid of fuel. A trifling stipend of alms may be sufficient to support him who is willing, though not wholly able to support himself.[19]

Young also drew a striking contrast between the unhealthy life inside relief institutions and the healthy, happy – and blatantly idealised – life of the countryside:

> Let us suppose a puny child escaped the ordinary fate [death in the workhouse], nestling round the pilfered faggot, chilled on quitting for a moment the breath of contagion around it, with no heed to its own wants, receiving its loathsome morsel in indolence, and improvident from weakness, from habit, and from example. – What a miserable contrast

[16] Poynter 227ff: '[Malthus's] *Essay* severely inhibited the charitable impulses of some simple and benevolent men'.
[17] Poynter 70.
[18] *Considerations on the Subject of Poor-houses and Work-houses, their Pernicious Tendency, And their Obstruction to the Proposed Plan for Amendment of the Poor Laws* (London, 1796), 19 (hereafter Young).
[19] Young 11.

> is this to the child of the cottage! 'drinking the spirit of the golden day,' enured to all weathers on the sheep down, or with the team; and habituated in all seasons and from the tenderest age to work, to earn, and to *manage his earning*, and bring his share of aid to a family pittance. It is from such English boys that we are to expect Englishmen . . .[20]

Beyond these partial parallels, Young is perhaps closest to Wordsworth when he stresses the importance of 'the habits of domestic affections' and 'the old chain which held together the country gentleman, the farmer, and the peasant'.[21]

While the main difference between Young and Wordsworth would seem to involve the former's emphasis on the economic benefit to be derived from encouraging habits of independence among potential claimants of poor relief, we need to draw a distinction between what Wordsworth might represent in a poem, and what he might say elsewhere, in more immediately practical contexts. Simpson, Harrison and Koch all read the poem very literally, as though it were, after all, a political pamphlet. But Wordsworth's well-known letter to Charles James Fox of January 1801, enclosing a copy of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, also has a good deal to say about poor relief, and this letter to a real 'Statesman' ought to make us cautious about reading 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' too literally as a political tract. In the letter Wordsworth comes closer to Young's views, reporting rather gloomily,

> that the most calamitous effect, which has followed the measures which have lately been pursued in this country, is a rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society. . . . recently by the spreading of manufactures through every part of the country, by the heavy taxes upon postage, by workhouses, Houses of Industry, and the invention of Soup-shops &c. &c. superadded to the encreasing disproportion between the price of labour and that of the necessaries of life, the bonds of domestic feeling among the poor, as far as the influence of these things has extended, have been weakened, and in innumerable instances entirely destroyed. The evil would be the less to be regretted, if these institutions were regarded only as palliatives to a disease; but the vanity and pride of their promoters are so subtly interwoven with them, that they are deemed great discoveries and blessings to humanity.[22]

After this general statement, with which Young would have found little to disagree, Wordsworth took as an example 'two neighbours', an elderly couple 'both upwards of eighty years of age', whose recent ill health had made them afraid they would be 'boarded out among some other Poor of the parish'. Assisted, where possible, by their neighbours, they were, he suggested, proof of an enduring 'spirit of independence' with a 'sublime conviction of the blessings of independent domestic life'. Wordsworth here mentioned in a parenthesis, as though it could it be taken for granted, '(they [the old couple] have long been supported by the parish)'. This reference to 'outdoor' relief, under the terms of the old Poor Law, is striking in that it goes unmentioned in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'. But what is most remarkable, after all this talk of workhouses, and of the frail and elderly, is that Wordsworth makes no mention of 'The Old Cumberland

[20] Young 20-21.
[21] Young 18, 8.
[22] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn. rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), 313-4.

Beggar' to Fox. Quite specifically, he sought to draw Fox's attention only to 'The Brothers' and 'Michael', poems concerned with the losing fight for economic independence in the Lake District. This may be because Wordsworth knew that Fox, like Young, was primarily concerned with the economic (and political) benefits of encouraging a spirit of independence among the poor, and was, in fact, surprisingly critical of any form of charity, which he felt had a 'degrading' effect.[23] But the suggestion must be, too, that he realised that 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' occupied a different level of reality from 'Michael' and 'The Brothers' and could not be seriously presented to a real 'Statesman' as a portrait of English values gone or going.

In its contemporary English context 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' was certainly very unrealistic. The debate about poor relief in the 1790s was between those who championed the old Poor Law, those (few before Malthus) who wanted to abolish any kind of public poor relief (and therefore, to some extent, advocated private charity and/or 'make work' schemes), and those who demanded a reformed Poor Law. Wordsworth's poem, however, presents an artificial contrast between what appears to be no Poor Law (private charity) and a *threatened* Poor Law based on the principle of 'indoor' relief. The first part of the Fenwick note may be of some relevance in explaining this: Wordsworth had 'observed' the beggar when he was a child and may, therefore, have witnessed acts of private charity to the beggar without being aware of the complicated mechanisms of parish poor relief which would, in any case, have supplied the old man's basic needs. Wordsworth, as an adult, would inevitably have become enlightened on this point, though needless to say the poem's (possible) preservation of the child's naïve view carries its own polemical force. But Wordsworth would have known, too, that the system of charity which the poem champions *was* practised over the border in Scotland. Rather surprisingly, Harrison seems to have been the only (published) critic to suspect that the poem champions Scottish ideas of poor relief. Harrison points to Sir Frederick Morton Eden's essay 'Of the Poor in Scotland', published in 1797, as containing most of the ideas in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'.[24] Both Eden and Wordsworth may be said to anticipate a later stage of the debate over the Poor Law, when there was much bickering over the English and Scottish systems due to the *Edinburgh Review*'s championship of Malthusian abolitionism. Harrison draws attention to some striking parallels between Eden and Wordsworth, though it is probably questionable whether Wordsworth would have actually needed a 'source' like Eden for information on Scottish poor relief. In any case, leaving Eden to Harrison, I prefer to emphasise the striking comparison between Wordsworth's beggar and Scott's characterisation of the Scottish beggar, Edie Ochiltree, in his 1816 novel, *The Antiquary*. Scott here was also engaging with the continuing debate over poor relief. The novel is set in 'the last ten years of the eighteenth century' and Edie described as 'one of the last specimens' of his kind.[25] Given that Wordsworth's introductory note to 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' had described the old man as representative of a 'class of Beggars' which 'will probably soon be extinct' the parallel is immediately arresting.[26] It may

[23] Fox set out his views on poor relief and charity in a speech of 9 December 1795. See William Cobbett and John Wright (eds.), *The Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (36 vols., London, 1806-20), xxxiii. 702.

[24] Harrison 31-2. The possible influence of Eden was also pointed out by Nicola Trott in an unpublished paper (1989) on 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', cited at Wu 52.

[25] *The Antiquary*, ed. David Hewitt (Edinburgh and New York, 1995), 3, 33 (hereafter Scott).

[26] *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1992), 228 (hereafter Butler and Green). All quotations from 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' are taken from this

also be deliberate, as in his 'Advertisement' to *The Antiquary* Scott cited Wordsworth as his model for representing the language and manners of the 'lower orders'. Even without this hint, Edie can be easily read as a sturdy Scottish challenge to Wordsworth's frail old men and sententious pedlars. He is characterised as:

> a sort of privileged nuisance – one of the last specimens of the old-fashioned Scottish mendicant, who kept his rounds within a particular space, and was the news-carrier, the minstrel, and sometimes the historian of the district.[27]

Edie is further described as having:

> . . . the exterior appearance of a mendicant. – A slouched hat of huge dimensions; a long white beard, which mingled with his grizzled hair; an aged, but strongly marked and expressive countenance, hardened, by climate and exposure, to a right brick-dust complexion; a long blue gown, with a pewter badge on the right arm; two or three wallets, or bags, slung across his shoulder, for holding the different kinds of meal, when he received his charity in kind from those who were but a degree richer than himself, – all these marked at once a beggar by profession, and one of that privileged class which are called in Scotland the King's Bedesmen, or, vulgarly, Blue-gowns.[28]

Scott contrasts Edie's treatment in Scotland with what it would have been in England, associating it with opposition to 'poor-rates and a work-house'.[29] There are thus a number of striking correspondences between Scott's Edie and Wordsworth's beggar, the most important, apart from their being represented as among the 'last specimens' of their kind, that they follow a particular local round, and that they are relieved by poor people with food or meal. In both cases, too, their value to the community is emphasised, although, not surprisingly, Scott and Wordsworth interpret this rather differently. It may very well be the case that Wordsworth, like Scott, was intent on shaming the English by evoking the 'privileged class' of Scottish beggars.

It is impossible to say for sure when Wordsworth first recognised the Malthusian implications of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', but it is reasonable to speculate that it was not many years after the publication of the poem. Philip Connell has recently traced, very expertly, an 'extended critique of Malthusian ideas in Book XII' of *The Prelude*.[30] Although Malthus's *Essay* was published just after 'the extended period of spiritual recovery and creative consolation' which Book XII describes, Connell argues persuasively that

> Nevertheless . . . he [Wordsworth] wishe[d] to imply that Malthus's arguments, along with Godwinian philosophy, provided a vital catalyst for his creative self-realisation. Book XII, we must therefore conclude, subtly distorts Wordsworth's intellectual development in order to suggest that it was his 'anxious' engagement with the doctrines soon to be associated with Malthus's *Essay* which helped to inspire his devotion to a

edition.
[27] Scott 33.
[28] Scott 30.
[29] Scott 33.
[30] 'Wordsworth, Malthus, and the 1805 *Prelude*', *Essays in Criticism* 50 (2000), 242-67, p. 255 (hereafter Connell).

poetry of nature and common life.[31]

In *The Prelude*, then, Wordsworth wrote an engagement with Malthus back into his pre-*Lyrical Ballads* period, and, by implication at least, framed *Lyrical Ballads* as something of an 'answer' to the latter's *Essay*. It thus seems reasonable to suppose that by 1804 he would have been sensitive to any Malthusian implications in his own work. It could be the case that it was just this sensitivity which compelled the engagement with Malthus in *The Prelude.* It was, after all, in his revised 1803 *Essay* that Malthus first set out his mature belief that public relief of the poor should be abolished, thereby compromising the political message of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and, by extension, the whole of *Lyrical Ballads*. This conjecture could explain some striking correspondences between 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and the passage in *The Prelude* which Connell has identified as Wordsworth's response to Malthusian ideas. *The Prelude* here is concerned with Wordsworth's delight in 'public road[s]' (l. 145) and the 'Wanderers of the Earth' (l. 156).[32] These gave him, he says, an education which allowed him to see 'into the depth of human souls' (l. 166). He concludes with the strong lines: 'Society has parted man from man, / Neglectful of the universal heart' (ll. 218-19). Something of the same fascination, the same education, is evoked in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', with its comparable assertion that 'we have all of us one human heart' (l. 146). Most importantly, both 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and *The Prelude* passage are concerned with setting out Wordsworth's belief in the value of *all* human beings. This was a belief he could set against both Pitt's plans to 'sweep' paupers into workhouses and the Malthusians' tendency to reduce people to burdensome statistics.

The extent to which Wordsworth may have wavered in his belief is probably debatable. Connell argues that '*The Prelude* wilfully fails to transcend certain fundamental claims of Malthusian doctrine',[33] citing as evidence the following passage:

> There are who think that strong affections, love
> Known by whatever name, is falsely deem'd
> A gift, to use a term which they would use,
> Of vulgar Nature, that its growth requires
> Retirement, leisure, language purified
> By manners thoughtful and elaborate . . .
> True is it, where oppression worse than death
> Salutes the Being at his birth, where grace
> Of culture hath been utterly unknown
> And labour in excess and poverty
> From day to day preoccupy the ground
> Of the affections, and to Nature's self
> Oppose a deeper nature, there indeed
> Love cannot be; nor does it easily thrive
> In cities, where the human heart is sick,
> And the eye feeds it not, and cannot feed:

[31] Connell 256.
[32] All quotations from *The Prelude* are from *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed (2 vols., Ithaca, NY, and London, 1991).
[33] Connell 258.

> Thus far, no further, is that inference good. (ll. 185-90, 194-204)

Thus, according to Connell:

> Wordsworth . . . appears to concede the inevitable absence of benevolent 'love' in the two situations which Malthus himself had identified as the principal barriers to the improvement of the labouring classes – extreme poverty and unchecked urbanisation. In such circumstances, Wordsworth claims, 'Nature's self' is opposed by 'a deeper nature' – the loveless law of selfishness and 'animal wants' (XII. 197-204). To that extent, *The Prelude* fails to provide an outright refutation of the *Essay on Population*, as Wordsworth finds himself challenged to discover a source of human 'dignity' at the deepest instinctual level, and in the most impoverished situations.[34]

Connell may, I think, make too much of the qualification, especially as Wordsworth seems to proceed to qualify that too: this is a good example, after all, of his 'using poetry as a channel for thinking aloud'.[35] Nevertheless, *The Prelude* passage undoubtedly points to where Wordsworth's doubts lay.

Those doubts had never been less in evidence than in the original version of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'. After addressing the 'Statesmen' and warning them not to regard the beggar as 'useless' (l. 67), or a 'A burthern of the earth' (l.73), Wordsworth had taken his poem in a confident, quasi-theological direction:

> 'Tis Nature's law
> That none, the meanest of created things,
> Of forms created the most vile and brute,
> The dullest or most noxious, should exist
> Divorced from good, a spirit and pulse of good,
> A life and soul to every mode of being
> Inseparably link'd. (ll. 73-9)

This large claim appears to integrate traditional ideas of the world's invariable mixture of good and bad, wheat and tares, with something of the Panglossian wisdom that 'as all things have been created for some end, they must necessarily be created for the best end', and rather more of Wordsworth's short-lived pantheistic belief in the 'One Life'.[36] Whatever the compatibility of these elements, the claim is central to the poem, for it serves as a prelude to the principal argument, that is, that the beggar's movements encourage a spirit of charity:

> While thus he creeps
> From door to door, the Villagers in him
> Behold a record which together binds

[34] Connell 260.
[35] Matthew Arnold's expression: *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, (6 vols., Charlottesville and London, 1996–) i. 141.
[36] For the climax of Wordsworth's faith in the 'One Life' in spring 1798, and subsequent shift away from that belief, see Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982), 22ff.

> Past deeds and offices of charity
> Else unremember'd, and so keeps alive
> The kindly mood in hearts . . . (ll. 79-84)

The 'spirit and pulse of good', the 'life and soul to every mode of being / Inseparably linked', is perplexing, because if 'every mode of being' is so impregnated with 'good', we naturally wonder why some of them ever came to be classified as 'vile' or 'brute' or 'noxious' in the first place. Perhaps Wordsworth's fear that there might be things 'Divorced from good' is revealed in his manner of raising that possibility, then quashing it. Why not simply say that all things are good, so all tend to good? What seems certain, anyway, is that some faith in the 'One Life' is needed to sustain the passage, and if this is absent it either approaches the Panglossian or becomes little more than a commonplace assertion that the 'meanest', 'vilest', most poisonous things all exist in combination with good things. Simpson aptly remarks the 'readerly dismay' provoked by Wordsworth's 'uncomfortably harsh . . . association (even as it is no more than that) of the old man with the "dullest and most noxious" of created forms'.[37] We might question, though, whether it really is 'no more than that'. Wordsworth seems to go out of his way to accommodate the 'Statesmen's' view of the beggar as an undesirable object. This was possible in the pantheistic confidence of 1798, but the passage became increasingly awkward as that vision faded and Wordsworth was forced to confront, after all, the grim world of Malthusian population statistics.

By 1835, as suggested already, Wordsworth's thoughts on the poor had moved in the clearly anti-Malthusian direction of approving a generous model of institutional relief. Now he could speak of 'a right in the people (not to be gainsaid by utilitarians and economists) to public support when, from any cause, they may be unable to support themselves'.[38] He argued fiercely, against the 'political economists' (and whether knowingly or not, against Fox, it may be added), that receiving parish relief did not 'degrade' anyone: 'The direct contrary is the truth: it may be unanswerably maintained that its tendency is to raise, not to depress; by stamping a value upon life . . .'.[39] It was the question of the 'value' of life which Wordsworth was largely concerned with when, around this time or soon afterwards, he made his only substantial revision to 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', adding some new lines after 'Inseparably linked'. His first, unpublished, effort at revision modified the passage to read:

> Inseparably linked: and, least of all,
> Can aught that bears a human front descend
> Into a pit so deep as to become
> Worthless . . .[40]

It would be difficult to argue that this addition strengthens the argument, and easy enough to maintain that it weakens it – that Wordsworth's 'least of all' has more the effect of an '*at least*'. More importantly, though, it introduces a new idea into the poem: that human beings can 'descend' into a 'pit'. Although Wordsworth does not specify what this 'pit' connotes, we

[37] Simpson 162.
[38] *Prose Works* iii. 242.
[39] *Prose Works* iii. 241.
[40] Butler and Green 231.

naturally gloss it as some form of moral or physical degradation. No longer appealing to a 'One Life' philosophy of omnipresent goodness, Wordsworth now seems more intent on answering, while also, of course, acknowledging, those Malthusian doubts which had assailed him in *The Prelude*. His second attempt at revision, published in 1837, confirms this tendency:

> Inseparably linked. Then be assured
> That least of all can aught – that ever owned
> The heaven-regarding eye and front sublime
> Which man is born to – sink, howe'er depressed,
> So low as to be scorned without a sin; –
> Without offence to God cast out of view;
> Like the dry remnant of a garden-flower
> Whose seeds are shed, or as an implement
> Worn out and worthless.

There must be a suspicion that Wordsworth protests too much here: the first revised version had referred to the 'human front' as though that were self-evidently of value, so the new 'heaven-regarding eye and front sublime' strikes us as special pleading. But it acts as a foil to the hint of a wider social tragedy, not glimpsed in the original poem. Against this tragedy Wordsworth no longer sets 'Nature's law' but the fear of an avenging Deity. In other words, he now turns to God, not Nature, to vindicate Man's 'deeper nature' as well as the apparently sub-human nature of the particular old beggar. Even at the structural level, it may be noted, the length of the inserted lines is sufficient to blur any sense of a very direct relationship between 'Nature's law' and the subsequent account of charitable habit-making.

Wordsworth's shift in emphasis is best explained as a response to the Malthusians' attempt to define pauperism as an economic impracticality rather than an essentially moral problem. Malthus's stern version of 'Nature's law' – that the natural rate of population growth was much greater than any possible rate of increase in subsistence – having impacted so much more profoundly on attitudes to poor relief than Wordsworth's own, the latter felt the need, no doubt, for a higher court of appeal. The late revision to 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' reflects Wordsworth's understanding of the fact that a defence of the innate 'worth' of human beings had now become a necessary preliminary to a criticism of government policy regarding the poor. Dickens understood this better than most, giving it very powerful expression a few years later in *The Chimes* (1844), a story aimed defiantly at Malthusian principles. Of course in 1798 Wordsworth had already been concerned with charges that the beggar was 'useless' (l. 67) and 'A burthern of the earth' (l. 73), in other words that he performed no useful role and was an annoying social problem. But at that time he had not imagined the beggar actually 'scorned' for having 'sunk' into his condition: he had seen the threat of 'indoor' relief being made compulsory, not that of a 'war upon mendicity' itself. The latter, in the simplified Fenwick history, had been commenced by Malthus in 1798, and in 1835 Wordsworth protested, not unreasonably, that: '[the New Poor Law] proceeds too much upon the presumption that it is a labouring man's own fault if he be not, as the phrase is, beforehand with the world'.[41] In 1798 Wordsworth had emphasised the importance of community spirit, a more purely moral version of

[41] *Prose Works* iii. 246.

Young's 'British spirit'; by the 1830s he was preferring to emphasise the indestructible 'worth' of the individual pauper in the eyes of God.

Nevertheless, whether Wordsworth recognised the fact or not, 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' was, arguably, of considerably more relevance to the post-Malthus than the pre-Malthus stage of the debate on poor relief. The poem's main limitation in the 1790s, if one wants to read it as a political text, was that it offered no sort of answer to the problem of unemployed, able-bodied paupers. It evoked a traditional, privileged community where, as Wordsworth later wrote of Grasmere, 'they who want are not too great a weight / For those who can relieve'.[42] It was probably for this reason, in part, that Wordsworth chose not to draw Fox's attention to the poem when he offered the latter a politicised reading of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1801. By the 1830s, however, after the Malthusians' successful establishment of the 'less eligibility' principle, one can speculate that the poem's argument began to have unexpected resonance. This is because it presented its own version of the 'less eligibility' idea. The many critics who have variously complained that 'Wordsworth might have been devoid of certain basic human sympathies for the intrinsic well-being of aging vagrants'[43] may be missing the point here. The poem is about the virtues and pleasures of patronage, so the beggar's lot is (necessarily) not meant to look particularly attractive. Whereas Eden had been critical of the Scottish system's tendency to put the burden of poor relief 'almost entirely upon the poorest and most industrious part of the community, these being the most credulous and liable to imposition',[44] Wordsworth saw, or fancied that he saw, a positive example of how a whole community, but especially the poor, could develop habits of giving rather than taking:

> . . . the poorest poor
> Long for some moments in a weary life
> When they can know and feel that they have been
> Themselves the fathers and the dealers out
> Of some small blessings... (ll. 140-4)

Tellingly, the beggar himself has not learnt such habits, so attempts 'to prevent the waste' (l. 17) of his crumbs which 'the small mountain birds' (l. 19) will, in any case, consume. Had he been used to giving in his days of greater prosperity he would presumably be happy to feed the birds now. The beggar's lonely isolation from the community of those who feed him is not entirely an economic accident.

Wordsworth's late (1846) anti-workhouse poem, 'I know an aged Man constrained to dwell', which returns to the subject of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and can be read as a sort of coda to it, drives home this lesson by force of contrast. There the old man, 'though poor / And forced to live on alms . . . fed / A Redbreast' (ll. 5-7).[45] It may seem a trivial fact, but this little act of love

[42] *Home at Grasmere* MS. B ll. 447-8; MS. D ll. 366-7. Quoted from *Home at Grasmere*, ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca, NY, and Hassocks, 1977).
[43] David Simpson, 'Criticism, Politics, and Style in Wordsworth's Poetry', *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984-5), 52-81, p. 54.
[44] Frederick Morton Eden, *The State of the Poor: Or, An History of the Labouring Classes in England* (3 vols., London, 1797), iii. Appendix, ccc.
[45] Text quoted is from *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford, 1940-49).

is central to the old man's existence. A 'strong' 'tie' (l. 21), a 'fellowship' (l. 32), is accordingly formed 'between the solitary pair' (l. 22) of man and bird, whereas the old Cumberland beggar had remained merely a hauntingly 'solitary man' (l. 24) in a 'vast solitude' (l. 156). It is significant, too, that the protagonist of the later poem is recorded as having had a wife and family, now dead and 'gone' (l. 25). The robin, 'Some recompense for all that he had lost' (l. 28), confirms his *continuing* need for reciprocal, loving relationships, as well as his self-realisation in and through such relationships. Though the difference between the poems might be dismissed as a result of the aging Wordsworth waxing sentimental about the elderly, 'I know an aged Man' can be read as extending the implications of the late revision to 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and therefore of continuing the process of shifting the (political) emphasis of the first version of that poem to some extent. Indeed, in focusing on the old pauper's capacity for love, emphasising his 'worth' rather than his utility, the poem is a striking answer, not least as Wordsworth's last, to the Malthusian doubts raised in *The Prelude* – an answer well adjusted to the taste of a reading public under the spell of Dickens.

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The Leech Gatherer

By MARY WEDD

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I HAVE RECENTLY BEEN READING—belatedly—John Powell Ward's excellent book *The English Line* published in 1991.[1] In it he traces a line of more than a dozen poets stemming from Wordsworth, ranging from Tennyson, via Hardy, to Larkin. One of their distinguishing characteristics, he says, is 'a melancholy' at times 'morbid' which 'pervades these poets'.[2] At first I was pulled up short. Can he be talking about Wordsworth? Hardy, yes. If you push a letter under a door, it may sometimes get hidden by the carpet with disastrous consequences, though that supposes shoddy housework, but this does not happen every time. Except in Hardy where you can be sure it will. Yes, I know that is in a novel but the poetry, beautiful though it is, is tarred with the same brush. I can recognize the same tendency in other poets in 'The English Line' also. Yet, in spite of his concern with all the ills 'That flesh is heir to', does one come away from reading Wordsworth feeling depressed? Ward does acknowledge that 'Wordsworth's larger aspiration to put melancholy behind him, if temporarily, does mark him out from many of the rest of these poets'[3] but still maintains that 'there are many suggestions of a dangerous morbidity in Wordsworth's poetry'.[4] Ward's book is of great interest and acknowledges the power of poetry to transmute sadness. I am simply saying that it made me sit up and reconsider what is meant by that word 'melancholy'.

For our purposes to-day I think we can dispense with what we may call 'the Dowland complex', the kind of melancholy that Ward says 'seems curiously, if not always wisely, connected with pleasure',[5] such as the fashionable kind which Wordsworth and his friend affected in France as undergraduates, 'a poet's tender melancholy / And fond conceit of sadness'.[6] The common experience of being most moved by the minor key and by slow movements in music has a complicated relationship to both our genuine pangs at the human lot and that self-indulgent pseudo-sadness, while providing a kind of serenity. 'Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought'.[7]

The common meaning of melancholy to-day is depression, closely allied to the mental illness of melancholia, but I do not think Wordsworth had in mind this pejorative sense of 'a dangerous morbidity' when he uses the word, for example, of Emily in *The White Doe*. She is a solitary who, having lost everything earthly that she cared about, is first 'brought

> To the subjection of a holy,
> Though stern and rigorous, melancholy!' (1596-7)

[1] John Powell Ward, *The English Line* (Macmillan, 1991).
[2] Ward 11.
[3] Ward 13.
[4] Ward 49.
[5] Ward 48.
[6] *1805 Prelude* VI. 276-7.
[7] Shelley, 'To a Skylark'.

She has herself under strict control:

> Her soul doth in itself stand fast,
> Sustained by memory of the past
> And strength of Reason; held above
> The infirmities of mortal love;
> Undaunted, lofty, calm, and stable,
> And awfully impenetrable. (1623-8)

Then, when the White Doe has brought its spiritual message, the tone changes. She

> Received the memory of old loves,
> Undisturbed and undistrest,
> Into a soul which now was blest
> With a soft spring-day of holy,
> Mild and grateful melancholy . . . (174-8)

His meaning here, perhaps, is something nearer to resignation, which brings its own kind of peace. Eliot has a line, 'Somewhere on the other side of despair',[8] and several of Wordsworth's solitaries attain this state: the Old Soldier

> Remembering the importance of his theme
> But feeling it no longer,

or the Old Man Travelling 'to whom

> Long patience hath such mild composure given,
> That patience now doth seem a thing of which
> He hath no need. (Prelude IV [1805] 477-8)

Poets of all periods and styles have faced grief. Pain, sorrow, suffering and loss are part of the human condition. One does not have to be in the world for long before encountering them and Wordsworth had been grievously exposed to them from childhood. Nor does age diminish them. Quite the contrary. So these things are a 'given'. It is no condemnation of a poet if he confronts them, indeed it would be cowardice to do otherwise. The crucial problem is how to deal with them.

The Ruined Cottage, as Jonathan Wordsworth says, places Wordsworth 'among the very few great English tragic writers'.[9] Tragedy makes no concessions to our desire for consolation or a happy ending. So why do we willingly subject ourselves to it? I think no one has yet been able to improve on Aristotle's answer, that by making us experience pity and fear it enables us, in modern parlance, to get them out of our system. By this purgation we are able to come to terms

[8] T.S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion*, part II, scene II, final scene.
[9] Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (New York: Harper, 1969), 153.

with the dark side of life so that we can go on living. Aristotle emphasizes the importance of choice language in this process and the need for the action to be such as to impress us with its wholeness and its universal relevance. That is one way of dealing with suffering and loss, but not the only one.

Of course, another way is to wallow in it and get some compensation from self-pity. Dorothy's Journal for the end of 1801 and early 1802[10] repeatedly speaks of being made miserable by Coleridge's 'very melancholy letters'. I think she uses the word as it was commonly used in those days just to mean 'very sad', but it may have had a tinge of that modern pathological definition with which we began. However, there was very good reason for Coleridge to write what Dorothy calls on 29th January 1802 'A heart-rending letter . . .' He was severely ill and the morphia he took to ease the pain only made his situation more desperate. Also, having made his wife the scapegoat for his own failures, he had constructed a fantasy perfect bride in the unwilling shape of Sara Hutchinson. He could not work to support his family and he felt that 'the poet is dead in me'.[11] Stephen Gill is not overstating when he says 'Throughout 1801 Coleridge was in torment'.[12] William and Dorothy agonized with him and were deeply anxious about him.

For Wordsworth the Spring of 1802 was a time of contradictions which were to be reflected in the poem, 'The Leech Gatherer'. It saw the production of a flowering of life-affirming lyrics celebrating natural objects and his relationship with them. At this time, too, the decision was made to see Annette, so that William could marry Mary Hutchinson. To Coleridge it must have seemed a bitter contrast to his own lot. But Wordsworth's life too was overshadowed by doubts and fears. Not only was he struggling with the obligation to write *The Recluse* which Coleridge had imposed upon him, which he had neither the ability nor the inclination to perform, but also he was beginning to feel that the inspiration at the root of the sublime poetry that he *could* write was leaving him. So, within a few days, from the 23rd to the 27th March, he produced three poems all related to this dilemma.

The first was 'To the Cuckoo', in which he remembered the magic of childhood and tried to believe that he could still 'listen, till I do beget / That golden time again'. The second was 'My heart leaps up'. Here he defiantly asserted that the rainbow brought the promise to him, as it had to Noah, that his world would not be destroyed. Whatever stage of life he moves to or even when he dies, the spiritual world to which he had been linked by nature in his childhood will remain. In this understanding the child is wiser than the man, but maybe the adult too can learn the continuity of that communion—but notice the tentativeness of 'I could wish'. This poem is probably the 'timely utterance' that brought relief in the third set of verses written in these few days, namely the first four stanzas of what became the 'Immortality Ode'.

On 27th March, Dorothy wrote in her Journal 'A divine morning – at Breakfast Wm wrote part of an ode – Mr Olliff sent the Dung and Wm went to work in the garden . . .' First things first!

> There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth and every common sight,
> To me did seem

[10] Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journal*, ed. Pamela Woof (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).
[11] Letter to Godwin, 25 March 1801, *Coleridge Letters*, ed. Griggs II, 714.
[12] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth—A Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 198.

Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore:--
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things that I have seen I now can see no more.

He tells how the beauties of the natural world which he celebrated in those lyrics of 1802 are still there and the 'happy Shepherd-boy' is still a 'Child of Joy', as Wordsworth was once, but the poet has lost the inspirational power whereby the physical earth was once irradiated. This is a bitter deprivation with which he cannot yet come to terms.

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

The next day, 28th March, the Wordsworths went to Keswick and, while they were still there, Coleridge, having become acquainted with Wordsworth's stanzas, wrote between sunset and midnight on April 4th his verse-letter to Sara Hutchinson. The Wordsworth's did not see it until 21st April when Coleridge came to Grasmere and read the verses to them. Dorothy records, 'I was affected with them & was on the whole, not being well, in miserable spirits'. Reading Ferguson's life, as she did later that day, can hardly have cheered her up, for he was a fine Scottish poet who died mad at the age of twenty-four. This was doubtless fresh in Wordsworth's mind too from recent reading when he wrote in 'The Leech-gatherer' of 'despondency and madness'.

The detailed ways in which the poets echoed each other in these poems is beautifully dealt with in Lucy Newlyn's book *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion* but I can only touch on one or two instances. Wordsworth's words 'There was a time' are echoed from Coleridge's poem 'The Mad Monk' published in *The Morning Post* in October 1800. Coleridge throws it back to Wordsworth in the verse-letter:

There was a time when tho' my path was rough,
The joy within me dallied with distress . . .
But now Ill Tidings bow me down to earth,
Nor care I that they rob me of my Mirth –
But Oh! Each Visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my Birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination! (232 ff.)

Like Wordsworth, he is lamenting the deprivation of that gift which made his creativity possible. Interestingly, he describes how the 'up' moods have ceased to palliate the 'downs': 'The joy within me dallied with distress'. The word 'joy' is another ping-pong ball that they bounce back and forth between them.

Like Wordsworth, Coleridge claims that natural objects can still give him some solace,

But oft I seem to feel, and evermore I fear,

They are not to me now the Things, which once they were. (294-5)

Wordsworth had said, 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more'. He had listed the beauties of the Rainbow, the Rose and the Moon, starlit water and sunshine, only to conclude 'That there hath passed away a glory from the earth'. Similarly, Coleridge details the appearance of 'this sweet primrose month', the larches and the night sky, but 'This Night, so tranquil now,' will end in storm and as for those lovely sights, they have become 'lifeless Shapes'. 'And still I gaze – and with how blank an eye!'

I see them all, so excellently fair!
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are. (42-3)

What a deeply touching couplet this is! Coleridge takes up Wordsworth's imagery, 'Apparelled in celestial light', and suggests that 'the glory and the dream' have gone because they are dependent on the human mind to throw that magic garment over them:

O Sara! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live.
Our's is her Wedding Garment, our's her Shroud . . .
Ah! From the Soul itself must issue forth
A Light, a Glory, and a luminous Cloud
Enveloping the Earth! (296 ff.)

If, through age, sickness or weakness of the imagination, the human contribution fails, the external world cannot of itself assume the numinous cloak.

I may not hope from outward Forms to win
The Passion and the Life, whose Fountains are within! (50-51)

In his admirable book *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, Seamus Perry explores the creative effect of Coleridge's concern with reconciling apparent incompatibles. Not being handicapped by a brilliant intellect I have never had any trouble in believing as few as two 'impossible things before breakfast' and was much entertained to find that my companion in mountaineering exploits with Molly, Tom McFarland, inadvertently dismisses me in a footnote, calling my preference for being 'not a schematist at all' as 'of no cultural concern to us'.[13] The relation between inner and outer, between the world of material things and man's mind, was one of Coleridge's most puzzling preoccupations. Seamus quotes Coleridge: '*Objectivity* with *Subjectivity*, in plain English, the impression of a thing as it exists in itself and extrinsically, with the idea which the mind abstracts from the impression'.[14] Wordsworth in his 'Prospectus to the Recluse' had seen the relationship as a marriage which could transform the commonplace:

For the discerning intellect of Man,

[13] Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 130.
[14] Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 276.

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[15] Molly Lefebure, *A*
[16] Ward 56.

When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.

He goes on to speak of 'the spousal verse / Of this great consummation'. Coleridge adopts Wordsworth's wedding imagery and at the same time recalls the joy that the shepherd-boy still has but Wordsworth has lost. This joy, Coleridge says, is the prerequisite for that fruitful relationship between inner and outer.

O pure of Heart! thou need'st not ask of me
What this strong music in the Soul may be,
What and wherein it doth exist,
This Light, this Glory, this fair luminous Mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making Power!
JOY, innocent Sara! JOY that ne'er was given
Save to the Pure, and in their purest Hour,
JOY, Sara! is the Spirit and the Power,
That wedding Nature to us gives in Dower . . . (308-16)

The nuptial metaphor at this time has a bitter resonance in Coleridge's life. By contrast with Wordsworth, he has no hope of marrying the woman he loves. He hopes for joy for her but does not expect it for himself. Instead, he proposes a strategy to redirect his activities from poetry to intellectual theorizing, another pair of his apparent incompatibles. No wonder Wordsworth could not write the great philosophical poem required of him!

For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient all I can;
And haply by abstruse Research to steal
From my own Nature all the Natural Man –
This was my sole Resource, my wisest plan!
And that which suits a part, infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the Temper of my Soul. (265-71)

I had a friend who, whenever I said anything critical about Coleridge's behaviour, would protest, 'Well, Mary, he was a depressive', as though this both explained and excused everything. Perhaps it does. He had every excuse for misery. Molly Lefebure says of his illness at this time, 'His trouble was chronic rheumatic heart disease and morphine addiction'.[15] His was a complicated condition which fluctuated but certainly the symptoms betrayed in the 'Letter to Sara Hutchinson' correspond with those of depressive illness or melancholia. As John Powell Ward says, 'all these sad feelings in the poem stem from that most melancholic thing, "A grief without a pang" at the start of the second stanza, the black mood which is depressive, not frenzied or hysterical'.[16]

[15] Molly Lefebure, *A Bondage to Opium* (Victor Gollancz, 1974), 338.
[16] Ward 56.

One of the problems of dealing with such sufferers is that, without professional treatment they are impossible to help because they are impenetrable, shut in the prison of themselves, incapable of empathy or mutual communication: Coleridge's conversations, though they charmed everyone by their brilliance, were notoriously monologues. As William Heath puts it, 'It hardly needs to be said that the verse letter to Sara has no real subject other than its composer, and that its addressee is often more a convenience than a loved one or a muse'.[17] Even when Coleridge mourns that she is ill and that he is not there to comfort her, indeed has contributed to her pain, he is thinking most of his own deprivation and does not desist from this exacerbation of her suffering.

Another depressive symptom is the one Ward cites, what Coleridge called 'A stifling, drowsy, unimpassioned grief' or, in a letter to Godwin, 'lazy and unhoping Indifference',[18] often leading to the patient's taking to his bed and 'turning his face to the wall'. It is almost impossible for the onlooker not to feel impatience and the strong urge to say, 'For goodness' sake pull yourself together!' But it is, of course, worse than useless to do so, just as it would be to tell someone with a fever to get a hold of his temperature. My sympathies have always been with Mrs. Coleridge, trying to cope with this, even before Molly Lefebure's admirable book about her. One takes off one's hat to Cowper's Mary Unwin and it is relevant to Wordsworth's misgivings in 'The Leechgatherer' that what Coleridge called 'the divine Chit chat of Cowper'[19] arose to counter his ever-threatening melancholia.

These two symptoms, that of failure to register the feelings and needs of others and that of inability to make himself produce work on time – or at all – in the face of his paralysed will inevitably affected Coleridge's work-life. Lamb's account of the state of Coleridge's literary affairs at his pretended death neatly demonstrates the gulf between the unrealistically ambitious projects that characterized his manic moments and his ability to complete them:

> Poor Col., but two days before he died he wrote to a bookseller proposing an epic poem on the "Wanderings of Cain", in twenty-four books. It is said he has left behind him more than forty thousand treatises in criticism and metaphysics, but few of them in a state of completion.[20]

Lamb did not exaggerate much. The miracle is the body of brilliant work that, in spite of everything, Coleridge did leave behind. Scholars are still beavering over it. As Richard Holmes says of the very letter to Godwin in which Coleridge says 'the poet is dead in me', 'Coleridge finds his salvation in the irrepressible life of language itself'.[21] Lamb was right too that one must resist the temptation to say 'poor Coleridge', 'I hate *poor*, as applied to such a man'.[22] Nevertheless, mixed with our sympathy and admiration in reading the verse-letter, is a certain revulsion at the references to his marriage, at his almost nauseous self-pity and envy of

[17] William Heath, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: A Study of their Literary Relations in 1801-1802* (Clarendon Press, 1970), 94.
[18] Letter to Godwin, 22 Jan. 1802, Griggs II, 784.
[19] Griggs I, 279.
[20] *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Marrs (Cornell, 1978), III, 205.
[21] Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), 302.
[22] Crabb Robinson's Diary, August 3, 1811, qtd. Lucas, *Life of Charles Lamb*, Fifth (Revised) edn. (London: Methuen) I, 382-3.

Wordsworth's circle, which McFarland calls 'The Significant Group'.[23] In a way, Coleridge is an unwilling but self-imposed 'solitary'. The offending passages were mainly cut in the Dejection Ode and the whole poem was better ordered yet the immediacy of the letter has perhaps a greater power to touch us. It was in this form that William and Dorothy read it at this time and that it inspired 'The Leech Gatherer', the culmination of what Jared Curtis calls 'a poetic dialogue on despair'.[24]

I know. You thought I was never going to get to my subject. But I could not see how to do justice to it without putting it in this well-known context. That Coleridge saw a close connection between his verse-letter and 'The Leech Gatherer' is evidenced by his sending a version of the latter and extracts from the former in the same letter to Sir George Beaumont on 3rd August, 1803. For what Coleridge called 'this fine poem' Wordsworth went back to an incident which had taken place on 3rd October 1800. Perhaps he resorted to Dorothy's journal to remind himself of the details of the encounter with the old man who had made such a deep impression on him. After describing his appearance, she emphasizes his aloneness:

> He had had a wife '& a good woman & it pleased God to bless us with ten children' – all these were dead but one of whom he had not heard for many years, a Sailor – his trade was to gather leeches but now leeches were scarce & he had not strength for it. . . . He had been hurt in driving a cart his leg broke his body driven over his skull fractured – he felt no pain till he recovered from his first insensibility. It was then 'late in the evening – when the light was just going away'.

Dorothy's account sounds like the material for the sort of lyrical ballad in which the narrator describes a chance meeting with a character who then is left to speak for himself, but this poem is subtly different for, from the beginning, it is concerned with the inner life of the narrator himself. Moreover, it ends with an overt comment on the relationship between inner and outer instead of a mere implication. In the first version Wordsworth seems to have included far more of the old man's description of his life and we owe it to the Hutchinson sisters that five stanzas of this were cut. Their letter expressing only qualified approval of the early draft of the poem which had been sent to them was answered by both William and Dorothy, in some indignation. Here is Dorothy:

> Dear Sara
>
> When you happen to be displeased with what you suppose to be the tendency or moral of any poem which William writes, ask yourself whether you have hit upon the real tendency and true moral, and above all never think that he writes for no reason but merely because a thing happened – and when you feel any poem of his to be tedious, ask yourself in what spirit it was written – whether merely to tell the tale and be through with it, or to illustrate a particular character or truth etc. etc.
>
> I am glad you have found out how to bake bread in my way.

[23] Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* (Princeton, 1981), ch. 3.
[24] Jared R. Curtis, *Wordsworth's Experiments With Tradition: The Lyric Poems of 1802* (Cornell, 1971), 25.

Though Wordsworth also fulminated at the criticism, to his credit he did take notice of what the sisters said and made crucial changes, thereby seemingly transforming the poem into something much greater. To replace the drastic cuts in the old man's account of himself, he provided a summary in what in the final version became stanza XV, 'He told that to these waters he had come . . .' (I am using this final version throughout.) He also added the crucial stanza XVI which ends 'To give me human strength by apt admonishment'. The images of the huge stone and the sea-beast, to which he refers in his 1815 Preface as examples of 'the conferring, the abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination', were also added between receipt of the Hutchinsons' letter and July 4th when Dorothy reported the poem as finished. As Jared Curtis puts it, 'One obvious effect of these similes is to present figures of the imagination which do the task that Wordsworth thought had been accomplished by his quoting the old man's speech; they are images of the poet's turning mind which serve thus to turn the reader's mind'.[25]

In other words, we are back to the question of inner and outer. Even before the changes were made, the poem began with the poet's own inner life and its relationship to external circumstance. To create his desired effect, Wordsworth altered a number of facts concerned with the meeting. Really he and Dorothy met the Leech Gatherer at that little puddle of a pond opposite How Top, as he says in the Fenwick Note 'a few hundred yards from my cottage at Town End, Grasmere', and he has made the old man a still practicing leech gatherer instead of a retired one. For his purposes in the poem, poor Dorothy has been eliminated, so that Wordsworth, as well as the old man, is a Solitary, and he has transferred the scene to a wild moorland tarn. He says, 'I was in the state of feeling described in the beginning of the poem while crossing over Barton Fell . . . The image of the hare I then observed on the ridge of the Fell'. The effect of the alterations is to diminish, but not to destroy, the matter-of-fact details of the real old man and to enhance the curative visionary element in the poet's mind. Coleridge found these dual aspects of the poem incongruous,[26] yoking together those two incompatibles 'the ideal' and 'the real'. To Wordsworth, on the other hand, each complemented the other.

Having cleared the ground in preparation for his poem by preserving the matter-of-fact characteristics of the old man, while rearranging the details of the meeting, Wordsworth was able to demonstrate its importance to his own inner life and its relevance to Coleridge's verse-letter. He had chosen with care an appropriate form, influenced by what he had been reading in Anderson's *British Poets*, including the Chaucer translations he had been working on at the end of 1801. He had recently been practicing and sometimes modifying the rhyme royal pattern in his translation of 'The Prioress's Tale' and 'Troilus and Cressida' and for this poem he gives the last line an extra foot, the whole providing a perfect vehicle for a meditative leisureliness together with the clinching rhyme of the last couplet. He uses the convention of the Spring Elegy but transforms that rather artificial genre, using it to reflect his own and Coleridge's expressions in the Ode and the Verse-letter. In reply to Sara's critical letter he explained what he had thought he was trying to do in the poem:

> I describe myself as having been exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of Nature and then as depressed, even in the midst of those beautiful objects,

[25] *Wordsworth Prose Works*, eds. Owen and Smyser, III, 33. Curtis 108.
[26] *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XXII.

> to the lowest dejection and despair. A young Poet in the midst of the happiness of Nature is described as overwhelmed by the thought of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of men, viz Poets – I think of this till I am so deeply impressed by it, that I consider the manner in which I was rescued from my dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence.[27]

The poem begins, in the mood of the 1802 lyrics, with one of his most beautiful natural descriptions:

> There was a roaring in the wind all night;
> The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
> But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
> The birds are singing in the distant woods;
> Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
> The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
> And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.
>
> All things that love the sun are out of doors;
> The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;
> The grass is bright with rain-drops; - on the moors
> The hare is running races in her mirth;
> And with her feet she from the plashy earth
> Raises a mist; that, glittering in the sun,
> Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

Interestingly, the progress of the weather here is exactly opposite to that in Coleridge's poem. The storm, instead of being on its way, is over – but the outcome is the same. Wordsworth commented in this 1815 Preface,

> The Stock-dove is said to coo, a sound well imitating the note of the bird; but by intervention of the metaphor *broods*, the affections are called in by the imagination to assist in marking the manner in which the bird reiterates and prolongs her soft note, as if herself delighting to listen to it, and participating of a still and quiet satisfaction, like that which may be supposed inseparable from the continuous process of incubation.[28]

The words 'a still and quiet satisfaction' remind one of the atmosphere of 'I have thoughts that are fed by the sun', written at the end of April 1802, where he speaks of 'A deep delicious peace'. It has been a wild night

> But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
> The birds are singing in the distant woods
> Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods . . .

[27] *Letters*, 14 June 1802, *Early Years*, 366-7.
[28] *Prose Works* III, 32.

Coleridge in his verse-letter had compared Sara to a 'mother dove' and the word 'broods' recalls Milton's Holy Spirit who 'Dove like satst brooding on the vast Abyss / And madst it pregnant'.[29] Again echoing his friend's words, Wordsworth here links the stock-dove's song and she 'herself delighting to listen to it' to the creativity and inspiration of the poet. After the nine end-stopped lines which list the beauties of the morning, the rhythm changes with the entrance of the hare, with two run-on lines and a break in the penultimate line, so that they reflect the animal's movement. The description of the hare creating her own 'luminous cloud' out of the mud at her feet is one of the most memorable passages in Wordsworth and captured my imagination when I was at school.

> . . . on the moors
> The hare is running races in her mirth;
> And with her feet she from the plashy earth
> Raises a mist; that, glittering in the sun,
> Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

Observing the creatures rejoicing in their own life, Wordsworth too recovers momentarily his childhood vision:

> I was a Traveller then upon the moor;
> I saw the hare that raced about with joy
> I heard the woods and distant waters roar;
> Or heard them not, as happy as a boy:
> The pleasant season did my heart employ:
> My old remembrances went from me wholly;
> And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

'As happy as a boy' but then there is that word again 'melancholy'. One is reminded of Keats:

> Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self.

That is exactly what the word 'melancholy' does to Wordsworth here:

> But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
> Of joy in minds that can no further go,
> As high as we have mounted in delight
> In our dejection do we sink as low;
> To me that morning did it happen so;
> And fears and fancies thick upon me came;
> Dim sadness – and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name.

[29] *Paradise Lost* I, lines 21-2.

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[30] *Matthew* VI, verses
[31] *Biographia Literar*

In extreme cases this swing from 'up' to 'down' can augur a manic depressive illness, but the phenomenon in its non-pathological form is common to us all. Indeed, looking round the world to-day at the 'ways of men, so vain and melancholy', one does feel inclined to give up. Coleridge's key-words, 'joy' and 'dejection' here reinforce the feeling that *his* 'fears and fancies' in his verse-letter also lie behind this stanza:

> I heard the sky-lark warbling in the sky;
> And I bethought me of the playful hare:
> Even such a happy child of earth am I;
> Even as these blissful creatures do I fare;
> Far from the world I walk, and from all care;
> But there may come another day to me –
> Solitude, pain of heart, distress and poverty.

He is about to show us an embodiment of these things in the person of the leech-gatherer. How can the poet contemplate what the future may hold for him? Moreover, an uneasiness about the concept of 'a post living in retirement' can be detected in several of his poems during the early years at Grasmere. Is he shirking his social duty when he states 'Far from the world I walk, and from all care' and how is this to be reconciled with the forthcoming responsibilities of marriage and a family? Is he, like Coleridge, failing to assure their future and his own?

> My whole life have I lived in pleasant thought,
> As if life's business were a summer mood
> As if all needful things would come unsought
> To genial faith, still rich in genial good;
> But how can He expect that others should
> Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
> Love him who for himself will take no heed at all?

There is a reminiscence of Matthew VI here. 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not neither do they spin . . .' and 'Take, therefore no thought for the morrow . . .'. But there is an obligation, too. 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you'.[30] When Wordsworth says, 'As if all needful things would come unsought / To genial faith, still rich in genial good', he is remembering both the promise and the obligation that goes with it. The word 'genial' is another echo of Coleridge's verse-letter when he complains, 'My genial spirits fail'. He says in *Biographia Literaria* 'I include in the meaning of a word not only its correspondent object but likewise all the associations that it recalls'.[31] So, here, he in turn is drawing on Milton where Samson says

> So much I feel my genial spirits droop,
> My hopes all flat; nature within me seems

[30] *Matthew* VI, verses 28, 31, and 33.
[31] *Biographia Literaria*, chapter XXII.

> In all her functions weary of herself –
> My race of glory run, and race of shame,
> And I shall shortly be with them that rest. (Samson Agonistes, lines 594-8)

Beyond its modern popular meaning of 'cheering' or 'sociable', 'genial' is a rich word, being the adjective from 'genius' as in 'exceptional ability' or as in genius of place or person, meaning 'the particular essence of'. But its first dictionary definition is 'generative', hence 'creative'. Coleridge said that 'Wordsworth's words always *mean* the whole of their possible meaning'.[32] So, in this case, he is trying to persuade himself that 'genial faith' and 'genial good' are the equivalent for him of seeking the kingdom of God, for he is doing what he was put into the world as a gifted creative artist to do. Yet he is overcome with doubt. The next lines are overtly meant to refer to himself but one cannot miss also their appropriateness to his friend, Coleridge:

> But how can he expect that others should
> Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
> Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?

It is a great mistake to suppose that because he used simple language Wordsworth was an unsophisticated technician. 'My language is precise',[33] he said, and might have added 'my prosody expert'. He has most skillfully manipulated his chosen stanza-form. In this case, in the last three lines he runs on the fifth and sixth lines, so that the words 'Build' and 'Love' are emphasized by being put at the beginning of lines. He also varies from the iambic foot in 'Build for him, sow for him' and 'Love him', so that the stress falls on the first syllable, the list leading up to that last desolate statement 'who for himself will take no heed at all' with its clinching rhyme. Thus we are brought back effectively to Coleridge's 'lazy and unhoping indifference'.

As Ward concedes, the tendency to melancholy, 'sometimes morbid', was not confined to the poets named in *The English Line*. Wordsworth had no trouble in finding this characteristic in past poets whom he knew and loved. William Collins, to whose memory Wordsworth wrote a poem while he was still at Cambridge, died insane before he was forty. Wordsworth's youthful wish in that poem was unlikely to be fulfilled:

> And pray that never child of song
> May know that poet's sorrows more.

We have already mentioned Cowper and Ferguson. Wordsworth chooses to cite Chatterton and Burns. Chatterton is called 'the marvelous Boy' because his 'Rowley Poems', which he pretended he had discovered in a fifteenth century manuscript, were begun before he was twelve years old. Though the fraud was exposed, he was nevertheless considered to be a poet of genius. But because of his acute poverty he committed suicide by taking arsenic at the age of seventeen. Wordsworth had probably known his works since school-days[34] and Miss Darbishire comments that 'Resolution and Independence' shares the metre and 'a kindred theme' with Chatterton's

[32] Griggs II, p. 977, Letter to Southey, August 14, 1803.
[33] *Letters II*, Part I, To Sir George Beaumont, February 1808, 194.
[34] Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge UP, 1993), 27.

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[35] *Poetic Works*, ed. D
[36] I Kings 19, verse 12

Excellent Ballade of Charitie.[35] On visiting Burns' grave in 1803, Wordsworth paid tribute to him and his influence:

> I mourned with thousands, but as one
> More deeply grieved, for He was gone
> Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
> And showed my youth
> How Verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth.

Burns, too, after an erratic life, died before he was forty.

> We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
> But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

As Wordsworth says in the letter, 'I consider the manner in which I was rescued from my dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence'. Surely the next stanza (VIII) leads in to a telling illustration of that enlightenment Wordsworth said he had received from Burns,

> How Verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth.

Our revelations do not necessarily come to us in a flash of lightning or a thunderbolt but they may be none the less heaven-sent for that. Even Elijah had to wait for a 'still small voice':[36]

> Now, whether it were by a peculiar grace,
> A leading from above, a something given,
> Yet it befell that, in this lonely place,
> When I with these untoward thoughts had striven,
> Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
> I saw a Man before me unawares:
> The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

Though probably the poem was improved by leaving out many of the details of the old man's life which the Hutchinson sisters found 'tedious', it is a fortunate thing that we have Dorothy's account of it, which undoubtedly increases our understanding. We remember the down-to-earth description of his appearance and clothes, which included an apron and night-cap. Wordsworth says 'A person reading this Poem with feelings like mine will have been awed and controuled, expecting almost something spiritual or supernatural -'. 'What is brought forward?' – Old people get used to being regarded as 'past their sell-by date'. As Lear discovered, 'Age is

[35] *Poetic Works*, ed. DeSelincourt-Darbishire, II, 511.
[36] I Kings 19, verse 12.

unnecessary'. Yet, what does Wordsworth present 'in the most naked simplicity possible'? A Senior Citizen! And we are not disappointed. As he says,

> I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an Old Man like this, the survivor of a Wife and ten children, traveling alone among the mountains and all lonely places, carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has entailed upon him.

And to think that I was nearly intimidated out of coming here by the fear of what our transport system might do to me!

Like Emily in 'The White Doe', the leech-gatherer has survived all his family and is entirely alone. He is a solitary man, obliged by his work to haunt the loneliest and most inhospitable of wild places. Moreover, to catch the leeches he had to stand in the water and let them attach themselves to his legs, despite his age and physical pain and weakness. No wonder Wordsworth saw the meeting, which both paralleled and contrasted the old man's life with his own, as a kind of portent and the message the leech-gatherer unwittingly brought as like that of the white doe, in his words 'a feeling of spirituality and supernaturalness'. This he achieves by 'the modifying powers of the Imagination' in the two images that follow:

> As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
> Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
> Wonder to all who do the same espy,
> By what means it could thither come, and whence;
> So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
> Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
> Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself:
>
> Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
> Nor all asleep – in his extreme old age:
> His body was bent double, feet and head
> Coming together in life's pilgrimage;
> As if in some dire constraint of pain, or rage
> Of sickness felt by him in times long past
> A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.

We remember Dorothy's account of the accident with the cart, 'his leg broke his body driven over his skull fractured'. Wordsworth passes the time of day with him, as one still does on meeting other walkers on the fells. How silly to criticize the poet for the banality of this greeting! Do not such conversations always begin by commenting on the weather? Besides, the poet's remark is not so commonplace as it appears. Geoffrey Durrant points out that it takes us back to the beginning of the poem and calm after storm. 'This morning gives us promise of a glorious day.' Durrant says, 'The morning has already given to the poet this promise, but it was short-

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[37] Geoffrey Durrant, *W*

lived, and was followed by the fear that the morning on the contrary gave warning of a very painful and difficult day, and of a painful and almost unbearable future for the poet'.[37]

A gentle answer did the old Man make,
In courteous speech which forth he slowly drew:
And him with further words I thus bespake,
'What occupation do you there pursue?
This is a lonesome place for one like you.'
Ere he replied, a flash of mild surprise
Broke from the sable orbs of his yet-vivid eyes.

His words came feebly, from a feeble chest,
But each in solemn order followed each,
With something of a lofty utterance drest –
Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach
Of ordinary men' a stately speech;
Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
Religious men, who give to God and man their dues.

If ever a man might feel justified in giving way to melancholy, surely it is this leech-gatherer. But does he do so? Has he turned his face to the wall and given himself up to 'lazy and unhoping indifference'? Is he oblivious to the existence of other people? Not at all. He receives the poet's question with 'a flash of mild surprise' from 'yet-vivid eyes', and he gives 'a gentle answer'. He is fully aware of the young man, perhaps even of his need for reassurance. In reply to the repeated question he tells more, 'Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind'. In describing his dignified speech and in the suggestion of the strength given by religious faith Wordsworth is surely remembering Sara Hutchinson's account of 'the intellectual Pedlar' of Kendal, a Scotsman, who had been a great influence on her youth:

He told, that to these waters he had come
To gather leeches, being old and poor:
Employment hazardous and wearisome!
And he had many hardships to endure:
From pond to pond he roamed, from moor to moor;
Housing, with God's good help, by choice or chance;
And in this way he gained an honest maintenance.

Anyone who saw on the television Bill Oddie in the Lake District stir the water to attract leeches, catch one on his boot and take it off to show to us, will know that such a job is no sinecure! Yet, does the old man neglect to earn a living thereby? Does he give up in despair? He does not. By the most lonely and painful work he gains 'an honest maintenance'. The poet feels challenged as though by some supernatural vision. He falls into a kind of trance as if before a divine

[37] Geoffrey Durrant, *William Wordsworth* (Cambridge UP, 1969), 94.

messenger, Mercury perhaps, or Gabriel, come, as they often have, in disguise, 'To give me human strength by apt admonishment'. Yet he does not immediately receive the message:

> My former thoughts returned: the fear that kills;
> And hope that is unwilling to be fed;
> Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
> And mighty Poets in their misery dead.
> - Perplexed, and longing to be comforted,
> My question eagerly did I renew,
> 'How is it that you live, and what is it you do?'

He is not really, as Lewis Carrol pretends, asking the old man again 'How is it that you live, and what is it you do'. He is appealing to him in desperation and pleading, 'How can you bear it? How does man face his fate?' What a wonderful and terrifying line that is 'And mighty Poets in their misery dead'! Technically this effect is achieved partly by the alliteration and sound-similarity of the two words, so opposite in meaning, 'mighty' and 'misery', partly by the rhythm of the line. The first two feet of the line are the expected iambs, but then, instead of an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable, we have a string of light ones with only a very slight stress – if any – on the first syllable of 'misery', which contrasts with and emphasizes the final stark monosyllable, 'And mighty poets in their misery dead'.

The leech-gatherer patiently repeats his story 'with a smile', reinforcing for the poet his fortitude and resolution, 'Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may'. In Wordsworth's mind he sees a picture of a solitary, decrepit figure eternally making his difficult way 'About the weary moors'. What a telling adjective! It describes the pain of all that walking for a cripple over difficult ground. The old man is a real down-to-earth human being who is also a supernatural influence. Wordsworth is reconciling inner and outer.

The last stanza has been much criticized but I do not share the uneasiness with it. However subtly and symbolically stated elsewhere in the poem, surely the message is summed up in these lines and I see no incongruity in the transition:

> And soon with this he other matter blended,
> Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,
> But stately in the main; and, when he ended,
> I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
> In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
> 'God', said I, 'be my help and stay secure;
> I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor'.

The first three lines recapitulate the characteristics of the old man: despite his pitiful state, he remains cheerful, thoughtful for others, dignified. If a man who has suffered so much and is reduced to such misery can call on such fortitude, resolution and kindness and can still maintain his honest independence, then surely he must be a pattern for us all. Wordsworth says in his letter, 'But Good God! Such a figure, in such a place, a pious self-respecting, miserably infirm Old Man, telling such a tale!' Not only will Wordsworth remember the leech-gatherer as an

example to follow but also as the occasion whereby, despite loss, the creative process, though perhaps changed, may go on, as Coleridge had inadvertently also shown. In lamenting that he could no longer write a poem, he had written one.

It is significant that in the next generation John Stuart Mill, who had been most influenced by Coleridge as a philosophical thinker in prose, went to his poetry to find an accurate memory of the attack of acute depression into which he fell in 1826. He says, 'The lines in Coleridge's "Dejection" – I was not then acquainted with them – exactly describe my case.

> A grief without a pang, void, dark and drear,
> A drowsy, stifled, unimpassioned grief,
> Which finds no natural outlet or relief
> In word or sigh or tear.'

Of what he calls 'the dry heavy dejection of the melancholy winter of 1826-7' – there is that word mentioned again – '. . . I have found a true description of what I felt', and he goes on to quote another Coleridge poem, 'Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, / And hope without an object cannot live'. A little later in that chapter of his *Autobiography*, entitled 'A Crisis in my Mental History', Mill reports,

> This state of my thoughts and feelings made the fact of my reading Wordsworth for the first time (in the autumn of 1828), an important event in my life.

It was 'the two-volume edition of 1815' that he read and found helpful. In particular he speaks of the Intimations Ode, now in its completed form, in which

> I found that he too had had similar experience to mine; that he also had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it. The result was that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never again subject to it.[38]

Mill had been brought up in a way that concentrated on the intellect, beginning to learn Greek at the age of three for example, but that neglected entirely what he found in Wordsworth, 'the very culture of the feelings'. Do we never learn? The testing of very young children in the *mechanics* of education and the concentration at all stages on *utility*, for getting jobs, does tend to mean that expressions of artistic imagination and 'the very culture of the feelings' are squeezed out of the curriculum.

In 'The Leechgatherer', as in the Ode, Wordsworth is surely examining a possible answer to the inevitability of suffering. Mill is right that he does not succumb to it, though he may in this poem point the way not so much to 'compensation' as to how to meet despair head-on by facing it with courage, dignity and avoidance of stultifying self-absorption. He does not maintain that this is easy but the leech-gatherer, who had such onerous difficulties to overcome, provided an

[38] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, World's Classics Edition (Oxford, 1935), chapter V, 114, 118, and 124-5.

object-lesson. Yes, the poem could easily have degenerated into crude Victorian moralizing – but it does not, because it combines the immediacy of personal experience with the most skilled technical poetic expertise. By these means we travel the spiritual journey with him and, as we share the temptation to melancholy which affects us all, so we share his imaginative road to the virtue which he so much admired, human fortitude. In the last resort we are all solitaries, facing our fate alone, but it is not inevitable that we should therefore cut ourselves off from reciprocal relationship and retreat into a shell of depression. No, I do not find Wordsworth melancholy to the point of morbidity. Quite the contrary. He faces the darker side of life but finds ways of dealing with it. When 'Perplexed, and longing to be comforted' one can do worse than go with him on the search for relief and inspiration.

This poem, which crowns the 'poetic dialogue on despair', ends as a celebration of the wonderful courage and endurance of many nameless sufferers whom we see around us every day who confront the worst that the human condition can subject them to and yet are not defeated. They say, with Byrhtwold at the Battle of Maldon, 'Our courage shall be greater as our strength grows less'.[39]

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[39] *The Battle of Maldon*, 1.313, translated into modern English.

John Scott, Lamb and the Jews: a postscript **by R.M. Healey**

In a very interesting exploration of Lamb's apparent 'racism' in 'Imperfect Sympathies', Duncan Wu offers a most persuasive explanation for the essayist's intemperate comments on the Scottish people.[1] However, he says little or nothing concerning Lamb's equally provocative remarks on Jews in the same essay:

> A Hebrew is nowhere congenial to me…I do not relish the approximation of Jew and Christian, which has become so fashionable. The reciprocal endearments have, to me something hypocritical and unnatural in them… If they can sit with us at table, why do they keck at our cookery ? I do not understand these half convertites. Jews christianizing—Christians judaizing—puzzle me…[2]

Lamb then goes on to select the singer Braham as an example of a 'christianizing' Jew. Doubtless Lamb did share some of the anti-Semitism of his era, but if, as Duncan Wu demonstrates, there were reasons for his attacks on the Scots at this particular time, might there not also have been a reason for his anti-Jewish sentiment?

The Scott/*Blackwood's* spat belongs to literary history. Meanwhile, however, another, far less known literary quarrel, partially fuelled by the *Blackwood's* dispute, was gathering momentum in the pages of the *London Magazine's* most immediate rival—*Gold' London Magazine*. The *Blackwood's* long campaign, of course, had deep roots in the Edinburgh—London rivalry and was conducted with much sharper weapons, but *Gold's* less skilful assault on Scott in the issue for March 1821 was no less inhumane and tasteless. For someone in Lamb's state of despondency the desire to hit back at such conduct must have been strong. And if the Scotsmen at *Blackwood's* deserved a rebuke, then surely the Jew who published *Gold's* merited the same.

At this point it is necessary to see *Gold's* as Lamb may have seen it. Here was a magazine published by a double act called Gold and Northhouse. Little is known about either Gold or Northhouse, but the magazine itself tells us that Joyce Gold printed it at 103 Shoe Lane. The name 'Gold' of course, was (and perhaps still is) popular among Jews (along with Diamond, Pearl, Silver etc), and Lamb would have been aware of this fact. But Joyce Gold? Was this not another example of 'a Jew christianizing or a Christian judaizing'? Furthermore, this Gold was in league with someone clearly non-Jewish, called Northhouse. Again, to Lamb this must have appeared a further example of the 'unnatural' coming together of Jew and Christian. In the case of *Gold's* such a pairing produced something unnecessarily offensive and Lamb in his anger used this alliance as a stick to beat the Jews.

It is possible that Lamb may have met Joyce Gold. *Gold's,* after all, was edited at Nineteen, Great Russell Street, Covent Garden, bang next door to numbers Twenty and Twenty-One, which was then Lamb's home. Some time ago, while speculating on this strange juxtaposition, I mentioned that the sole reference by Lamb to *Gold's* occurs in the *London Magazine* at the end of 'A Complaint on the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis':[3]

> C being asked why he did not like *Gold's London* as well as ours—it was
> In poor S's time—replied—
> *Because there is no Weathercock,*
> *And that's the reason why.*[4]

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[1] 'John Scott's Death and Lamb's 'Imperfect Sympathies', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, n.s.,114, April 2001.
[2] 'Imperfect Sympathies', *The Essays of Elia* (Temple Classics edition, 1900),110 – 11.
[3] 'The Other London Magazine: *Gold's* and its Contributors', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, n.s.,61(January 1988), 156.
[4] See Bertram Dobell, *Sidelights on Charles Lamb* (London, 1903), 246.

But in no recorded letter does the curious and observant Lamb comment on this remarkable contiguity. This is a genuine puzzle, but perhaps in the final analysis, we must reluctantly accept that Lamb was either wholly unaware of the identity of his neighbours, or was simply uninterested in them. However, if Lamb *did* know what was going on next door but chose to remain on friendly terms with the rival publishers, it goes without saying that the decision by *Gold's* to mock Scott's memory must have appeared to Lamb as a sort of betrayal.

But what exactly was the nature of *Gold's* vendetta against Scott and his magazine ? Well, the antipathy dated from the twin launch of the rival magazines in January 1820. *Gold's* accused its rival of stealing the idea of a London magazine as early as November 1819, and when this tactic failed, it embarked on a campaign of obloquy, which lasted for eighteen months. In the main the jibes were satirical swipes at certain 'cockney' writers, notably Hunt and Hazlitt, Barry Cornwall and Cornelius Webb(e), parodies of those poets known to be admired by Hazlitt (such as Coleridge and Wordsworth), a declared support for *Blackwood's* in the row with Scott, and heavy-handed disparagement of the *London Magazine*. The main, indeed possibly the sole, contributor of this anti-*London* material was a talented young journalist, William Frederick Deacon who, for over a year, appears to have been the chief contributor to *Gold's* under the initials WFD and the soubriquets 'Paul Clutterbuck' and 'Sam Quiz'. While supporting *Gold's* Deacon was also responsible for all or most of the material in the *Dejeune*, a magazine he had launched in October 1820 and in which he reprinted some of his *Gold's* pieces. Deacon's undoubted talents as a comic writer and parodist have already been assessed elsewhere by myself and others, but for our present purposes, one particular contribution deserves closer inspection.[5] This was Deacon's lengthy squib 'The Literary Ovation' which appeared in the March 1821 issue of *Gold's* under the pseudonym 'Paul Clutterbuck'.

The circumstances in which John Scott, Hazlitt, Lamb, Barry Cornwall and others are brought together is a fictitious dinner party given on 3 February 1821 by the publishers Baldwin, Cradock and Joy for their contributors. Clutterbuck is sent an account of this event by someone who was present. The narrative, whose tone is characterised by a particularly heavy-handed irony, begins by ridiculing Scott and such literary works as the *Visit to Paris* and *The House of Mourning*: 'for the untimely death of which poem, his muse has been in mourning ever since'. Scott's magazine is then belittled as a work which 'waddles with unfeeling perseverance from the press like a goose from the grass market'. We are then treated to a 'song' by Hazlitt as 'The Lecturer' which describes the latter's Surrey Institution lectures as having 'neither rhyme nor reason', alludes somewhat disparagingly to the infamous *Letter to William Gifford*, and approvingly to the *Quarterly's* opprobrium. Clutterbuck then declares that Hazlitt is 'a very great man and to our certain knowledge, is not the owner of a single pimple'.[6] The satirical tone is not skilfully handled, as a cumbersome irony alternates with a sort of schoolboy facetiousness, to no great effect. Wainewright in his Egomet Bonmot dismissed *Gold's* as 'clumsy'. How, for instance, were readers to regard the introduction of Lamb, who recites a 'Songe to Fancy, by Good Master Webster'? As Bertram Dobell points out, the same song 'only differing in a few unimportant particulars', had already been published in *Gold's* as one of Sam Quiz's imitations of George Colman. As Dobell remarks, the verses 'bear no resemblance to anything that John Webster did write or ever could have written.'[7]

Indeed, the jibes at Hazlitt and Scott would certainly not have endeared *Gold's* to Lamb. They were, after all, among his closest friends. But it is doubtful whether he would have taken any great offence at Clutterbuck's ineffectual use of his own name. Unfortunately, there was far

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[5] See my essay on Deacon in Dabundo (ed), *Encyclopaedia of Romanticism* (Garland, 1992),152 – 53;see also Graeme Stones and John Strachan (edd), *Parodies of the Romantic Age*, volume 4, W. F. Deacon, *Warreniana* (1824), ed. Strachan.

[6] These quotations are taken from the text published in *Dobell*, 265 – 275.

[7] The Colman parody occurs in *Gold's London Magazine*, 2 (October, 1820), 368; see also *Dobell*, 291.

worse to follow. 'The Literary Ovation' ends with one of the most outrageous *faux pas* in literary history. As a way of symbolising the long dispute between John Scott and *Blackwood's*, Clutterbuck offers us a mock battle between the two rival parties. Christopher North begins by firing away 'the small shot and cannon balls of his satire'. John Scott responds by bringing 'a huge cannon into the field of action 'and firing off' a ten-pounder of his own moulding,'which failed of its mark'. In this fictitious encounter Scott comes off worse. Clutterbuck has him fleeing the battle scene, while his foe 'smote him as he retired with lusty and triumphant repercussions'.[8]

'A Literary Ovation' appeared on 1 March 1821, a mere four *days* after Scott had died of his wounds following the infamous duel with Christie. Gold and Northhouse, evidently envisaging an adverse reaction to the piece, published a note explaining that the article had been written sometime *before* Scott's death and had been in print before that event had occurred. Had the article not concluded with such an unfortunate recreation of the real circumstances surrounding this fatality, the editor (who was probably Deacon himself) may have got away with this explanation. As it was, the piece could not but deeply distress Scott's friends and relations. Not only did the writer describe a duel and its aftermath but his partisanship obliged him to envisage Scott fleeing from his enemy. To anyone familiar with Scott's courage or who had witnessed the real events at Chalk Farm, the facetiousness of Paul Clutterbuck must have appeared inexcusable.

While we must hope that the fateful duel did indeed take place after Deacon wrote 'The Literary Ovation', few of Scott's friends who read it would have accepted that the article could not have been withdrawn by the publishers at the last minute. The decision by Gold's to go ahead and publish, combined with the effect of Maginn's hurtful remarks on Scott in *Blackwood's* and the meeting with Walter Scott, whom Lamb knew to be instrumental in his friend's death, were evidently overpowering influences on a mind already assailed by grief. As we have seen, one result was Lamb's unusually intemperate remarks on Scotsmen and Jews in 'Imperfect Sympathies'.

The final irony, and one which Lamb, Hazlitt and the other contributors to the *London Magazine* must have relished, has to do with the fate of the magazine in which 'The Literary Ovation' appeared. Just four months later, *Gold's* had folded, ostensibly due to the nervous breakdown of Deacon, its main contributor, but more probably because the latter's partisanship and poor judgment had eventually exhausted the patience of his readers.

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[8] *Dobell,* 283 – 84.

The AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies

This year the first of the annual get-togethers to be held outside Birmingham took place most appropriately in the very literary market town of Ledbury, Herefordshire, home to possibly the largest poetry festival in Britain, birthplace of John Masefield and possibly William Langland, and the subject of a sonnet by Wordsworth, 'St Catherine of Ledbury', published in 1835.Elizabeth Barrett Browning also spent her early days near here and a few miles away at Dymock, in an idyllic period before the First War World, a group of literary *flaneurs*, including Lascelles Abercrombie, Robert Frost, John Drinkwater, Wilfrid Gibson, and Edward Thomas wrote and read aloud their own poetry between bouts of cider drinking.

This year's meeting in the ancient Burgage Hall, just below the parish church where Auden married the daughter of Thomas Mann, began with the formal business of the AGM. It was reported that the Alliance has now chalked up its hundredth member society, which may possibly be the Wordsworth Trust. The ALS can now claim to represent the interests of at least 40,000 individuals—a fair achievement for an organisation that has only been in existence for twelve years. Financially the Alliance is in pretty good shape too, although if certain projects (such as a parody competition) are to go ahead subscriptions may need to be increased. Two changes were made to the executive. Chairman Peter Barton (Walmsley Society) retired and was replaced by the art historian Nicholas Reed (E. Nesbit Society). And after twelve years as a very active President the actor Gabriel Woolf stood down in favour of the novelist Susan Hill, whose election did not meet with general approval. Our very energetic Secretary Rosemary Culley (Graham Greene Birthplace Trust) issues regular news bulletins as well as supervising the ALS Web site, a feature of which is a constantly developing literary gazetteer. Under its editor Thelma Thompson (Shropshire Literary Society), the second issue of the annual *Open Book* continues to reveal the hidden talents of ALS individuals, and although this year it contains an interview with yours truly, it is worth reading if only for its praise of Charles Lamb.

In the afternoon a packed hall was treated to a wonderful and often moving celebration in words and images of the Dymock poets by their 'Friends', notably Linda Hart, who has stayed many years longer in cider-apple country than did her fellow countryman Frost, and Gabriel Woolf who, as usual was at his brilliant best.

The next annual meeting of the ALS will be held on 27 April 2002 in Burslem, where the Arnold Bennett Society will be hosts.

R.M. Healey,
Press Officer