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‘The Tremble from It Is Spreading’: A Reading of Wordsworth’s ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’[1]

By MICHAEL O’NEILL

I SEEM TO RECALL THAT SOMEBODY SAYS OR WRITES SOMEWHERE words to the following effect: that the best way to prepare for reading Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is a prolonged meditation on the significance of the Passion.[2] I feel a comparable meditative effort is called for in attempting to talk about Wordsworth’s ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’. To be on the brink of lecturing on this greatest of poems is to experience a state of awe and trembling.

What I want to do, to begin with, just to give you a sense of the kinds of things that fascinate me about the ‘Ode’, is to quote from Hopkins, whom I still think is the poem’s most suggestive critic. This is Hopkins, in a letter to R.W. Dixon, 23rd October 1886. Dixon didn't much care for Wordsworth’s ode and Hopkins felt that his friend’s views needed some attention:

> I feel now I am warm and my hand is in for my greater task, Wordsworth’s ode; and here, my dear friend, I must earnestly remonstrate with you; must have it out with you. Is it possible that, – but it is in black and white; you say that the ode is not, for Wordsworth, good; and much less great… There have been in all history a few, a very few men, whom common repute, even where it did not trust them, has treated as having had something happen to them that does not happen to other men, as having *seen something*, whatever that really was. Plato is the most famous of these. Or to put it as it seems to me I must somewhere have written to you or to somebody, human nature in these men saw something, got a shock; wavers in opinion, looking back, whether there was anything in it or no; but is in a tremble ever since. Now what Wordsworthians mean is, what would seem to be the growing mind of the English speaking world and may perhaps come to be that of the world at large is that in Wordsworth when he wrote that ode human nature got another of those shocks, and the tremble from it is spreading. This opinion I do strongly share; I am, ever since I knew that ode, in that tremble. … The ode itself seems to me better than anything else I know of Wordsworth’s, so much as to equal or outweigh everything else he wrote: to me it appears so. . . .the interest and importance of the matter were here of the highest, his insight was at its very deepest, and hence to my mind the extreme value of the poem.

And he goes on, and this is very much the sort of area I want to talk about:

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[1] A version of this essay was first given as a lecture at the Wordsworth Winter School on 23 February 2007. I am extremely grateful to the Wordsworth Trust for providing a CD recording of the talk, and to Nick Powell for very kindly arranging for the lecture to be transcribed. I have substantially tinkered with the transcription, attempting to eliminate various incoherences and longueurs, but I have sought at the same time to retain the shape and the feel of the lecture as it was delivered. I would also like to record my gratitude to Richard Gravil for inviting me to lecture at the Winter School.

[2] After the lecture, I realised that I had half-remembered the remark from one of the first books of literary criticism I read, John Pick, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Priest and Poet*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966). Pick says of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*: ‘Analysis cannot exhaust its possibilities, and Bernard Kelly’s advice, “Meditate first for a fortnight on the Passion of our Lord”, is the soundest admonition any reader can have’, p. 41.

> His powers rose, I hold, with the subject: the execution is so fine. The rhymes are musically interlaced, the rhythms so happily succeed (surely it is a magical change 'O joy that in our embers'), the diction throughout is so charged and steeped in beauty and yearning (what a stroke 'The moon doth with delight').[3]

I think that is a profound piece of criticism. There are two things from it that I want to take. One has to do with the poem's substance. Somehow there is something very deep and culturally central about the subject-matter, as is shown by Hopkins's sense that Wordsworth 'got a shock'. To give you another person commenting on this aspect of the poem, here is the contemporary poet, Geoffrey Hill, in his essay 'Redeeming the Time.' Hill praises Hopkins's criticism and, as with Hopkins, for Hill, who picks up Hopkins's phrase '*seen something*,' the 'shock' reverberates:

> If Wordsworth has indeed seen something, he has seen or foreseen the developing life crisis of the nineteenth century.[4]

This is a large claim and it constructs a link between rhythm, the very rhythm of the poem, the way it changes tack, the way it offers hope when one thought there was no or little hope left, and the poet's overall vision. A sense of such a link between rhythm and vision has roots in Romantic practice. Indeed, Shelley says, in *A Defence of Poetry*, that 'All the authors of revolutions in opinion are ... poets ... as their periods are harmonious and rhythmical'.[5] And Hill, as with Hopkins, conveys the 'shock' of which he speaks, consciously turning the almost despairing 'deep' of Wordsworth's 'deep almost as life' (l. 131) into a depth associated with 'deep shocks of recognition' that manifest a 'resistance proclaimed'.[6]

There is, then, something significant about this poem culturally. I used to think it was what Harold Bloom calls a 'Wordsworthian crisis-poem', a poem born out of a mood close to despair, a great poem written out of a sense that the poet could no longer have access to the sources of great poetry.[7] Certainly it is a profoundly personal poem and I shall go on to show how Wordsworth impresses his individuality on the poem's phrasing. At the same time it seems to resonate. Just as Wordsworth moves between 'I' and 'we', so the 'Ode' moves between being about a personal crisis and a looming cultural struggle. Leslie Stephen, later in the nineteenth century, sees the poem as foreshadowing, confronting and, indeed, answering the cultural furore induced by the work of Darwin. He argues that, for all their difference, what Wordsworth and Darwin share is a sense of the importance of 'primitive instincts'.[8] Ultimately, at stake here is resistance to a merely utilitarian and industrial culture, a feeling that there has to be something of value that outweighs the imperatives of such a culture.

Wordsworth locates that value, not in childhood, but in our recollections of childhood, in our adult awareness of what we have lost, since it is in that awareness of loss that we recreate a sense of its value. So, for me, an old truth newly felt about the 'Ode' is the sheer spiritual substance at its heart. My other major emphasis in the lecture will be on Wordsworth's art,

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[3] Quoted from *William Wordsworth*, ed. Graham McMaster, Penguin Critical Anthologies (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 242-3. I have corrected an obvious typographical error, in which 'powers' was erroneously substituted for 'rhymes'.

[4] Geoffrey Hill, 'Redeeming the Time', *The Lords of Limit* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984), p. 88.

[5] Quoted from *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 679.

[6] Geoffrey Hill, 'Redeeming the Time', p. 87.

[7] *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 95.

[8] Leslie Stephen, 'Wordsworth's Ethics', *Hours in a Library*, Third Series (1879), quoted from *Wordsworth*, ed. McMaster, p. 201.

especially his near-miraculous ability to find words, tones, images, patterns of syntax, rhymes, and rhythms adequate to the changing curve of his thoughts and emotions.

II

Let me just run through a few introductory points about the poem, then come back to it, and start looking at it all over again. The 'Ode' was composed between March 1802 and March 1804.[9] In the Fenwick Note to the poem Wordsworth relates it to his childhood inability 'to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being'. This rather wonderful Wordsworthian sense is one which children often do have. I remember thinking as a child (my one point of contact with Wordsworth) that death was for other people: I was certainly going to dodge this bleak visitor; death was not going to happen; how could one cease to exist? What Wordsworth is saying is such non-applicability of death to oneself only seems like a mere fantasy; it is actually in touch with some deep instinct that human beings have that they are not destined solely for extinction.

Ultimately, the instinct chimes with the adult 'faith that looks through death' (l. 188), as Wordsworth calls it in the poem. But he relates the feeling in the Fenwick Note to a less immediately consoling intuition, his awareness of an 'abyss of idealism', an abyss of which we are conscious from passages in *The Prelude*, such as the aftermath of the boat-stealing episode when Wordsworth is left with a 'dim and undetermined sense / Of unknown modes of being' (*1805*, I. 419-20).[10] Sometimes we think of Wordsworth as a 'Nature Poet', a poet with a great love of the external world, but there are these moments in Wordsworth when he seems to undergo a black-out in relation to sensory experience, times 'when the light of sense / Goes out in flashes that have shown to us / The invisible world' (*The Prelude*, *1805*, VI. 534-6). It is as though the light of sense gutters, but, in doing so, flashes before us some other world. Wordsworth speaks, too, in the Fenwick Note about his sense that he could not quite believe in the reality of the external world. He 'grasped at a wall or tree', to hold something tangible in order to persuade himself that he was really in the physical world. In the poem, the lines that are relevant to that moment are Wordsworth's praise in stanza IX (as it would become in later printings) of 'obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things, / Fallings from us, vanishings; / Blank misgivings of a Creature / Moving about in worlds not realiz'd' (ll. 144-8).[11]

Another fascinating remark that Wordsworth makes about the poem in the Fenwick Note involves his allusion to the use he makes of the Platonic notion of 'a prior state of existence'. This notion is the basis for the solution that develops after the lament of the first four stanzas. When he comes back to the poem, after the lapse of time involved in the protracted compositional process, he expresses, in the first line of the fifth stanza, 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting' (l. 58), the notion that birth is a mode of sleep, that, in some barely graspable sense, we were awake somewhere else. This Platonic idea of the pre-existence of the soul is important for the poem. But it comes close to being what Wallace Stevens would call 'a supreme fiction'. In the Note, Wordsworth does not claim for the idea the status of 'truth', but he does assert that 'tho' the idea is not advanced in revelation, there is nothing there to

[9] See William Wordsworth, *'Poems, in Two Volumes' and Other Poems 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), from which the text of the 'Ode' is taken, for further details. Curtis writes: 'Probably some or all of stanzas 1–4 composed March 27, 1802. Further composition – possibly including some or, less probably, all of stanzas 5–8 – on June 17, 1802. Most of the last seven stanzas probably composed, and the poem completed, early 1804, by March 6', p. 271.

[10] *The Prelude* is quoted from William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

[11] The Fenwick Note is quoted from *'Poems, in Two Volumes' and Other Poems 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis; all quotations from p. 428.

contradict it'. We can entertain it as a possibility: indeed, 'the fall of Man presents an analogy in its favor'; Wordsworth made the 'best use of [the idea] I could as a Poet'. This is a poem that, in the end, like so many great Romantic poems, does not depend on a belief structure outside itself. It is working within its own terms, with whatever materials it can lay hold of, to advance some kind of affirmation. Wholly unlike Shelley's *Adonais* as it is in many respects, it anticipates, in this regard, aspects of the later elegy.

In *Poems, in Two Volumes* the 'Ode' has as its epigraph from Virgil ('*Paulò majora canamus*') the idea of aiming at a loftier tone than is attempted by most of the poems either in *Poems, in Two Volumes* or in *Lyrical Ballads.* It has evident affinities with 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' ('Tintern Abbey') in its fascination with the interplay in life of loss and recompense. The 'Ode' might be seen as 'Tintern Abbey', a few years down the line. There is a continuity between the works, but Wordsworth is moving from the notion that nature never did betray the heart that loved her to the fear that nature is going to do exactly that. At the same time Wordsworth is full of tact about this matter, preferring to talk about 'Earth' (l. 77) rather than 'Nature', and depicting 'Earth' as a 'homely Nurse' (l. 81), where 'homely' has a compassionate irony after the reference to 'God, who is our home' (l. 65). Indeed, a crux is the precise meaning of the word 'nature' in the beautiful turn that Hopkins praises: 'O joy! that in our embers / Is something that doth live, / That nature yet remembers / What was so fugitive!' (ll. 132-5). I assume 'nature', there, means something like 'human nature' but I also wonder whether Wordsworth means to convey a *rapprochement* between human nature and external nature, to suggest that there is in the natural world which he looks at evidence of something that he knows about within his own nature.

In terms of genre, the 'Ode' is perhaps the most impressive example of the Pindaric ode, a form associated with exalted flights of imagination and irregularity of stanzaic design. You can read the poem as falling loosely into three parts that correspond to the traditional divisions of the ode: strophe, antistrophe and epode. In the first part, lines 1 to 57, the poet articulates his sense of loss for the 'glory and the dream' (l. 57) despite his attempts not to grieve. You can see attempts not to grieve in these lines: 'Oh evil day! if I were sullen / While the Earth herself is adorning, / … while the sun shines warm, / And the Babe leaps up on his mother's arm: — / I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!' (ll. 42-3, 48-50). In the repetition of 'I hear' there is a delicately calculated over-insistence. Then, in one of those transitions that gives this poem intermittent hints of a mood close to heartbreak, Wordsworth evokes a different, a more credible mood by way of a sombre triple rhyme. This time the effect is authoritative rather than insistent:

> — But there's a Tree, of many one,
> A single Field which I have look'd upon,
> Both of them speak of something that is gone … (ll. 51-3)

The notion of something 'gone' goes on echoing. In the line, 'Both of them speak of something that is gone', there is absence, but also presence: objects still present 'speak of something that is gone'. The capacity to 'speak' embodies a residual hint of hope. This hope finds confirmation in the following lines:

> The Pansy at my feet
> Doth the same tale repeat:
> Whither is fled the visionary gleam? (ll. 54-6)

'Where has it gone to?' is the question coiled inside the Pansy's 'tale', as the colon at the end of line 55 brings out. And in the section's final line, 'Where is it now, the glory and the dream?' (l. 57), there is the strong sense that 'it', in all its post-numinous belatedness, is

somewhere, albeit somewhere else. 'Now' is worth attention in line 57. Ultimately the 'now' of 'Where is it now, the glory and the dream?' will be recreated in this poem. And it is in this poem that 'glory' – the glory, that is, of the word 'glory', including the possibility that dream corresponds to substance – will be recovered.

In the second part, lines 58 to 131, the personal sense of loss is placed in a larger context. It is explained now, this sense of personal loss he depicts in the first section, as an experience that occurs in every life as we all move further and further away from our origins in pre-existent splendour.

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
> The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
> Hath had elsewhere it's setting,
> And cometh from afar:
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home … (ll. 58-65)

Then Wordsworth describes the remorseless effects of what we now call acculturation as we familiarise ourselves with this world. As the child grows up he is pathetically eager to leave behind his real magnificence and accustom himself to the everyday, as is brought out in the downcast ending of this section. Of the child, who has been called a 'Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!' (l. 114), Wordsworth enquires:

> Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
> The Years to bring the inevitable yoke …? (ll. 126-7)

The phrase 'the inevitable yoke' is probably an echo of Thomas Gray's 'th'inevitable hour' (l. 35) from his 'Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard'.[12] The echo suggests an equivalence between Gray's reference to physical death and the spiritual near–death of the growing child who is 'Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife' (l. 128). The notion of 'blindness', of not seeing what you need to see, is a major thread in the poem's web of imagery. Yet the process of loss does not involve moral failure; this fall is an inevitable consequence of living in time:

> Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
> And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
> Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life! (ll. 129-31)

The inverted foot with which that last line opens mimics the heaviness of the weight with which custom may lie upon a life; diction and versification suggest a pressing to death. And yet custom's weight is 'deep *almost* as life' (emphasis added), reminding us of the work performed by small words in this poem, words such as 'utter', 'ever', 'often' – and here 'almost'. The phrase 'deep almost as life' obscurely hints at a way out; custom is not quite totally suffocating life.

And in the final section, lines 130 to 206, Wordsworth scales the heights, producing the most magnificent poetry of the 'Ode'. If the poetry scales the heights, it does so by pulling

[12]Quoted from *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. David Fairer and Christine Gerrard.(Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

itself out of the depths. One might call it a '*de profundis*' poetry, signalled by the brave, troubled affirmation:

> O joy! that in our embers
> Is something that doth live ... (ll. 132-3)

'Something that doth live': a minimal claim, it names a kind of living at odds with a life-denying force that is 'deep almost as life'. There is 'something' that lives, and it lives because 'nature yet remembers / What was so fugitive' (ll. 134-5). In this final section Wordsworth accepts the fact of loss, very movingly. Although the poet implicitly tells us at the end of the 'Ode' that this is a poem that gives us 'Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears' (l. 206), there are lines that are almost difficult to read without tears, as when Wordsworth asks:

> What though the radiance which was once so bright
> Be now for ever taken from my sight … (ll. 178-9)

The pentameters give plangent expression to a sense of loss; Wordsworth feels the loss as keenly as he felt at the start of the 'Ode', but he brings to it a feelingly stoic, courageous acceptance:

> We will grieve not, rather find
> Strength in what remains behind … (ll. 182-3)

Because of memory, because of the very adult consciousness which in some ways represents a falling away from childhood vision, there is gain as well. Because we have suffered, because we have matured, life is not all just a surrender to custom; there is, countervailingly, an awareness of our condition as human beings, and in that awareness Wordsworth discerns value. The pathos of the poem arises partly from the fact that no child could have written the 'Ode'. Children may be mighty prophets, but it is only the suffering adult poet who can articulate a sense of childhood's complex significance, just as it is only he who can, however lightly and comically, hint at the mutely visionary splendour of Johnny's imaginings in *The Idiot Boy*. Johnny, like the child in this poem, is the other side of words; he is kin to the 'eternal Silence' (l. 158) about which, daringly, the 'Ode' is compelled to speak. But poets must work with words, they are on this side of that wall beyond which Johnny and the child abide, and Wordsworth is very aware of this fact.

It is possible in paraphrasing to suggest that the poem offers its own version of 'thesis/antithesis/synthesis', as though it conveyed a clearly marshalled argument, but the beauty of the poem is the way that it takes you with it on a journey, the way it oscillates between and moves from line to line. Each section is itself made up of conflicts, qualifications, hesitations and subtlisings, caught in the delicate web of Wordsworth's responsive syntax and poetic art. Among the lessons that Shelley learned from Wordsworth was the older poet's ability to construct his poems out of subtle and affecting transitions. Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Ode to the West Wind' show careful study of the way that Wordsworth changes direction. A line from the latter poem such as 'Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is!' (l. 57), drawing itself out of the morass of grief and self-pity in 'I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!' (l. 54), has something of the quality I have tried to describe in 'O joy! that in our embers / Is something that doth live' (quoted from *Major Works*). These transitions give us the sense of a poet who will never simplify his deepest feelings into any neat design. The 'Ode' is a skilfully made poem, but it is open at every stage to hazard, to chance, to new forms of feeling.

III

What I propose to do now is to look in more detail at the poem's transitions and moments of feeling. Possibly the first impression it makes is of combining an austere bareness of diction and great rhythmical freshness. Here is the first stanza:

> There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight
> To me did seem
> Apparell'd 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 which I have seen I now can see no more. (ll. 1-9)

'There was a time': we are taken back into a past when 'every common sight' was 'uncommon'. Later, we hear about 'the light of common day' (l. 76), where 'common' implies an ordinariness that snuffs out the visionary. But 'common' can mean something in which we all share, and its use at the start signals that the poem's matter will concern us all. Then in the third line you get two words which occur several times in the poem, 'To me'. 'To me alone there came a thought of grief' (l. 22), Wordsworth will write, and, again, at the close, 'To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears' (ll. 205-6). 'To me' is Wordsworth's personal signature in the midst of 'common' experience. 'To me did seem' precedes a change of diction in the fourth line as the poem deploys a language that is yearningly grand, 'Apparell'd in celestial light'. The language breaks out of the monosyllabic, clothing itself in the after-remnants of 'celestial light'.[13] Immediately Wordsworth returns to the monosyllables of loss: 'It is not now as it has been of yore', where the words rehearse the fact of loss as though it were an irreducible knowledge. And then we get, in the next line, an effect that offers a clue to the way the poem works: 'Turn wheresoe'er I may'. There is a quality central to the poem in the head-swivelling search implied by the rippling syllables of that 'wheresoe'er'. In the very word 'wheresoe'er', you feel the yearning look, the turning sight. This flaring out of feeling gives way to a line that consolidates the conviction of loss: 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more', an alexandrine that drags its way from the visionary past into the stricken present. The line makes us aware that the poem is engaged in concentrated struggle; the 'now' of line 9 refers not only to a current emotional state but also, as has already been suggested, the verbal activity going on in the poem.

In the next stanza Wordsworth offers us a poetic mimicry of an imaginatively benumbed state. He conveys a mood which might be ventriloquised as saying, 'I can't get beyond a certain state', and he does it, to start with, through muted, deadened statements. At least that is how I have always heard the stanza's opening couplet: 'The Rainbow comes and goes, / And lovely is the Rose' (ll. 10-11). The statements are true, but they are not true enough; they do not have about them the glory and the freshness of a dream. In the following lines, Wordsworth tries to breathe new or, indeed, old life into the wording, as though feeling that the previous lines were inadequate: 'The Moon doth with delight / Look round her when the heavens are bare' (ll. 12-13). Initially the lines sound as though everything is as it always was. Is not this the

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[13] For an illuminating discussion of the phrase, its Miltonic source (in *Paradise Lost*, III. 51), and its function in the poem, see Nicola Zoe Trott, 'Wordsworth, Milton, and the Inward Light', in *Milton, The Metaphysicals, and Romanticism*, ed. Lisa Low and Antony John Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 116-18.

Wordsworth of joy and delight? The subtle difference, here, is that the poet appears to know that he is performing a verbal trick, that he is projecting feeling on to the moon, that he is, indeed, writing a poetry worthy of Hopkins's already quoted praise, 'what a stroke', since, if it reanimates the moon, it does so as a verbal fiction, a question, for example, of the positioning at the start of the line of 'Look'. Immediately Wordsworth returns to the language of benumbed statement

> Waters on a starry night
> Are beautiful and fair;
> The sunshine is a glorious birth … (ll. 13-15)

One can hear a repressed 'But' behind these line. When it emerges, it speaks of something lacking:

> But yet I know, where'er I go,
> That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth. (ll. 17-18)

There, in 'where'er I go', the yearning of the earlier 'wheresoe'er' returns.

Indeed, one aspect of Wordsworth's art that has recently been capturing my attention is the way in which the poetry of the 'Ode' invests words with amplified resonance.[14] One might look at the difference between the line –

> The sunshine is a glorious birth –

and the words,

> there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth.

'Glorious' and 'glory' are cognate words, but they come from opposing sides of the poem's drama. 'The sunshine is a glorious birth', but, though 'glorious', the glory that it has is not the glory that Wordsworth wants. There is a true 'glory' that is missing. This closeness yet farness between 'glorious' and 'glory' suggests a poet who knows that what he has lost is uncannily caught up in, yet wholly removed from, what he still possesses.

In the third stanza Wordsworth seems to try to settle himself, to assert that lament is misplaced, that with such evidence of joyousness in the external world his inner state should be one of joy. One can see anxiety and restlessness in the scrambled tenses of the verse. If you look at the way the stanza opens –

> Now, while the Birds thus sing a joyous song,
> And while the young Lambs bound
> As to the tabor's sound (ll. 19-21) –

you can see how we are placed in the present tense, as though Wordsworth were saying, 'Everything is fine in the present'. And then, strangely, we return to the past. The birds and

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[14] See Helen Vendler's chapter 'Lionel Trilling and Wordsworth's Immortality Ode', in *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 93–114, for acute analysis of what she calls the poem's 'powerfully plotted succession . . . of "wounds" and "cures"' (p. 107). For more detail on the poem's use of internal verbal repetition and echo, see my comments on the poem in the forthcoming book, *Romantic Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. Michael O'Neill and Charles Mahoney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). A few sentences from my Headnote to the 'Ode' in that work overlap a little with sentences in section II of this essay.

lambs may be happy in the present, but Wordsworth writes: ‘To me alone there *came* a thought of grief’ (l. 22; emphasis added). That's slightly odd, isn’t it? I think we are expecting: ‘To me alone there *comes* a thought of grief’ (emphasis added). It is as though the poet were trying to locate the ‘thought of grief’ in the past, but it also suggests that this poet does not just live in the present. Memory of a ‘thought of grief’ turns out to be not wholly distinguishable from a present-tense ‘thought of grief’. Then we get the attempted recovery:

> A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
> And I again am strong. ll. 23-4)

What that ‘timely utterance’ is, critics have debated. ‘Resolution and Independence’ is one suggested candidate, but the compositional dates do not support this conjecture. Perhaps it is the poem itself, or its opening. And what is the nature of the ‘timely utterance’? Is it an utterance that resists grief or is it an utterance that, as it were, exorcises grief by expressing it? One sure thing is that Wordsworth tries to stage a rallying of spirits throughout this stanza, as in the line: ‘I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng’ (l. 27). The poem’s central image of hearing comes into play there. Then Wordsworth writes this enigmatic line: ‘The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep’ (l. 28). Here the poetry moves beyond the merely natural. The ‘Winds’, associated with a ‘corresponding mild creative breeze’ (*The Prelude*, *1805*, I. 43), blow from barely discernible ‘fields of sleep’. Where or what are ‘the fields of sleep’? It is hard to say, but we know that that word ‘sleep’ is going to become important later in the poem when we find out that ‘Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting’. Just opening up in the phrase ‘fields of sleep’ is a glimpse of another world, another domain, a glimpse that, later, Wordsworth will expand into a gaze.

What follows is an assertion that Wordsworth can still respond to the natural world, and here the verse seems to be deliberately strained:

> The fullness of your bliss, I feel — I feel it all.
> O evil day! if I were sullen … (ll. 41-2)

And so forth, until all that attempted rallying, that attempted sense that the appropriate response is one of joy, is quietly just shelved, put to one side, replaced by a far deeper knowledge of particularised loss. There is nothing that can bring back the ‘Tree, of many one’ (l. 51). Loss here is personal, individual; it involves the specific: ‘A single Field which I have look’d upon’ (l. 52) refers to a ‘Field’ that cannot be replaced by any other field. Wordsworth elegises a triangulated relationship between poet, tree and single field. Yet a larger sense of loss finds its way into the poetry, too:

> Both of them speak of something that is gone:
> The Pansy at my feet
> Doth the same tale repeat:
> Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
> Where is it now, the glory and the dream? (ll. 53-7)

These questions, to which Wordsworth will try to find answers, are subtly different: one asks where the ‘visionary gleam’ has ‘gone’; the other where it is ‘now, the glory and the dream’. The ‘gleam’ has both vanished and yet stays, different from and blurring into the ‘glory and the dream’. The writing makes of loss and presence an unentangible skein.

The rest of the poem seeks to find answers, and stanza 5 reads as follows:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere it's setting
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day. (ll. 58-76)

Like some all-knowing but disappointed oculist, the stanza traces a process of diminishing vision. It moves through phases of seeing, as the eyes adjust to 'Shades of the prison-house': a strong metaphor that represents life as a dungeon experience. As the boy grows, there is a kind of assonantal irony; as he is 'growing', the 'Shades … begin to close'. And yet, one of Wordsworth's rallyings then occurs: 'But [nonetheless] He beholds the light, and whence it flows, / He sees it in his joy'. He still beholds the light and he sees its origin; implied here is resistance to the fading of vision. Even in 'The Youth, who daily farther from the East / Must travel, still is Nature's Priest', there is 'still' residual hope. As 'Nature's Priest', it is as though the 'Youth' were professing some kind of natural doctrine, and as though nature were in some way here, for Wordsworth, bound up with 'clouds of glory'. He is 'on his way attended' 'by the vision splendid' as though 'the vision' is accompanying him, but there is an inevitable sense of entropy, of fading.

One moment of particular interest is that line: 'At length the Man perceives it die away'. It is not just that the light dies away, but that 'the Man perceives it die away'; there is an active power involved in seeing that one has lost the capacity to see. This power is the basis of Wordsworth's final affirmation in the 'Ode'. You have, his poem says, to come to terms as a human being with the fact of loss. The capacity for apprehension of loss is itself a kind of gift. That said, 'perceives' is a slightly less active word, or less contemplative word, than 'beholds' a few lines earlier. To behold, here, is to be in a state of grace: vision and its object unite. To perceive is to be analytically at odds with what it is you are looking at. At the end of the stanza, 'And fades into the light of common day', the word 'common' takes on perhaps its least optimistic meaning in the array of Wordsworth's uses of the word; here, it implies a falling away from 'the vision splendid'.

In the next section, or stanza, Wordsworth describes how 'Earth' (l. 77) tries to assist us. Earth now is a 'homely Nurse' (l. 81): not our true parent, but a foster parent doing her best for us, she

doth all she can
To make her Foster-child, her inmate, Man,

Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came. (ll. 81-4)

What Earth offers is a kind of misguided care. It is as if she were supplying a bracing pep-talk: 'you know, it will be better for you if you forgot that you were born in a palace; you have got to adjust to the fact that you are going to live the rest of your life in a prison, but there is much to be enjoyed here, so don't just brood on your past'. So, the 'homely Nurse' is doing her best to make us forget something, as though to remember it would be too painful. But this is not ultimately going to be the poem's solution. It will not be forgetfulness that will come to our aid; it will be memory.

Then we get stanzas 7 and 8, delightful, funny and, I think, finally tragic. When in 'To H. C. Six Years Old', Wordsworth looks at Hartley Coleridge and expresses his fears for the 'happy Child! / That art so exquisitely wild' (ll. 11-12), he feels that the child has nothing to do with life's 'unkindly shocks' (l. 28) and should be like a 'Dew-drop' (l. 27) that 'at the touch of wrong, without a strife / Slips in a moment out of life' (ll. 32-3). In 'To H. C.', as in the 'Ode', Wordsworth's study of metaphysical lyric poetry shines forth, in the use of conceits and varying line-lengths, and Marvell's 'On a Drop of Dew' is clearly in Wordsworth's mind in 'To H. C.'[15] In the 'Ode' Wordsworth, thinking about the child, dwells on the passage, in Blakean terms, from Innocence to Experience; he talks about how we learn, how we adjust, and provides remarkable lines about the psychology of child development. Anyone who has ever been a parent will know that feeling of wanting their children not to want to become grown-up too quickly; it seems such a foolish ambition. Wordsworth conveys his view of the folly of this ambition through the comparison between the child and a 'little Actor' 'Filling from time to time his "humorous stage"' (ll. 102, 103). Samuel Daniel is quoted there, from his dedicatory sonnet (l. 1) to Fulke Greville in *Musophilus*. But behind the whole passage lurks Jacques's speech, 'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players' (2. 7. 139-40) from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.[16] Human beings not only 'play a part'; they rehearse it, in Wordsworth's variation, as his 'little Actor cons another part' (l. 102). Losing their sense of who they are, they think that they must adjust to their culture:

…And with new joy and pride
The little Actor cons another part,
Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That Life brings with her in her Equipage;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation. (ll.101-7)

Wordsworth uses a favourite word at the close, the word 'endless'. But this is not an endlessness of promise, of 'something evermore about to be', as he puts it in *The Prelude*,

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[15] See Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth Reading 1800-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 142-3, for details of Wordsworth's possible reading of Marvell (including 'On a Drop of Dew') 'by March 1802' (p. 142). For views, largely sceptical, on the possible influence of Vaughan on Wordsworth's 'Ode', see the same work, pp. 263-4, and John T. Shawcross, 'Kidnapping the Poets: The Romantics and Henry Vaughan', in *Milton, The Metaphysicals, and Romanticism*, ed. Low and Harding, pp. 185-203. However, the fact of difference between Vaughan and Wordsworth cogently noted by Shawcross, and located by him in the poets' 'attitude toward God' (p. 198), should not, in my view, diminish the value of comparative study of the two poets, who evidently do share a fascination with the meanings (however different) lodged in nature, the idea of the soul's pre-existence, and the yearning to recapture a former state.

[16] Shakespeare is quoted from *the Complete Works: Compact Edition*, gen eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

1805, VI. 542. Nor is it an endlessness of the illimitable. This is the endlessness of the merely recurrent, until an original spark is extinguished, the nightmare that Shelley explores in *The Triumph of Life*.

Then, in stanza 8, we get an abrupt transition. We move from tragic-comic teasing (if you like) of the child engaged in 'endless imitation' to a stanza stigmatised by Coleridge as full of '*mental* bombast', where there is 'a disproportion of thought to the circumstance and occasion'. Coleridge's is a suggestive comment, if one strips it of its benign hostility, and allows for Wordsworth's awareness that his writing might be regarded as '*mental* bombast'. Wordsworth raises the stakes, challenging and overwhelming the disbelief of his former-collaborator, with his sardonic 'These would be tidings indeed'.[17] In effect, the writing daringly invites us to see such 'bombast' as a means to the truth. At any rate, Wordsworth daringly changes tack and apostrophises the child:

> Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
> Thy Soul's immensity… (ll. 108-9)

The line 'Thy Soul's immensity' has a line to itself as the poem lifts itself to the heights of its subject. Wordsworth is trying to remind child and reader of a true spiritual grandeur, whose destiny, nature and home are bound up with the 'Soul's immensity'. The lines introduce conceits that would not be out of place in a metaphysical lyric. A child turns out to be, in the next line, 'best Philosopher' (l. 110). We may think of philosophers as people who toil through life trying to develop wisdom, but Wordsworth shocks us into a new sense of what a love of wisdom might be when he asserts that it is the child who knows more than any Socrates or Plato or Aristotle. Images of seeing recur when the child is presented as an 'Eye among the blind' (l. 111). Because the child is 'deaf and silent', not yet fully comprehending human speech, it is, in a sense, superior as it 'read'st the eternal deep, / Haunted for ever by the eternal mind' (ll. 112-13). Later, that 'eternal deep' will flower into the image of the 'immortal sea' (l. 166). Wordsworth carries his conceits to the point where we realise he is not merely being daringly imaginative; he is straining to say something literally true when he addresses the child as 'Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!' (l. 114). The language conveys a sense that the child knows everything that we toil the rest of our lives to try to find: he is one 'On whom those truths do rest, / Which we are toiling all our lives to find' (l. 115-16); he is seen as caught up in the awe-inspiring presence of his own 'Immortality', when Wordsworth addresses him thus: 'Thou, over whom thy Immortality / Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave' (ll. 117-18).

This is a 'Day' that differs from that which provides the earlier 'light of common day'. This 'Day' has put night to flight, even as it seems darkly obscure, even foreboding, brooding over the child like a 'Master o'er a Slave', constituting 'A Presence', as Wordsworth says in one of his most majestic lines, 'which is not to be put by' (l. 119). This 'Presence' cannot be 'put by'; it will come back. Then come the lines that Coleridge found terrifying and Wordsworth cut in deference to his friend's response, lines that present the child as one

> To whom the grave
> Is but a lonely bed, without the sense or sight
> Of day or the warm light,

[17] *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), II. 136, 138. Some of Coleridge's particular points open up how mysteriously Wordsworth is writing, as when Coleridge chooses not to examine 'the propriety of making a "master *brood* over a slave"'; II. 138. The expression is, indeed, intriguing; appropriately, perhaps, for a poem first published in 1807, it implies an unusually concerned slave-owner.

A place of thought where we in waiting lie… (ll 120-3)[18]

'A place of thought' recalls and tallies with, even answers, the syntactical shape of 'A Presence'; the grave, for the child, lacks 'the sense or sight / Of day or the warm light', but it serves as a springboard for resurrection. Both 'Presence' and 'place' participate in the indestructibility of 'thought', so the verse enjoins us to believe. Wordsworth is double-minded, as so often in the poem: he captures both the appeal of 'the *warm* light' (emphasis added) and the lure of the grave, which in turn is finally less claustrophobic cell (Coleridge's sense) than palatial ante-chamber.

It is with such palatial splendour in mind that we can understand the pain behind Wordsworth's questioning turn:

Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of untam'd pleasures, on thy Being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The Years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife? (ll. 124-8)

'Why is it', Wordsworth asks the child, 'that when you are on your "Being's height", at the topmost point of human potential, subject to no acculturating laws that tame your "pleasures", why is it that at this stage you wilfully "provoke" a process that will result in your wearing "the inevitable yoke"'? The tangled syntax of the long sentence does justice to the 'glorious' state enjoyed by the child and to the anguishing sadness of the fact that the child seems wilfully to bring on that state's passage into something positively inglorious. In 'blindly' Wordsworth makes a contrast with the visionary seeing granted the child as an 'Eye among the blind'.

And then, after the deadening sense of failure, when 'custom' (l. 130) settles on the child 'Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life' (l. 131). Wordsworth, at the start of stanza 9, finds a way out of despair in the great opening transition: 'O joy! that in our embers...'. This line is the start of a passage in which Wordsworth conjures up some kind of answer to the questions formulated earlier at the close of stanza IV. The word 'embers' implies something burnt out, and the consolation is consciously minimal, yet it gathers momentum as Wordsworth expresses gratefulness

That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!

Then the sorrowing but gravely joyous organ-swell of full pentameters blares forth: 'The thought of our past years in me doth breed / Perpetual benedictions' (ll. 136-7). 'Thought', again, takes centre-stage, as it will at the poem's end; thought, consciousness, reflection, all demand acceptance and high regard. 'In me' recalls 'To me' of line 3, insisting on the internalised state of feeling and thought in the poem. 'Perpetual benedictions' might be a phrase from some liturgical rite, resonant with a sense of confirmed thankfulness. But any hint of the pompous is sent packing from the stanza's pomp when, in the most intricate syntax in the poem, Wordsworth tells us what he is not giving blessings for:

…not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest … (ll. 137-8)

[18] In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge hopes that it is not the case 'that the whole meaning of the passage is reducible to the assertion, that a *child*, who by the bye at six years old would have been better instructed in most christian families, has no other notion of death than that of lying in a dark, cold place', II. 140-1.

What follows is a passage that one needs to bear in mind when people speak of Wordsworth as making a simplistic cult of childhood. He doesn't! Childhood is a thought-baffling state for Wordsworth. Yes, he sees the worth of

> Delight and liberty, the simple creed
> Of Childhood, whether fluttering or at rest,
> With new-born hope for ever in his breast:— (ll. 139-41)

Yet if Wordsworth implies that, in some moods, he could feel that 'the simple creed / Of Childhood' was of significance, it is not, for him, when the crunch comes, why childhood matters: it is

> Not for these I raise
> The song of thanks and praise;
> But for those obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things
> Fallings from us, vanishings… (ll. 142-6)

It is by means of 'those obstinate questionings', those 'fallings' and 'vanishings' that childhood offers a legacy praised by Wordsworth; it was a time valuable for its enigmas and mysteries, for the

> Blank misgivings of a Creature
> Moving about in worlds not realiz'd … (ll. 147-8)

'Creature', rhymed intriguingly with 'Nature' in 'our mortal Nature' (l. 149), links 'our mortal Nature' with our created state, while 'Creature' suggests, I think, that the child instinctively knows it is the product of a creator; the 'Blank misgivings' are those of a creature, semi-aware of having come from somewhere else, of being created, and now 'Moving about in worlds not realiz'd'. This line suggests the 'abyss of idealism' of which Wordsworth speaks in the Fenwick Note. In this state, life is 'not realiz'd', as though some mist blurred the contours of objects, as though existence were an evanescent fluid failing to solidify; it does not make sense and yet it yields up a 'dim and undetermined sense / Of unknown modes of being', as the lines already quoted from *The Prelude* have it. Or, in the words of the 'Ode', it is a time of

> High instincts, before which our mortal Nature
> Did tremble like a guilty Thing surpriz'd… (ll. 149-50)

Evoking how that side of us that is merely mortal trembles in the presence of those 'High instincts', Wordsworth recalls Horatio's description of the vanishing of the ghost of Hamlet's father: 'And then it started like a guilty thing / Upon a fearful summons' (*Hamlet*, 1. i. 129-30). Shakespeare's ghost now comes to stand for 'our mortal Nature'; indeed, in an uncanny reworking of Shakespeare's lines, the ghost is associated with the 'mortal' and the 'High instincts' with those powers to which it is subject. The verb 'tremble' registers a deep frisson of near-traumatic shock, and perhaps when Hopkins talks about being 'all in a tremble' it is this part of the poem that he has particularly in mind. In what follows the syntactical convolutions recur: 'But for those first affections' (l. 151), Wordsworth says, his 'But for' meaning 'Only for' — it is only for 'those first affections' that he raises the earlier 'song of thanks and praise'. To find the construction governing the second 'But for', you have to go back to 'Not for these I

raise'. Wordsworth's sense, in fact, is inextricable from our feeling of having to grasp with some difficulty at his meanings, a feeling shaped and mimicked by his syntax. He values 'those first affections, / Those shadowy recollections' (ll. 151–2), in part, because they are 'shadowy'. Here, in effect and somewhat remarkably, Wordsworth says: 'I don't really know what they were, but what I do know is that they govern our lives'. These 'affections' and 'recollections', 'be they what they may, / Are yet the fountain light of all our day' (ll. 153-4). They provide, as that neo-Plotinian image of the 'fountain light' suggests, the origin of all illumination in our existences. They 'Are yet a master light of all our seeing' and

Uphold us, cherish us and make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence… (ll. 155-8).

They constitute 'truths that wake, / To perish never' (ll. 158-9), where the first verb links with associations of sleeping and awaking running through the poem, and where it is part of the qualifying nature of Wordsworth's writing that the assertion 'To perish never' brings to mind the idea that the truths could easily perish. The verse is full of such qualifications, as when Wordsworth says of these 'truths' that there is nothing that 'can utterly abolish or destroy' (l. 163) them. 'Utterly' is an important word, without which the line would risk glibness. The adverb suggests that 'listlessness' and 'mad endeavour' (l. 160), both weariness and an excess of energy, and 'all that is at enmity with joy' (l. 162), can do a great deal to abolish or destroy these truths, but they cannot 'utterly' destroy them. The poem then moves into smoother and grander waters, itself enjoying 'a season of calm weather' (l. 164) here, a calm felt in the poem's rhythms and the clarification of its metaphorical patterns of seeing and hearing:

Hence, in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore… (ll. 164-9)

As adults, thanks to our 'first affections' and 'shadowy recollections', we have ourselves a glimpse of some kind of eternity, on the shore of which we see the children 'sport', 'And [in a magnificent alexandrine] hear the mighty waters rolling evermore' (l. 170).

The line picks up and gives fuller visionary form to the earlier image of 'the eternal Deep'. Another poet would have stopped his poem at the close of stanza IX, ending the poem on a triumphant high note. Wordsworth does not do this. He returns to the earlier scene of natural beauty, to the birds singing and the lambs bounding, and he says: 'We in thought will join your throng' (l. 174). 'We' can only join the natural 'throng' 'in thought'; we cannot participate in any happily 'thoughtless' way. For all his foregoing 'shadowy' affirmations, Wordsworth is compelled to restate his sense of loss:

What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind,
In the primal sympathy

Which having been must ever be,
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering,
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind. (ll. 178-89)

The lines, 'We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind', are powerful because we feel, in them, an abiding grief. The two 'though' clauses, 'What though the radiance' (l. 178) and 'Though nothing can bring back the hour' (l. 180), stoically quiver with a renewed conviction of loss; the second 'though' is even more absolute as a statement since, repressing the word 'What', it cuts itself adrift momentarily from the gesture of near-defiance in 'What though'. Personal agency seems irrelevant: a 'radiance' has been 'for ever taken from my sight'; its loss, in that sense, has nothing to do with the poet. Yet Wordsworth makes the word 'ever' actors in a Janus-faced drama. Against the view that 'radiance' has been 'for ever taken from my sight', Wordsworth places his trust 'In the primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be'. These are absolute poles here: a sight has been 'for ever' taken from him, but there is a 'primal sympathy' which must 'ever be'.

The affirmations are complex, as when Wordsworth speaks of 'soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering'. The idea of 'suffering' as the source of 'soothing thoughts' is not automatically straightforward, but the verse's sound patterns seek to persuade us that there is a connection here. 'Out of' allows 'suffering' its abiding reality. These 'soothing thoughts' have, I suppose, to do with 'faith', and with 'years that bring the philosophic mind'. In the end, though, do we think the 'Ode' is a great poem because Wordsworth has won his way through to a 'faith' that means he can now understand or comprehend the function of 'suffering'? Do we think it is a great poem because he has discovered a 'philosophic mind'? Or do we think it is a great poem because he has been able to express the ebb and flow of different yet composite feelings? Wordsworth seems, finally, not to be wholly happy with the idea that the 'philosophic mind' brings some kind of solution. With infinite tact, he wishes to explain himself to the natural world: 'don't think', he seems to say, 'that I have left you behind':

I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway… (ll. 193-4)

He reaffirms his bond with the natural scene outside himself:

I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripp'd lightly as they… (ll. 195-6)

Yet, as the last stanza proceeds, it becomes clear that the way the poet feels about the natural world is coloured by his sense of bravely withheld and bracingly managed personal loss:

The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality… (ll. 199-201)

I think 'take' there is used in deliberate opposition to the earlier 'now for ever taken from my sight'. The radiance has been taken but now 'The Clouds … / *Take* a sober colouring' (emphasis added). 'Another race hath been, and other palms are won', Wordsworth assures us and himself. His biblical reference (there is probably an allusion to I Corinthians 9: 24: 'Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may

obtain'), suggests that the poet has embraced a vocation, one that involves an awareness of the still sad music of humanity.

We arrive at the last lines of the poem. Why are these lines so extraordinary? Well, a couple of things invite attention. We notice how graciously Wordsworth includes us all (the condition of which he speaks is, indeed, 'common') as he gives

> Thanks to the human heart by which we live… (l. 203)

This is central to Wordsworth, the sense that all of us have one common heart, a heart 'by which we live'. It is not just the bodily organ that keeps us going as it pulses away, but it is, metaphorically, as the traditional seat of feeling, the faculty that gives meaning to our lives. It is our capacity for feeling that matters. In the next line Wordsworth gives 'Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears'. Earlier, he spoke of raising 'The song of thanks and praise'. At the close, 'Thanks' goes to the human heart, not to the philosophic mind; it goes not to 'the faith that looks through death' but to the 'human heart by which we live'.

But then, true to another side of Wordsworth, the side which remarks in *The Prelude* that 'Points have we all of us within our souls / Where all stand single' (*1805*, III. 186-7), the 'Ode' returns, at the very close, to the poet's 'single' individuality. He is not claiming we all share his experience. Not is he boasting of his specialness. Rather he is just stating something incontrovertible. In line 205, 'To me the meanest flower that blows', lets us know that the poet derives saddened, unique nutriment from his feeling for the natural world, while the line's final two words 'can give' allow for that giving to be intermittent, a kind of grace. What they can give, in the poem's final and finest line, are 'Thoughts', a word alighted on with strength yet delicacy in the stress-shift, 'that do often lie too deep for tears' (l. 206). 'These 'Thoughts', the last use of a word crucial to the poem, lie 'too deep for tears' and almost, one feels, too deep for words; they belong in some realm the other side of sorrow.

For Wordsworth, they are reachable 'often', not always. I recall Jonathan Wordsworth suggesting, in a class in his room in Exeter College, 1974, in a closing murmur, that one should prize that word 'often' — presumably as a word that rescues the line from anything facile or grandstanding. Wordsworth does not bequeath some magically poetic access to serenity; chanciness remains. We are still creatures who live in an unpredictable universe, but we can be grateful that Wordsworth, out of the depths of his response to human 'mortality' and his sense, too, of human 'intimations of immortality', was able to raise so remarkable a 'song of thanks and praise'.

Life Writing in Wordsworth's 1807 *Poems in Two Volumes*

By DAVID CHANDLER

> Glory of youth glowed in his soul;
> Where is that glory now?
> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Songs of Travel*

> The Ordinary World in one sense is the place you came from last.
> Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*

Of the 115 poems in Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes*, as many as 50 were written in 1802, and another 20 or so in 1803.[1] Immediately after this period, as is well known, he returned to *The Prelude*, extending it into the *Thirteen-Book* poem familiar today. Less well known is the fact that Wordsworth made an earlier attempt to enlarge *The Prelude* immediately *before* this period, in late 1801. The present essay argues that it is, accordingly, useful to read many of the poems published in 1807 as immediately 'framed' by important *Prelude* work, and as responding to concerns and problems encountered when Wordsworth attempted to extend the *Two-Part* (1799) version of that poem devoted to his childhood and youth.

In mid-1804, with *The Prelude* growing apace, Wordsworth glanced at the poem's history and, using the metaphor of the stream of inspiration, declared it had 'stopp'd for years; / Not heard again until a little space / Before last primrose-time' (VII, 11-13).[2] The clear implication is that *The Prelude* had 'stopp'd' between 1799, when the *Two-Part* version of the poem was completed, and early 1804. But this simplifies matters, for on 26 December 1801 Dorothy Wordsworth noted in her journal 'Wm wrote part of the poem to Coleridge', and the following day she recorded 'Mary wrote some lines of the 3rd part of Wm's poem which he brought to read to us when we came home'.[3] There are no more records of work on *The Prelude* until 11 January 1803, when Dorothy again records that 'William was working at his poem to C' (137).[4] (The surviving *Grasmere Journal* breaks off just after this entry, leaving the tantalizing possibility that further work may have been done on the 'poem to C' in 1803.) Scholars have paid little attention to *The Prelude* in 1801-03, but some knowledge of what happened then sheds valuable light not only on the much more successful extension of the poem in 1804, but on that great outflow of shorter poems in 1802-03 which feature so prominently in *Poems in Two Volumes*.

In determining what Wordsworth wrote in 1801, the surviving manuscripts are of little help. A few scraps of verse from the opening of Book III can be connected to Dorothy's claim that work was done on a '3rd part', but there is nothing more. It is possible, however, to estimate roughly how much of *The Prelude* was written in its 'stopp'd' period. The evidence is set out elsewhere, and need not be repeated here:

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[1] Many of the poems can be dated quite precisely; others not. In cases where there is uncertainty I have dated the poems to the year in which they seem most likely to have been written (thus a poem known to have been composed between March 1803 and March 1804 seems most likely to be a poem of 1803, and I have treated it as such).

[2] All quotations from *The Prelude* are, unless otherwise noted, from *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark. L. Reed, 2 vols. (Ithaca, NY, 1991).

[3] *The Grasmere Journals*, ed. Pamela Woof (Oxford, 1991), 53.

[4] Ibid. 137.

suffice it to say that Wordsworth extended *The Prelude* by something like 200 lines in these years.[5] The first scholar to work through the relevant evidence was Ernest De Selincourt, who concluded '[in 1800-03] very little was done, probably not more than 100 to 200 lines of Book III, and certain odd passages of verse which were afterwards incorporated in later books'.[6] His assessment was not improved until, half a century later, Jonathan Wordsworth and Stephen Gill proposed 'it … virtually certain that the point reached in December 1801 was *1805* [*The Thirteen-Book Prelude*], III. 167'.[7] The precision of their claim involves the use of other evidence, to be detailed shortly.

It is useful to consider where Wordsworth had got in those first 167 lines of Book III. The two parts of *The Two-Part Prelude*, completed in 1799, had established a broadly chronological shape, and described Wordsworth's childhood and youth; the obvious continuation of the poem was a discussion of what happened to Wordsworth after the age of seventeen, the obvious event demanding treatment his move to Cambridge University. Book III accordingly begins with a brief account of his arrival in the university town, and wonder at what he saw there. The tone is buoyant: 'My spirit was up', Wordsworth says, 'my thoughts were full of hope' (l. 16). A few lines later he exclaims: 'fresh day / Of pride and pleasure!' (ll. 22-23). His life feels like a dream because of the extraordinary change of scene: 'Strange transformation for a mountain Youth, / A northern Villager!' (ll. 32-33). After a few more lines on his 'Gentleman's array' (l. 43) and modest room in St. John's College, he continues:

> Of College labours, of the Lecturer's Room,
> All studded round, as thick as chairs could stand
> With loyal Students, faithful to their books,
> Half-and-half Idlers, hardy Recusants,
> And honest Dunces;—of important days,
> Examinations, when the man was weigh'd
> As in the balance!—of excessive hopes,
> Tremblings, withal, and commendable fears,
> Small jealousies, and triumphs good or bad
> I make short mention; things they were which then
> I did not love, nor do I love them now.
> Such glory was but little sought by me
> And little won. But it is right to say
> That even so early, from the first crude days
> Of settling-time in this my new abode,
> Not seldom I had melancholy thoughts,
> From personal and family regards,
> Wishing to hope without a hope; some fears
> About my future wordly maintenance;
> And, more than all, a strangeness in my mind,

[5] Reed (ed.), *Prelude*, i. 12-18. Perhaps I should note that (besides setting out the statistical evidence) Reed argues here that the main addition to *The Prelude* in 1801-03 was the so-called 'post-Preamble' preceding the 'Was it for this' question that *The Two-Part Prelude* had commenced with. Jonathan Wordsworth rejected this in his Penguin edition of *The Prelude* (1995). I am convinced Reed is wrong, and hope to publish a full discussion of the issue in the near future.
[6] *The Prelude* (Oxford, 1926), xxxv.
[7] 'The Two-Part *Prelude* of 1798-99', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 72 (1973), 503-25, p. 524.

A feeling that I was not for that hour,
Nor for that place. But wherefore be cast down? (ll. 60-81)

At this point, instead of simply continuing his poem with new verse, describing his Cambridge experiences, Wordsworth 'borrowed' 86 lines from his earlier poem, 'The Pedlar', written in 1798 as part of *The Ruined Cottage*. Wordsworth is known to have been working on a revision of 'The Pedlar', by then an independent poem, in December 1801, immediately before Dorothy described him working on the '3rd part' of 'the poem to C'; from this Jonathan Wordsworth and Stephen Gill inferred, persuasively, that Wordsworth's main effort at this time was to incorporate 'The Pedlar' lines into *The Prelude*, extending that poem to what is now Book III, line 167. 'The Pedlar' was written in the third person and described the idealized early life of an itinerant pedlar. Noting that his protagonist was 'untaught / In the dead lore of schools undisciplined', Wordsworth had put the rhetorical question 'Why should he grieve?' and continued with a rhapsodic passage on how nature herself had been the pedlar's teacher.[8] Adapting the question to 'Why should I grieve?' he now continued *The Prelude* thus:

Why should I grieve? I was a chosen Son.
For hither I had come with holy powers
And faculties, whether to work or feel:
To apprehend all passions and all moods
Which time, and place, and season do impress
Upon the visible universe; and work
Like changes there by force of my own mind. (ll. 82-88)

There are, I suppose, two ways of understanding this incorporation of material from 'The Pedlar' into *The Prelude*. Jonathan Wordsworth and Stephen Gill stated that 'this mood [the pedlar's] had characterized his [Wordsworth's] early Cambridge days'.[9] Their argument, in other words, is that 'The Pedlar' was disguised autobiography and Wordsworth now simply dropped the disguise. My objection is that even if 'The Pedlar' is read as straightforward autobiography—I prefer to consider it, following Wordsworth, fantasy autobiography[10]—there is no reason at all to connect its 'mood' with 'early Cambridge days' apart from the circular argument that Wordsworth did use the lines at this point in *The Prelude*. Almost nothing is known of Wordsworth's 'mood' in 1787-88 save what he tells us in *The Prelude*, and it would be rash to conclude that when actually at Cambridge he made the sort of distinction between 'early … days' and later that gives the completed Book III its odd shape. The only evidence from the period itself is *An Evening Walk* and some shorter poems; the former is described by Ben Ross Schneider Jr., in the fullest study of Wordsworth's Cambridge years, as 'effectively demonstrat[ing] the power of melancholy over the undergraduate poet's mind'.[11] Even allowing for the difference of idiom, there is certainly little in *An Evening Walk* to suggest that the undergraduate Wordsworth was experiencing the lonely raptures

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[8] *The Ruined Cottage* MS. B, ll. 74-76. Quoted from *The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca, NY, 1979), 46.
[9] Wordsworth and Gill, p. 523.
[10] Wordsworth told Isabella Fenwick that 'the character I have represented in his [the pedlar's] person is chiefly an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances.' *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London, 1993), 79.
[11] *Wordsworth's Cambridge Education* (Cambridge, 1957), 80.

described in ‘The Pedlar’, and from there taken into *The Prelude*. The other way to interpret the incorporation of ‘The Pedlar’ lines, the one I favour, is to understand them as a defensive fiction. Wordsworth found it impossible to discuss Cambridge in the positive way he had discussed the Lake District, so substituted the ‘Pedlar’ lines which emphasise private communion with nature but have nothing to do with Cambridge at all.[12]

Whether the adapted material in Book III is read as literally reflecting Wordsworth’s ‘mood’ in 1787-88, or as a defensive fiction standing in place of troublesome memories, there can be little doubt that it led to a crisis in *The Prelude*’s development. In *The Two-Part Prelude* Wordsworth had, with great power, been able to relate his individual development to environmental factors. The poem is full of the sights and sounds of the Lake District, and Wordsworth’s response to these is shown to be essential to his imaginative growth as a poetic, nature-loving young man. But this method proved inadequate to certain challenges that his university years posed, and in late 1801 Wordsworth essentially decided *not* to write about Cambridge. The first 59 lines of Book III do not get beyond a picture-postcard style approach to the town and university; there is nothing to make the reader feel there was anything unique or very personal about Wordsworth’s response to the place. The paragraph beginning ‘Of College labours’, quoted above, starts to sound more personal, and when Wordsworth says he felt ‘a strangeness’ in his mind we finally feel that a really Wordsworthian note is being struck. But hardly is this note heard, than Wordsworth is borrowing from ‘The Pedlar’ and the ultimate point of that borrowing is to say that Wordsworth’s most precious experiences at Cambridge had nothing to do with Cambridge. The adapted lines represent Wordsworth as delighting in an inner world of his own:

> Unknown, unthought of, yet I was most rich,
> I had a world about me; ’twas my own,
> I made it: for it only liv’d to me,
> And to the God who look’d into my mind. (ll. 141-44)

Having this sort of inner world, even in the context of a defensive fiction, may have been very wonderful, of course; but emphasizing it didn’t help Wordsworth continue a poem which had been built on the premise that a dynamic exchange is possible between self and environment. Not surprisingly, then, this first attempt to discuss his student life quickly ran out of steam. That this internal turn was essentially a dead end is clear in the following paragraph, lines 168-94, which I strongly suspect was also written before 1804: perhaps in 1803, when Dorothy records further work on *The Prelude*. This includes the lines:

> Points have we all of us within our souls,
> Where all stand single; this I feel, and make

[12] It is worth invoking Duncan Wu’s, *Wordsworth: An Inner Life* (Oxford, 2002) here. Wu argues that Wordsworth’s poetry was essentially informed by grief until he met Coleridge, who then exerted a warping effect on Wordsworth’s native genius. ‘The Pedlar’ was written under Coleridge’s influence, and is accordingly ‘not fully Wordsworthian’ (118); Wu suggests that ‘many readers still find Armytage’s [the pedlar’s] life too idealized, too programmed to persuade’ (117). In the terms of Wu’s study (if I understand them correctly), ‘The Pedlar’ lines cannot possibly be a description of Wordsworth’s ‘mood’ in ‘early Cambridge days’. (One of the many commendable aspects of *Wordsworth: An Inner Life* is, incidentally, the careful attention Wu pays to the poetry Wordsworth actually wrote at Cambridge.)

Breathings for incommunicable powers (ll. 186-88)

—which surely mark a sense of limits reached. Wordsworth seems to declare that he has advanced as far as autobiography can go.

Here *The Prelude* could easily have come to an end, though not exactly a conclusion. But in early 1804 Wordsworth quite suddenly began extending it with a fluency and success that contrasts revealingly with his faltering attempts to move it forward in 1801, and perhaps in 1803. A new note is struck almost immediately:

> Enough: for now into a populous Plain
> We must descend.—A Traveller I am
> And all my Tale is of myself; even so,
> So be it, if the pure in heart delight
> To follow me; and Thou O honor'd Friend!
> Who in my thoughts art ever at my side,
> Uphold, as heretofore, my fainting steps.
> It hath been told already how my sight
> Was dazzled by the novel show, and how,
> Erelong, I did into myself return.
> So did it seem, and so, in truth, it was.
> Yet this was but short-liv'd: thereafter came
> Observance less devout. (ll. 195-207)

It is here, with what I would like to think were the first lines written in 1804, that Book III, and ultimately *The Prelude* as a whole, gets significantly redirected. The notion of 'descent', and the fear of 'fainting steps', prepare the reader for more troublesome revelations. In three lines ('It hath been … into myself return') Wordsworth tersely summarises the earlier part of the book. The transcendent spiritual revelations incorporated from 'The Pedlar' are dismissed as, after all, merely temporary ('Yet this was but short-liv'd'). 'Observance less devout' sets the tone for the rest of the Book, justifying the inclusion of another description of university life, now represented as having had a deleterious effect on the young poet:

> …easily I pass'd
> From the remembrances of better things,
> And slipp'd into the week-day works of youth… (ll. 242-44)

With the 'descent' into the 'populous Plain' Wordsworth was hesitantly starting to build a 'Fall' structure into his poem. It was this idea of a 'Fall' which drove the expansion of *The Prelude* in 1804, and that was central to the idea of the projected five-book poem, as Jonathan Wordsworth persuasively demonstrated.[13] There is no hint of it in the first 194 lines. The final version of Book III has a curious doubled structure. It begins with descriptions of Cambridge life, then says this had no effect on the poet, who inhabited an imaginative world of his own; it then continues with further descriptions of Cambridge life, and suggests that this did, after all, corrupt Wordsworth's imagination and poetic sensibility. The result is not particularly satisfactory, which may explain, in part, why Book III has always been among the least admired parts of *The Prelude*.

[13] *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982), 235-46.

In my understanding Wordsworth came to realise quite early on, certainly by the end of 1801, that he couldn't say anything very positive about Cambridge, and that this was a problem for a poem which had so far been almost wholly positive. In retrospect it can be recognised that confronting the problem of Cambridge was central to Wordsworth's entire life writing project. It forced him to choose between presenting himself as autonomous, immune to his environment (the choice made defensively in 1801), or as susceptible to negative influences (the choice made reluctantly in 1804). Similarly, it forced him to choose between presenting his life as a more or less continuous progress towards philosophic insight (the choice made defensively in 1801), or as capable of losses, reversals, stagnation (the choice made reluctantly in 1804). This is not surprising: Cambridge was, after all, the place where the youth Wordsworth became the man Wordsworth. *The Two-Part Prelude* had established Wordsworth's youth as 'a time of rapture' (I, 458)[14] and increasing understanding of the workings of nature and the mind. In moving on to discuss what happened afterwards Wordsworth had to reflect on the overall shape of his life, and the connection between childhood and maturity. Several poems in the *Poems in Two Volumes* ponder just these issues, and are caught, as it were, between the larger life narratives Wordsworth was shifting between in *The Prelude*.

Less than three months after *The Prelude* was laid aside, March 1802 produced a remarkable crop of autobiographical lyrics, among them 'To a Butterfly', 'To the Cuckoo', 'My heart leaps up', and the first four stanzas of the 'Intimations Ode'—probably written in that order. Considering these poems as a group, Gene W. Ruoff argues that 'we cannot possibly reconstruct a coherent Wordsworthian way of thinking about the relationship between childhood and maturity at this time. His writing is exploratory in nature'.[15] That is surely going too far: there are consistent elements in these poems, though also a sense of experiment as Wordsworth, with the freedom encouraged by his lyric mode, tries out various ways of thinking about the shape of his life. 'To a Butterfly' and 'To the Cuckoo' both explicitly represent childhood as what the latter poem calls a 'golden time', and by extension it is easy to feel that something similar is implied in the other two poems (Ruoff disagrees, arguing, for example, that the four stanzas of the 'Ode' do not have to be about childhood at all). Thus far they all agree with *The Two-Part Prelude*. If this much is accepted, they are also concerned with the loss, or threatened loss, of that 'golden time'—and to some extent the question of what to do about it.

The first written of these poems, eventually presented as the first of the controversial 'Moods of My Own Mind' in the 1807 collection, was 'To a Butterfly'. Here Wordsworth appeals to the butterfly to stay near him because of the happy childhood memories it generates: 'Float near me; do not yet depart! / Dead times revive in thee' (ll. 5-6).[16] 'Dead' is an arresting word, suggesting both *forgotten* and *ended*, though bearing in mind the vivid childhood scenes evoked in *The Prelude*, it seems likely that *ended* was the dominant sense in Wordsworth's mind. The subsequent reference to a '*solemn* image' (my emphasis) of 'My Father's Family' reinforces this (ll. 8-9). Wordsworth's father had died in 1783, leading to the breaking up of the family: perhaps most painfully

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[14] These words do not actually appear in the *Two-Part* poem, but the feeling they describe is very much in evidence.

[15] *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Making of the Major Lyrics 1802-1804* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1989), 38.

[16] All quotations from *Poems in Two Volumes* are from *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY, 1983).

to the separation from Dorothy, who Wordsworth goes on to recall playing with in the second stanza. Wordsworth avoids defining adult life in this poem, but suggests that happy childhood days are now past, though vivid memories of them can be prompted by the sight of a butterfly.

'To the Cuckoo' works in a similar way, though here Wordsworth puts more emphasis on the act of reviving 'dead times', less on those times themselves. The sound of the cuckoo brings Wordsworth a feeling of joy, and this prompts memories of childhood:

> [It is the] same whom in my School-boy days
> I listen'd to; that Cry
> Which made me look a thousand ways;
> In bush, and tree, and sky.
>
> To seek thee did I often rove
> Through woods and on the green;
> And thou wert still a hope, a love;
> Still long'd for, never seen!
>
> And I can listen to thee yet;
> Can lie upon the plain
> And listen, till I do beget
> That golden time again.
>
> O blessed Bird! the earth we pace
> Again appears to be
> An unsubstantial, faery place;
> That is fit home for Thee! (ll. 17-32)

'To the Cuckoo' makes it clear that the 'golden time' of childhood is over, but that it can be recovered, albeit temporarily, through the associative power of the imagination. The willingness to acknowledge some sort of loss, however indirectly, is of great significance for Wordsworth's larger life writing project. It was what he had found it hard to do in *The Prelude* in late 1801, and that he continued to find hard when attempting to be at all specific about the when and how. But in these short lyrics the difference between a joyous and imaginative childhood and a less joyous, less imaginative maturity could serve as a sort of given, enabling poetry that did not need to explain itself.

The difficulty Wordsworth had accepting the idea of loss, even in these short lyrics, is evident in 'My heart leaps up'. Some readers respond to this as a simple, joyous poem; others, placing more emphasis on the sense of overstatement ('Or let me die!'), agree with William Heath that it reflects a mood of 'desperation'.[17] I incline more to the latter reading: there is an underlying fear that the heart will not always leap; that the power of the child's response will diminish, even if it has not already done so. *I am unchanged* is advanced both as a claim and prayer; as such 'My heart leaps up' seems to echo the defensive mood in which Wordsworth had imported a large section of 'The Pedlar' into *The Prelude* instead of confronting the possibility of change and loss—the

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[17] *Wordsworth and Coleridge: A Study of Their Literary Relations in 1801-1802* (Oxford, 1970), 104.

idea that his imaginative faculties might have become blunted. The movement from line 3, 'So was it when my life began', to line 4, 'So is it now I am a Man', simply leaps over any imaginative crisis at Cambridge, and indeed those later imaginative crises that the extended version of *The Prelude* would come to include. Of course by making the rainbow an index of imaginative health issues of place and social environment fade in significance. It is, as it were, the same rainbow, whether seen in Cockermouth, Hawkshead, Cambridge, London, or Paris. Nonetheless, the final lines—'And I could wish my days to be / Bound each to each by natural piety'—seem inclined to conciliate the facts of change in a way the earlier part of the poem does not. Whatever 'natural piety' is, it is surely something well short of the spiritual ecstasies, adapted from 'The Pedlar', which Wordsworth had introduced into *The Prelude* three months earlier. Here he seems to be settling for less.

The pressure building up in 'My heart leaps up' is released, to some extent, in the first four stanzas of the 'Intimations Ode', probably begun just afterwards. Here the rainbow reappears, but now in association with a lost 'glory':

> The Rainbow comes and goes,
> And lovely is the Rose…
> But yet I know, where'er I go,
> That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth. (ll. 10-11, 17-18)

The four stanzas describe a see-saw movement, starting with an omnipresent sense of loss, then moving on to a 'relieving' experience of joy (ushered in by the puzzling and much discussed 'timely utterance'), then returning to the sense of loss. They seem designed to start questions ('Whither is fled the visionary gleam?') rather than to offer answers, and in this respect they start to unravel the doubtful security of the 1801 *Prelude* which had been as superficially confident in its answers as it was reluctant to admit questions. But the fact that the Ode was laid aside, incomplete, at this time is obviously significant. Although a certain sense of loss could be productively absorbed in poems like 'To a Butterfly' and 'To the Cuckoo', Wordsworth was still unable to grapple with personal loss as a major aspect of human—and specifically his own—experience: one requiring analysis, explanation, and, above all, consolation. This was, to reiterate, a problem he had been led into by *The Prelude*. 'Tintern Abbey', written before *The Prelude*, spoke of loss but also recognized that:

> other gifts
> Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
> Abundant recompence. (ll. 87-89)[18]

But after *The Prelude* things no longer looked quite so straightforward.

The fundamental problem was that *The Two-Part Prelude* had, with poetry of great power and originality, presented an idealized picture of Wordsworth's early life. 'Tintern Abbey', with its parenthetical, passing reference to 'The coarser pleasures of my boyish days / And their glad animal movements' (ll. 74-75), had not. Having committed himself to the idealized view, it was always going to be difficult for Wordsworth to discuss the transition to adult life and the world of 'experience'. The

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[18] 'Tintern Abbey' is quoted from *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY, 1992).

unfinished ‘Intimations Ode’ had admitted the loss of something ‘visionary’, but also raised the stakes still higher by associating early life with ‘celestial light, / The glory and the freshness of a dream’ (ll. 4-5). There was no easy way back from this to ‘coarser pleasures’ and ‘glad animal movements’. Nevertheless, there is some evidence in the poems of 1802 and 1803 that Wordsworth recognized that his poetic investment in a glorious childhood was storing up problems for later, and that something needed to be done to reduce the majesty of early life to more manageable proportions.

This recognition is most clearly evidenced in the little-known sonnet, ‘“Beloved Vale” I said’, one of the most significant autobiographical statements in *Poems in Two Volumes*, but the least discussed:

> ‘Beloved Vale!’ I said, ‘when I shall con
> Those many records of my childish years,
> Remembrance of myself and of my peers
> Will press me down: to think of what is gone
> Will be an awful thought, if life have one.’
> But, when into the Vale I came, no fears
> Distress’d me; I look’d round, I shed no tears;
> Deep thought, or awful vision, I had none.
> By thousand petty fancies I was cross’d,
> To see the Trees, which I had thought so tall,
> Mere dwarfs; the Brooks so narrow, Fields so small.
> A Juggler’s Balls old Time about him toss’d;
> I looked, I stared, I smiled, I laughed; and all
> The weight of sadness was in wonder lost.

The sonnet cannot be precisely dated, but what evidence there is points to its being written between May 1802 and the end of the year[19]—a time period that would allow some reflection on the poetry written in March, especially, perhaps, on the unfinished Ode. The ‘Beloved Vale’ the sonnet addresses is the Vale of Esthwaite, the location of many of the experiences described in *The Two-Part Prelude*, and presumably also a place Wordsworth would have associated with the ‘celestial light’ of the Ode. Before discussing ‘“Beloved Vale” I said’ as a response to Wordsworth’s earlier writing, however, it is worth pointing out that it is also a response to a kind of sonnet Charlotte Smith had popularized in the 1780s, for in this sense Wordsworth was engaging with the life stories of other poets, however clichéd those had become.

Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* of 1784 was one of the landmark publications of English poetry in the period when Wordsworth was growing up. It is on the basis of this collection that Stuart Curran describes Smith as ‘the first poet in England whom in retrospect we would call Romantic’ (an argument I, for one, have no problem with).[20] Wordsworth probably read the *Elegiac Sonnets* in 1784, bought a copy in 1789, when at Cambridge, and was a sufficient admirer of Smith to visit her at Brighton in 1791.[21] Smith’s sonnets typically represent her childhood as a time of idyllic happiness, and adult life, by contrast, as an experience of unmitigated woe. Several of them are based

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[19] Mark L. Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years, 1800-1815* (Cambridge, MA, 1975), 172.
[20] *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (Oxford, 1993), xix.
[21] Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth’s Reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge, 1993), 127-28.

around the idea of a 'return' to a place of childhood association, and this is the case with what is probably her best-known sonnet, 'To the South Downs':

> Ah! hills belov'd!—where once a happy child,
> Your beechen shades, 'your turf, your flowers among,'
> I wove your blue-bells into garlands wild,
> And woke your echoes with my artless song.
> Ah! hills belov'd!—your turf, your flowers remain;
> But can they peace to this sad breast restore;
> For one poor moment soothe the sense of pain,
> And teach a breaking heart to throb no more?
> And you, Aruna!*—in the vale below,
> As to the sea your limpid waves you bear,
> Can you one kind Lethean cup bestow,
> To drink a long oblivion to my care?
> Ah! no!—when all, e'en Hope's last ray is gone,
> There's no oblivion—but in death alone!
>
> * The river Arun.[22]

Smith had very real and personal reasons for making the loss of childhood happiness a theme in her poetry,[23] but the theme suited the age and, picked up by other poets, soon became formulaic. Wordsworth evokes the formula in 'Resolution and Independence', another poem of 1802 published in 1807:

> We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
> But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness. (ll. 48-49)

The examples Wordsworth cites in support of this are Chatterton and Burns, though they don't exactly fit the description (neither went mad, say). I have argued elsewhere that it was actually Goethe's Werther that Wordsworth had in mind here and elsewhere in 'Resolution and Independence'.[24] But it was Charlotte Smith, whose *Elegiac Sonnets* contained five sonnets 'Supposed to be written by Werter', who did the most to establish and illustrate the theme in English poetry. A comparison of '"Beloved Vale" I said' with poems like Smith's 'To the South Downs' shows Wordsworth working with, perhaps playing with, the expectation that his experience, and his poem, will be something like hers. That is, returning to a place associated with happy childhood memories he expects to feel the sense of loss and sadness that Smith tended to experience in rather overpowering fashion. Instead, however, he experiences a 'thousand petty fancies', a sense of the absurd, and ends up laughing rather than weeping.

Read simply as a response to a tradition of poetry established by Smith, '"Beloved Vale" I said' is arresting; but it becomes much more significant, I suggest, when the poetical investment Wordsworth had made in the 'Beloved Vale' of Esthwaite in *The Two-Part Prelude* is taken into account. Smith never associates the South Downs with

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[22] Text from *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, op. cit.
[23] See Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Houndmills, 1998).
[24] '"In the end despondency & madness:" *Werther* in Wordsworth', *Wordsworth Circle* 30 (1999), 55-59.

anything more than happy, innocent childish play and enjoyment of nature. But Wordsworth had made the area around Hawkshead of great importance to his imaginative and spiritual growth, and any reader of *The Two-Part Prelude* who turns to '"Beloved Vale" I said' is likely to be rather disappointed with its debunking tone. It seems to me that lines six and seven—'no fears / Distress'd me; I look'd round, I shed no tears'—are essentially an answer to Smith's model of poetic experience, but line eight—'Deep thought, or awful vision, I had none'—is more an answer to expectations that might have been raised by Wordsworth's earlier writing on his Hawkshead years, when, for example, he had been able to write:

> Ah! not in vain ye Beings of the hills!
> And ye that walk the woods and open heaths
> By moon or star-light…
>   did ye love to intertwine
> The passions that build up our human soul,
> Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
> But with high objects, with eternal things,
> With life and nature, purifying thus
> The elements of feeling and of thought,
> And sanctifying by such discipline
> Both pain and fear, until we recognise
> A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.
>   Nor was this fellowship vouchsafed to me
> With stinted kindness. In November days,
> When vapours, rolling down the valleys, made
> A lonely scene more lonesome, among woods
> At noon, and 'mid the calm of summer nights
> When by the margin of the trembling lake
> Beneath the gloomy hills I homeward went
> In solitude, such intercourse was mine. (I, 130-49)[25]

Going back to this poetry of 1799 brings a specifically Wordsworthian perspective to bear on the failure of 'Deep thought, or awful vision' in the 1802 poem of return. And if '"Beloved Vale" I said' is read as a response to the idealization of childhood in earlier poetry, it can be understood as an attempt to establish a perspective that allows the transition to maturity to be understood and narrated more comfortably. Of course it is easy to feel that '"Beloved Vale" I said' leans too far in the debunking direction: Wordsworth is prepared to give up the 'deep thoughts' and 'awful visions' with such apparent ease that it makes the reader accustomed to his other poetry uncomfortable. The memories of boyhood are represented, from a sober adult viewpoint, as comically exaggerated, and there is a palpable sense of relief that 'deep thoughts' are no longer required. Unlike the case in 'To the Cuckoo', there seems to be no way back to childish excitement and wonder; there is only wonder at the wonder of the child. Significantly, though, '"Beloved Vale" I said' manages to suggest that maturity brings not only a sense of loss but also the natural development of a mechanism that allows us to cope with it; in this it anticipates the much profounder poetry of the completed 'Intimations Ode' and the extended *Prelude*.

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[25] The text quoted here is from *The Prelude, 1798-1799*, ed. Stephen Parrish (Ithaca, NY, 1977).

The description of a 'thousand petty fancies' which emerge in place of 'deep thoughts' and 'awful visions' in '"Beloved Vale" I said' evokes a considerable number of the more playful poems in the 1807 collection, where Wordsworth represents himself as agreeably distracted by little things. In different ways these, too, subtly undermine the more elevated and heroic image of himself established in *The Two-Part Prelude* of 1799 and its 1801 extension. There is, for example, the remarkable outpouring of flower poems. In *The Prelude* there is no suggestion that the young Wordsworth was inclined to stop and look at individual flowers: his eye is always on larger landscape features, his imagination always inclining to see some sort of unifying spiritual force in the landscape. But in some of the poems of 1802 and 1803 Wordsworth works on a much smaller scale, rather as if his great contemporary, J. M. W. Turner, had laid aside his sublime landscapes and seascapes of this period to concentrate on still life painting. 'To the Daisy', probably written in mid-1802[26] and given pride of place as the opening poem in the 1807 collection, is the most important of the flower poems and particularly significant in the present context as it includes a little autobiographical narrative in which Wordsworth attempts to explain, in a sense, why as a younger man he had indeed failed to notice individual flowers:

> In youth from rock to rock I went,
> From hill to hill, in discontent
> Of pleasure high and turbulent,
> Most pleas'd when most uneasy;
> But now my own delights I make,
> My thirst at every rill can slake,
> And gladly Nature's love partake
> Of thee, sweet Daisy! (ll. 1-8)

On first reading these lines it is easy to feel that Wordsworth is leapfrogging back over *The Prelude* and its problems to the developmental narrative of 'Tintern Abbey'. In that version of his life, as noted already, there was loss, but gain conspicuously outweighed loss. As in 'To the Daisy', Wordsworth represented his younger self as an energetic pursuer of pleasure in nature, almost too active to really appreciate what lay before him:

> when first
> I came among these hills … like a roe
> I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
> Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
> Wherever nature led; more like a man
> Flying from something that he dreads, than one
> Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
> (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
> And their glad animal movements all gone by,)
> To me was all in all. (ll. 67-76)

On further consideration, however, it is the differences between the two passages which grow in significance. The young Wordsworth evoked in 'Tintern Abbey' who found

[26] Reed, *Chronology*, p. 161.

nature 'all in all' was treading the right road: he just hadn't arrived at the deeper philosophical insight which that road leads to. But the young Wordsworth evoked in 'To the Daisy', with his rather paradoxical 'discontent / Of pleasure high and turbulent', is effectively convicted of error. The key word in this opening stanza of the *Poems in Two Volumes* is surely 'own'—'my *own* delights I make'—which leads to the initially odd idea that Wordsworth's youthful pleasures were *not* his 'own'. One might recall the judgment of the narrator in *The Great Gatsby* that 'the intimate revelations of young men or at least the terms in which they express them are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions.'[27] A passage in one of Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* is more apropos, as well as sympathetic:

> LANDOR. Young poets imagine feelings to which in reality they are strangers.
> SOUTHEY. Copy them rather.
> LANDOR. Not entirely. The copybook acts on the imagination. Unless they felt the truth or the verisimilitude, it could not take possession of them.[28]

The 'copybook' for 'pleasure high and turbulent' in nature was extensive by the 1790s; there are plenty of young men who experience such pleasures in the novels of Charlotte Smith and Ann Radcliffe, say. Radcliffe's Valancourt, most at home in mountains, 'full of ardour, highly susceptible of whatever is grand and beautiful, but impetuous, wild, and somewhat romantic', is a famous example of the type.[29] If I understand the first stanza of 'To the Daisy' correctly, then Wordsworth is saying that he pursued the sort of experiences that such literature celebrated and encouraged. But *now*, by contrast, instead of fashionable 'turbulence', he can experience real, genuine, personal pleasure in the simple and ordinary: and with this gesture, as it were, he creates a context in which many of the poems in the 1807 collection should be read.

There is a useful parallel to be drawn with Pushkin's 'Onegin's Journey', a poem of the 1820s which is essentially overflow work from *Eugene Onegin*. Here Pushkin's narrator describes the 'sublime' mountainous scenery of the Caucasus, which educated Russians had come to think of as the most beautiful part of the Russian empire, before breaking off with the words:

> Needful to me are other pictures:
> I like a sandy hillside slope,
> before a small isba two rowans,
> a wicket gate, a broken fence,
> up in the sky gray clouds,
> before the thrash barn heaps of straw,
> and in the shelter of dense willows
> a pond—the franchise of young ducks.[30]

This is probably the most influential description ever of the flat plains of Russia which cultured Russians, nurtured on Western European ideas of what constituted beautiful

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[27] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli, (Cambridge, 1991), 5.
[28] *The Complete Works of Walter Savage Landor*, ed. T. Earle Welby and Stephen Wheeler, 16 vols. (London, 1927-36), v. 307.
[29] Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford, 1966), 41.
[30] *Eugene Onegin*, trans. Vladimir Nabokov, 4 vols, (Princeton, 1964), i. 339 ('Fragments of *Onegin's Journey*', xviii).

landscape, had long failed to see any aesthetic appeal in.[31] There is a political significance in Pushkin's lines that is absent in Wordsworth's, but the general point is similar. Both Pushkin's narrator and Wordsworth have experienced the standard experiences recommended to poetic young man: they have focused their attention on the sublimity of rocky, mountainous landscapes. But now they have discovered their heartstrings pulling in a different direction, towards something humble, unpresuming, ordinary. This idea is developed in a later stanza of 'To a Daisy':

> If stately passions in me burn,
> And one chance look to Thee should turn,
> I drink out of an humbler urn
>   A lowlier pleasure;
> The homely sympathy that heeds
> The common life, our nature breeds;
> A wisdom fitted to the needs
>   Of hearts at leisure. (ll. 49-56)

The ease with which 'stately passions' can be deflected here suggests, once again, that the insights and sublimities of *The Two-Part Prelude* and its 1801 extension are being subtly devalued. Again, I interpret this devaluing of earlier experiences as both a defensive gesture, a sort of damage limitation exercise, and a way of allowing Wordsworth to negotiate positively the transition from youth to maturity in his writing.

Before leaving Pushkin, it is worth mentioning Vladimir Nabokov's long note on the stanza of 'Onegin's Journey' quoted here. He suggests that 'the generalized form of romanticism' develops first, taking its inspiration from 'the contrived Arcadia of Italian and Spanish romance'[32]—lowland woods and meadows surrounded by mountains, with the ocean usually not too far away (the landscape of much of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, say). Descriptions of this landscape tend to be vague and evocative rather than concrete and precise, and Nabokov sees the 'desolate Byronic scene' as a natural development of the tradition. But in 'the second, specific, phase of romanticism, [there is an] interest in "ordinary" details and in "realistic" trivialities, having none of that natural poetic residue that the words "ocean" or "nightingale" had.' This argument has considerable resonance in the context of Wordsworth's 1807 *Poems*. The poem 'O Nightingale! Thou surely art' rejects the 'tumultuous' song of the nightingale in favour of the 'homely tale' of the stockdove, repeating the sort of contrasting experiences established in 'To the Daisy'. Similarly, the poems about the 'Little, humble Celandine' are quite deliberately devoted to a flower without 'poetic residue', and Wordsworth specifically, albeit playfully, criticises poets who pursue poetic clichés: 'Poets, vain men in their mood! / Travel with the multitude'.[33] In general, there are a lot of '"ordinary" details and … "realistic" trivialities' in *Poems in Two Volumes*, one reason for the collection's initial lack of success.

If the opening poem in *Poems in Two Volumes* elevates the humble and associates its appreciation with the wisdom of maturity, so different from the turbulent emotions of earlier years, the closing poem, the completed 'Intimations Ode', reaches 'the self-same bourne' by a 'different road'—from the opposite direction, even. The collection ends, as

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[31] For a valuable discussion of Pushkin in the context of Russian landscape aesthetics see Christopher Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL, 2002), 78-86.
[32] *Eugene Onegin*, iii. 290.
[33] 'To the Small Celandine', ll. 33-34.

it begins, with a statement of devotion to a humble flower: 'To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears' (ll. 205-06). But the value of that 'meanest flower' is now brought into focus by an act of renunciation required by the astonishing central myth which Wordsworth, probably in 1804, had introduced into the Ode:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
> The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
> Hath had elsewhere it's setting,
> And cometh from afar:
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home:
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy,
> But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
> He sees it in his joy;
> The Youth, who daily farther from the East
> Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
> And by the vision splendid
> Is on his way attended;
> At length the Man perceives it die away,
> And fade into the light of common day. (ll. 58-76)

This is, of course, a general myth of human life, one that cannot be connected in any straightforward way to Wordsworth's own life. It is not the story told in *The Prelude* in any of its versions. As Peter Manning says, it is a 'generalized picture of decline from infancy to manhood', and as such 'contains a comfort: it places the vision safely in the past and represents its dissolution as an inevitability rather than a matter of individual fallibility'.[34] With this, Cambridge and its problems—which Wordsworth was grappling with again around the time he completed the Ode—could be spectacularly bypassed, and, at the same time, the contrast between childhood and maturity, the foundation of the March 1802 lyrics, be given a firm, mythic underpinning.

On first reading, the Ode seems to have nothing at all to do with 'To the Daisy'. Yet 'the light of common day' which the Ode says must, perforce, be accepted as part of growing up can be linked without much difficulty to what the earlier poem calls 'The homely sympathy that heeds / The common life'. The emotions released by the 'meanest flower' are part of the 'difficult humanizing of imagination' that Geoffrey Hartman understood as central to Wordsworth's poetry.[35] One of the most remarkable things about the conclusion to the Ode, indeed, is the assertion that nature is loved *more*, not less, for the loss of the 'celestial light' and 'visionary gleam':

> I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,

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[34] 'Wordsworth's Intimations Ode and Its Epigraphs', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 82 (1983), 526-40, p. 531.
[35] *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*, new edition with added 'Retrospect' (New Haven, CT, 1971), xi.

> Even more than when I tripp'd lightly as they… (ll. 195-96)

There is no space here to trace the complex line of thought which leads to such reassurance. Of more immediate importance, in any case, is simply that Wordsworth gets to this point: that he is able to 'manage' the movement from childhood to adult life which had proved a stumbling block in the 1801 *Prelude*. Whereas 'To the Daisy' had rejected Wordsworth's earlier, 'turbulent' experiences as essentially unreal (taken from Landor's 'copybook'), the Ode represents them as unreal in a quite different, far more spiritual, sense. But in either case, it is suggested, the mature poet needs to embrace (rather than resisting, or denying) a mature reality identified as much by '"ordinary" details and … "realistic" trivialities' as by 'The still, sad music of humanity' (l. 92) of 'Tintern Abbey'. It is the 'trivialities', indeed, that are more in evidence in *Poems in Two Volumes*, and these largely influenced the collection's very negative critical reception. But they represent a turn toward a 'real' world of men and things after the dangerously inward and defensive turn taken by *The Prelude* in 1801, and as such allowed the new interpretation of experience which made it possible for Wordsworth to continue his autobiography with great confidence in 1804.

Doshisha University

Re-reading ‘Resolution and Independence’

By FELICITY JAMES

This paper offers a few thoughts on response in and to ‘Resolution and Independence’, itself a poem which dramatises difficulties of responding, of listening, of hearing properly. I want to begin with a famous encounter on a lonely moor, in the light of the setting sun, with black shadows of the forest behind, an encounter which seems to take place in a ‘half-dream’, with a gentle, foolish, elderly man, who has a particular message to impart:

> ‘I saw,’ he tells us, ‘an aged aged man,
> A-sitting on a gate’.
> ‘Who are you, aged man?’ I said.
> ‘And how is it you live?’
> And his answer trickled through my head,
> Like water through a sieve.
>
> He said ‘I look for butterflies
> That sleep among the wheat:
> I make them into mutton pies,
> And sell them unto men’, he said,
> ‘Who sail on stormy seas:
> And that’s the way I get my bread –
> A trifle, if you please.’
>
> But I was thinking of a plan
> To dye one’s whiskers green,
> And always use so large a fan
> That they could not be seen.
> So, having no reply to give
> To what the old man said,
> I cried ‘Come, tell me how you live!’
> And thumped him on the head.[1]

It might seem something of an unsympathetic response in itself to be quoting Lewis Carroll’s parody of ‘Resolution and Independence’ in such surroundings. Carroll’s fascination with the poem had started in the 1850s, when he published an earlier version, ‘Upon the lonely Moor’, in the satirical Oxford magazine, *The Train*, as a spoof academic source for one of ‘our great poets’. As Carroll told his uncle:

> Its plot is borrowed from Wordsworth’s ‘Resolution and Independence’, a poem that has always amused me a good deal (though it is by no means a comic poem) by the absurd way in which the poet goes on questioning the poor old leech-gatherer, making him tell his history over and over again, and

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[1] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; *and*, *through the Looking Glass*. ed. by Martin Gardner (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000). 256-60 and notes.

> never attending to what he says. Wordsworth ends with a moral – an example I have *not* followed.[2]

And if you recall, the old man of the White Knight's song persists in telling his listener all about his schemes to 'hunt for haddock's eyes', 'dig for buttered rolls', and 'search the grassy knolls / For wheels of Hansom-cabs', while his questioner fails to respond to his requests for a tip, rewarding him only with thumps – in the original version, designed for the hardier humour of Oxford dons, the old man is pinched, and kicked, his ear given a 'sudden box': '[I] tweaked his grey and reverend locks, / And put him into pain'.[3] The violence done by Carroll to Wordsworth is in part a testimony to the poet's monumental status in the Victorian era – it had only been a couple of years before, in 1854, that his statue, funded by public subscription, had been unveiled in Westminster Abbey, and the conception of Wordsworth as sage and spiritual power was similarly being set in stone in the period.[4] The introduction by John Morley to his collected works toward the end of the century, for instance, is typical in its evocation of Wordsworth's power to 'assuage, to reconcile, to fortify'.[5] And it is clearly a Victorian version of Wordsworth to which Carroll responds when he writes that 'Wordsworth ends with a moral': the version, for instance, offered by John Stuart Mill when he writes that Wordsworth's poems 'comprise a better & a more comprehensive morality than all other poets together – & alone of all poets he seems able to make moralizing interesting'.[6] By the later nineteenth century, when Mill's opinion had hardened into a virtual consensus, parody becomes perhaps one of the few original ways to respond to Wordsworth's writing.

But Carroll isn't just debunking Wordsworth; he is also, as parody so often does, bringing out important aspects of the original. That 'absurd way in which the poet goes on questioning the poor old leech-gatherer … never attending to what he says' touches on a raw nerve of the poem, on an issue of response which troubled Wordsworth himself, and which continues to trouble critics. It was first mentioned by Francis Jeffrey who sarcastically commented in the *Edinburgh Review* 'notwithstanding the distinctness of [the leech-gatherer's] answer, the poet, it seems, was so wrapped up in his own moody fancies, that he could not attend to it'.[7] This essay suggests some ways in which Wordsworth tried to approach this problem: the fear of not being able to respond, or, conversely, of not evoking a sympathetic answer. These questions had deep personal significance for Wordsworth at the time, as he tried to respond to Coleridge's demands to write *The Recluse* and as he worried about how friends, readers and reviewers would respond to his poems when he had managed to write them.[8] His anxiety should also be seen in the wider context of acute

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[2] Ibid, 259

[3] *The Collected Verse of Lewis Carroll*. (New York: Macmillan, 1933) 727-28.

[4] See Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[5] John Morley, ed., *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (London: Macmillan, 1888), lxiv.

[6] 'Wordsworth and Byron', speech delivered at the London Debating Society, 20 January 1829; John Stuart Mill, *Journals and Debating Speeches*. ed. John M. Robson. 2 vols. (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press; Routledge, 1988) I, 441. Cited by Gill, 49. *Wordsworth and the Victorians*.

[7] Donald H. Reiman, *The Romantics Reviewed*: *Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*. Vol. A: II (New York: Garland, 1972), 434.

[8] As Mary Wedd has discussed in an enlightening talk delivered to the Winter School a few years ago, 'Wordsworth's life [at this point] 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

awareness in the period about reader response and the position of the author – what Lucy Newlyn has explored as the 'anxiety of reception'.[9] It's this anxiety which I think Carroll, as stubborn, intractable, resistant reader, picks up, and parodically gives back. And it's also an anxiety I feel a profound sympathy with on a very lowly level – because I'm so aware of all the excellent work which has already been done on the poem, especially by people connected with the Wordsworth Winter School, to which I'll be making frequent reference. Building on their work, I want in this essay to discuss how the poem and the whole 1807 volume grapple with response on several different levels, before moving on to suggest some ways in which these can also shed light on Wordsworth's attitude to the reader.

From the start, the poem foregrounds the importance of listening and responding, while also suggesting its difficulties. The roaring of the wind allows us to hear in contrast the calm of the early morning, and is modulated into the singing of the birds in line four. Voices and sounds are carefully evoked:

> Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
> The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
> And all the air is fill'd with pleasant noise of waters.[10]

And yet the difficulty of finding an answer is very subtly played out within the verse itself. Here, even allowing for local pronunciation, we have rhymes which are slightly askew, which, like the jay answering the magpie, give back a slightly different echo: 'floods', 'woods', 'broods'.[11] Particular words themselves appeal for the active response of the reader, such as the brooding of the stock-dove, which encloses within it the sound of its cooing. Wordsworth's concern that the reader be aware of the precise response meant to be evoked here is suggested by the 'Preface to the Edition of 1815':

> ...by the 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.[12]

This comment points to the way in which the poem, too, broods over its own voice – in the sense both of reflection and, as Michael O'Neill has pointed out, of 'worried anxiety', of self-consciousness about the function of a poet.[13] As O'Neill explores, this self-consciousness might seem to open up a gap in Wordsworth's writing,

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root of the sublime poetry that he *could* write was leaving him'; Mary Wedd, 'The Leech Gatherer', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* ns 115 (2001), 86-104 (88).

[9] Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism*: *The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[10] Text from William Wordsworth, *Poems in Two Volumes* (London: 1807), 89-97.

[11] It is a moot point whether the jay is 'answering' the stock-dove or the magpie – either way, the impression is of voices which respond to one another whilst not, in fact, directly engaging in conversation.

[12] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) III, 32.

[13] Michael O'Neill, '"The Words He Uttered...": A Reading of Wordsworth', in *Romanticism On the Net*, August, 1996.

between the metaphoric and the straightforward: the 'intervention of the metaphor' and the 'real language of men'.

This, as he shows, has important implications for the way in which self and other are figured in the poem, which in turn has consequences for the relationship between author and reader. There has been a great deal of critical wrestling with the topic of self/other in the poem, and two main views have emerged. I'll begin with a classic summary from Geoffrey Hartman:

> Though a storm in nature sets the scene, and is followed by a mental storm as Wordsworth thinks of 'mighty Poets in their misery dead', the Leech-gatherer comes to save Wordsworth from dejection as gently and surely as that opening storm passes into a beautiful dawn.[14]

Hartman very persuasively articulates a narrative of empathy and identification with the other. In bearing witness to the leech-gatherer's troubles and the way in which he has dealt with suffering and solitude, the poet gains perspective on his own: his poetry itself then functions in a similarly redemptive way. From suffering, and from bearing sympathetic witness to the suffering of others, comes something positive. But, it might be countered, this is something positive for the poet, not for the encountered other:

> 'God,' said I, 'be my help and stay secure;
> I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor'.

This might be all very well for Wordsworth, but it doesn't do much good to the Leech-gatherer. Carroll's poem shows this opposing point of view very acutely. Here the poet actively does violence to the other, and cuts him off without a penny, so anxious is he to pursue his independent resolutions about dying his whiskers. Following this refusal to engage, he nevertheless formulates a little conclusion for himself based on the encounter, which in fact has nothing to do with the man himself:

> And now, if e'er by chance I put
> My fingers into glue,
> Or madly squeeze a right-hand foot
> Into a left-hand shoe,
> Or if I drop upon my toe
> A very heavy weight,
> I weep, for it reminds me so
> Of that old man I used to know –

Simon Malpas has written an excellent article on just this topic, suggesting that 'the conclusions which the narrator draws from his encounter […] illustrate – through their wholly arbitrary relation to what has gone before – the problematic status of the closure of resolution discovered by the humanist reading of ''Resolution and Independence'''.[15] In other words, this is not a narrative of redemption, but of suppression, where Wordsworth deliberately ignores the voice of the other. As such,

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[14] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964) 202.

[15] Simon Malpas, 'I Cried "Come, Tell Me How You Live!" / and Thumped Him on the Head': Wordsworth, Carroll and the 'Aged, Aged Man'', in *Romanticism On the Net*, February 1997.

Carroll's parody broadly fits in with materialist critiques of the Romantics in the 1980s by Marjorie Levinson and Jerome McGann.

This materialist argument runs parallel to the argument concerning poetic authority recently put forward by Richard Bourke in his *Romantic Discourse and Political Modernity*. Bourke, like Carroll in some ways, reads against the grain, against the long tradition of readers, from Mill to Arnold to Morley to Hartman, who have found in Wordsworth the power to 'assuage, to reconcile, to fortify'.[16] Instead, he urges us to be alert to the 'fiction of poetic redemption' going on in the encounter with the leech-gatherer. A fiction, because by 1802, he thinks that for Wordsworth 'the resource of human strength is located within a practice available to the cultivated' only, whether that's through the leech-gatherer's own 'stately speech' or the complicated metaphors of, for example, the sea-beast and stone of stanza ten. Bourke reads this not as reconciliation but as restriction. Wordsworth, he thinks, began by trying to make language and metaphor one, but he ends by invoking what we might term an Aristotelian distinction between metaphor and ordinary language, the poetic set apart from the ordinary and not in dialogue with it. Commenting on the transformation of the leech-gatherer through the revisions of the poem, he suggests that 'we are in the midst of the replacement of the figure by the literary figure'.[17]

Criticism of the poem, then, tends to emphasise its oppositions: between self and other, between the language of poetry and the language of ordinary men, and, I'd add, related to that, the relationship between author and reader. If the poem is very much about self-other awareness, it is also about reading and being read, in a volume which is itself preoccupied with questions of sympathetic response. Later I'll discuss the ways in which Wordsworth's own reading of Dorothy and of Coleridge shaped the poem: let's look first at the movements of response within the poem. I've already touched on the way in which the sounds of the stock-dove and of the jay and the magpie half-answer one another, encouraging the reader or the listener to pay attention to their own response. This emphasis on response and its difficulties is continued with the image of the hare in the second stanza, raising the mist, which, 'glittering in the sun, / Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run'. But the poet's response moves, of course, from joyful, youthful spontaneity to 'dim sadness, & blind thoughts', to a preoccupation with lack of answer:

> …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?

This was a time when Wordsworth was acutely aware of the responsibilities of love. Through the early part of 1802, he was thinking about marriage – Coleridge said in February that he expected Wordsworth to marry soon – and Stephen Gill suggests that it was during a meeting at Middleham in early April that he told Mary Hutchinson that he intended to see Annette before the marriage took place, since the Treaty of Amiens in March had just made this possible.[18] But that this anxiety is perhaps linked less to family and friends than to potential readership and a future audience becomes a

[16] John Morley, ed., *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (London: Macmillan, 1888) lxiv.

[17] Richard Bourke, *Romantic Discourse and Political Modernity*: *Wordsworth, the Intellectual and Cultural Critique* (New York: London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 239.

[18] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1989), 204.

little clearer when in the next stanza we move into the meditation on other, earlier authors:

> I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
> The sleepless Soul that perish'd in its pride;
> Of Him who walk'd in glory and in joy
> Behind his plough, upon the mountain-side:

As others have pointed out (Mary Wedd and Michael O'Neill amongst them) 'Resolution and Independence' borrows its metre from Chatterton's *Excellent Ballade of Charitie*, and later in the volume, we have a direct poem of homage to Burns. Moreover, the descriptions both of Chatterton and Burns echo Wordsworth's own state earlier in the poem, when he described himself 'as happy as a Boy', walking with 'joy'. This self-identification means that the trajectory is destined to be similar:

> By our own spirits are we deified;
> We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
> But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.

There is a double movement here, I think. All through the poem, and through the volume itself, there is a oscillation between pride in a self-possessed separateness and difference, 'Far from the world I walk', and lonely isolation: 'Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty'. Here, too, there is a doubt about the position of the poet. 'By our own spirits are we deified' seems to denote both that self-belief, self-deification, is crucially necessary because the worth of the poet will not be recognised by others, and uncertainty about the dangerous consequences of such pride, on a personal level, 'despondency and madness', and perhaps also on a social and political level following withdrawal from the world. The invocation of Chatterton and Burns is both a movement of sympathy and identification from Wordsworth, and a desire to distance himself from their fate, to create a different narrative for himself. This begins in the next stanza, as he sees the leech-gatherer, a long-drawn-out process of seeing and looking, which runs across several stanzas – 'I saw a Man before me unawares'; 'My course I stopped as soon as I espied / The Old Man'; 'a minute's space I guess I watch'd him'; 'He being all the while before me in full view'. And the old man himself is looking: he

> fixedly did look
> Upon the muddy water, which he conn'd,
> As if he had been reading in a book.

It's a remarkable comparison – bringing the distinctly different lives of the leech-gatherer and of the poet together. 'As if he had been reading in a book': so the leech-gatherer is both being looked at and engaged in his own looking; being read, as it were, and also reading. Just as the images of Chatterton and Burns incorporated something of Wordsworth as writer in them, so too does the leech-gatherer incorporate something of Wordsworth the reader. If this is so, then what are we to glean from his inability to hear the old man?

> …his voice to me was like a stream
> Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide…

On the one hand, to understand this inability, we could return to Bourke's concept of Wordsworth's lack of exchange: his failure to make his poetry correspond to an egalitarian politics and poetics he originally espoused. This runs alongside the concept of Wordsworth the author as cloistered egotist, who tries to impose a moral on the reader but won't let him or her answer back. In many ways, Wordsworth, throughout his life, lays himself open to this charge. One thinks of that famous 'long letter of four sweating pages' he sent to Lamb following the latter's very shrewd and sympathetic comments on the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads,* 'the purport of which was, that he ... "was compelled to wish that my range of **Sensibility** was more extended"'. Coleridge then joined the fray 'four long letters, equally sweaty and more tedious, came from him; assuring me that, when the works of a man of true genius such as W. undoubtedly was, do not please me at first sight, I should suspect the fault to lie "in me and not in them"'.[19] The same scene was played out when Sara Hutchinson famously commented on the 'tediousness' of the early version of 'The Leech-Gatherer'; Wordsworth embarked on a prose explanation so that 'you will be better able to judge whether the fault be mine or yours or partly both,' seconded in stricter terms by Dorothy: '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'.[20] This emphasis on Sara's 'fault' in reading I think has helped to obscure the way in which the poem itself puts forward a much more open idea of dialogue between author and reader.

Let's just go back for a moment to the use of metaphor in the poem to show how this dialogue might work, thinking first about the complex descriptions of which he was so proud in stanza ten:

> As a huge Stone is sometimes seen to lie
> Couch'd 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 crawl'd forth, which on a shelf
> Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself.
>
> Such seem'd this Man…

Here, says Wordsworth in his 1815 Preface, 'the stone is endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the sea-beast [that 'couch'd' idea]; and the sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone'. The two objects, he tells us, 'unite and coalesce in just comparison'. But the emphasis on the process of comparison, 'as', 'like', 'seem'd', suggests the way in which the objects – the stone, the sea-beast, the old man – don't 'unite and coalesce'. Instead, I think, the reader is prompted to see how the poet is making the different objects respond to one another, just as, in that first stanza, the jay responds, albeit differently, to the magpie.

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[19] Edwin W. Marrs, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*. 3 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975) I, 273.

[20] Ernest de Selincourt, and Chester L. Shaver, eds., *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805*. 2nd ed. Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) I, 366-7.

There is a complex texture of sound and echo here which allows us to generate the 'st' of 'Sea-beast' from 'Stone', so that one word 'crawls forth' from the other, with the 't' and 's' of that line 'So that it seems a thing endued with sense' linking the two. And while a crawling 'Sea-beast' might in another context seem, perhaps, repulsive, I don't think it is here, because within the poem that image of the beast coming forth 'to sun itself' sets up a very positive association with the second stanza, 'All things that love the sun are out of doors'. Like the Ancient Mariner being taught how to find the water-snakes beautiful, the reader is brought to associate the sea-beast with the hare and her mist 'glittering in the sun'. One isn't straightforwardly creating the meaning of the other, but instead they exist in relation to one another, and to the poem. The leech-gatherer, too, might similarly exist both on his own terms and in terms of significance to the poet, both as 'ordinary' figure and literary figure. Here I want to bring in the observation Richard Gravil has made in *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation* that 'such tutelary figures as the leech-gatherer have two lives, their own and a separate existence in Wordsworth's mind as archetypes of his own psychological needs'.[21] One need not cancel the other, but might instead answer it, creating dialogue both within the poem, and between poet, subject, and reader. As Michael O'Neill comments, 'Wordsworth is shaping intuitions on the margins of language' here; he is pushing at the limits of his own poetry to create 'dialogic effects which allow poet and reader to explore different perspectives', rather than, as Bourke would have it, failing to align his poetry with his own earlier egalitarian thinking.[22]

Allusion offers another way into understanding this dialogue between poet and reader. I mentioned earlier Wordsworth's own remarks in the *Preface* on that fifth line, 'Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods', when he suggests that in the reader's mind the word 'broods' brings together the sound of cooing and the idea of incubation, the imagination and the affection: '...by the intervention of the metaphor *broods*, the affections are called in by the imagination'. He does not, however, refer to the other ideas called in by the word, literary and personal. On one level it carries a particular message about the sort of poetic enterprise Wordsworth is undertaking, in its allusion to the evocation of the Holy Spirit in Book One of *Paradise Lost*:

> thou from the first
> Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
> Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss. (i. 8-23) [23]

It also enters into dialogue with Coleridge, who used the stock-dove image in his *Letter to Sara*. It comes firstly in the early part of the poem, 'thy lov'd haunt! where the Stock-doves coo at Noon'. This reference to a specific place expands into a symbol of 'the conjugal & mother Dove' in the closing lines. The allusions, as Lucy Newlyn has pointed out, are parodic:

> Turning Holy Spirits into farmyard fowls is an affectionate and playful kind of satire. It makes fun of Coleridge's solemnity, and of his analogy between

[21] Richard Gravil, *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation, 1787-1842* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 151.
[22] O'Neill, '"The Words He Uttered." A Reading of Wordsworth'.
[23] *Paradise Lost, The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alistair Fowler, (London: Longman Annotated Poets, 1968).

> imagination and God; but it also brings one effectively back to the world of literal things.[24]

I'm not sure that stock-dove in 'Resolution and Independence' is *quite* literal, because we seem to get snagged on its gender. Granted, male stock doves are enlightened birds, and both parents share the duties of incubating the eggs, but the way in which Wordsworth shifts from 'his own sweet voice' in the poem to 'her soft note' in the *Preface* suggests that the dove of the poem is itself shifting between the literal and the literary, both a brooding bird and, as we thought about earlier, a figure for the poet's own brooding. But Lucy Newlyn is quite right, I think, to comment on the parody of this allusion, and the way in which it brings so much more into play, as it were, than Wordsworth allows in the *Preface*. It encourages a sensual response on the part of the reader to the sound of the word, and a literary one as we put it into dialogue with Milton; it also functions as a response itself to Coleridge's poem, and finds an answer, later in the 1807 volume, in the imagery of the 'Nightingale' poem in 'Moods of my Own Mind', composed, according to Jared Curtis, probably between early February and April 1807. Here the stock-dove's song is compared to that of the nightingale, 'a Creature of a fiery heart', whose notes 'pierce, and pierce'. The stock-dove's voice, by contrast, is 'buried among trees', a 'homely tale':

> Yet to be come at by the breeze:
> He did not cease; but coo'd – and coo'd;
> And somewhat pensively he woo'd:
> He sang of love with quiet blending,
> Slow to begin, and never ending;
> Of serious faith, and inward glee;
> That was the Song, the Song for me!

The stock-dove of a single line in 'Resolution and Independence', with its very subtle identification with the poet's own task, is here expanded into the subject of a whole poem, the embodiment of a specific, one might say, resolute poetic attitude. The way in which the stock-dove's perpetual song must be worked at to be heard or understood nicely brings out Wordsworth's own conception of his own work. Moreover, those echoes and allusive patterns allow the reader to respond, to work toward dialogues between poems and poets, without being, like Carroll's old man, beaten over the head by them.

This is not to suggest that this process is easy, or indeed always conscious, for Wordsworth. It comes very gradually through a working out of his own responses to the words of others, and then through long periods of revision. In the first instance, the poem constitutes a response to Dorothy's journal, and also, more broadly, a response to the *Letter to Sara Hutchinson*. On October 3rd, 1800, as everyone here will know, Dorothy and Wordsworth had met 'an old man almost double':

> His trade was to gather leeches, but now leeches are scarce, and he had not strength for it. He lived by begging, and was making his way to Carlisle, where he should buy a few godly books to sell.[25]

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[24] Lucy Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 120.
[25] Ernest de Selincourt, ed., *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*. 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1941) I, 63.

To those in the family and friendship circle who knew of Dorothy's journal entry Wordsworth's poem would have had a special resonance. In the poem the encounter gains force through the poet's own solitude, which echoes the old man 'wandering about alone and silently'. But for some early readers, it would clearly have been an allusion to a shared experience – like Coleridge's mention of the 'adder's tongue' in his footnote to 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', which again picks up Dorothy's words, this time in the Alfoxden notebook describing ferns they had seen on walks with Coleridge in February 1798. As Mays suggests, the fern may have been 'among the first near-private emblems shared by Coleridge and the Wordsworths'.[26] Similarly, it is important to remember that though the poem is presented as the narrative of an individual's progress toward resolution and independence, its encounter is mediated through Dorothy's words, through Wordsworth's own reading or listening to the journal entry two years after the original meeting, and, in part, through his response to Sara Hutchinson's 'tediousness' comment. Wordsworth's leech-gatherer is of course different from the one whom he had met with Dorothy. Dorothy's is a lonely figure, but he is defined through his links with others, his 'Scotch parents', his dead wife and ten children, his lost sailor son. Wordsworth's leech-gatherer is bent double 'as if some dire constraint of pain, or rage / Of sickness felt by him in times long past' weighs upon him; but in Dorothy's account we hear of a specific pain suffered, 'He had been hurt in driving a cart, his leg broke, his body driven over, his skull fractured'. Moreover, he is not a leech-gatherer any more: he is not strong enough to persevere in his trade, although he clearly remembers the details. But when we turn back to the version of the poem composed in early May 1802, the one sent to Sara Hutchinson, we see that Wordsworth was using far more specific allusions to Dorothy's journal entry, especially in lines 130-34:

> I go with godly Books from Town to Town
> Now I am seeking Leeches up & down
> From house to house I go from Barn to Barn
> All over Cartmell Fells & up to Blellan Tarn.

This earlier version is much more literal, in particular its description of the first sighting of the leech-gatherer:

> I to the borders of a Pond did come
> By which an Old man was, far from all house or home.

'Not stood, not sat, but '*was*' – the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible', writes Wordsworth to the Hutchinsons in defence of the lines. Here we see how he is struggling with his own concept of metaphoric language versus ordinary language. There's an uncompromising awkwardness about that 'was', followed by the line-break, and between the 'come' and 'home' rhyme, which is flattened and modulated in the revised version:

[26] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*. ed. J. C. C. Mays. 3 (2 part) vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) I, 351.

> I saw a Man before me unawares:
> The oldest Man he seem'd that ever wore grey hairs.
> My course I stopped as soon as I espied
> The Old Man in that naked wilderness
> Close by a Pond, upon the further side.

We can see how in both his defence of the original, and in his revisions, how he is wrestling with the same concept of simplicity he had put forward in the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800, which, Dorothy tells us in that journal entry, he had been thinking about on the day they met the leech-gatherer: 'he talked much about the object of his essay for the second volume "of L. B"'.[27] We can see a clear continuity between the emphasis on 'plainer, and more emphatic language' and 'nakedness and simplicity' of that essay, and the 'naked simplicity' of the early versions of the 'Leech-Gatherer'. But in the later versions, that nakedness, rather than a mode of description, becomes an adjective applied to the wilderness, perhaps an additional complication or ornamentation. That 'was' is replaced by a more uncertain 'The oldest Man he seem'd', and there is an emphasis on the poet's perception of the man, which may itself be uncertain or 'unawares'. Does it follow, then, that he is moving away from those earlier ideals of simplicity when he revises the poem? I think, on the contrary, that they become even more deeply embedded in the final version, and here I am again indebted for my thinking on this point to the work Richard Gravil has done in showing how important the leech-gatherer becomes as an archetypal figure, shaped by the consciousness of the late 1790s and the Racedown/Alfoxden concern with economic hardship, and yet also connected to larger patterns of folk tale and myth: 'but whereas the Dorset and Somerset figures challenge what we do[…] Cumbrian figures challenge what we are'.[28] Moreover, this transition has in part been effected through listening, through response (albeit reluctant) to Sara Hutchinson's difficulty with the first version. The uncertainty of 'seem'd' and 'unawares', I'd argue, adds to this idea of the poet ceding absolute authority.

If the leech-gatherer is in part shaped by the figures of the 1790s poems, 'Resolution and Independence' is also a response to the friendship of that time. It is a poem which looks back to the great years of exchange with Coleridge in 1797 and 1798, and which specifically responds, of course, to Coleridge's 'Letter to Sara Hutchinson' and its later version 'Dejection: An Ode'. I'll focus on Coleridge's 'Letter' here, written in April 1802, the month before 'The Leech-Gatherer', and itself a response to the first four stanzas of 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'. In Lucy Newlyn's words, the 'Letter' shows 'a strange and moving … awareness that *Intimations* evokes no corresponding intensity in himself'.[29] There has, of course, been a great deal written about the correspondences and competition between the poets; here I want briefly to touch on how 'Resolution and Independence' mirrors and partially answers Coleridge's own questions about response and finding a sympathetic audience.[30] Wordsworth's anxieties concerning metaphorical and ordinary language

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[27] de Selincourt, ed., *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* I, 63.
[28] Gravil, *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation, 1787-1842,* 153.
[29] Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* 79.
[30] See Newlyn, *Coleridge, Wordsworth and the Language of Allusion* 17-137, Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1988. 'Wordsworth's Two Replies to Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode", by Milton Teichman. *PMLA*, Vol. 86, No. 5 (Oct. 1971): pp. 982-89, also touches on the importance of 'Stanzas Written in My Pocket-Copy of Thomson's " Castle of Indolence"', as a humorous continuation of the dialogue.

are intertwined with the struggles of Coleridge to make one thing relate to another, and to connect thing to thought. The connections and relations between the two poems go some way toward providing an answer to both poets' fears. Both are poems concerning the anxiety of reading as much as of writing, and Wordsworth's, importantly, is a re-reading of Coleridge's themes.

We begin the 'Letter' in 'dull', 'unrous'd', 'lazy' mood, where even the prospect of a storm seems to bring welcome action:

> O! Sara! that the Gust ev'n now were swelling,
> And the slant Night-Shower driving loud & fast! [31]

But 'Resolution and Independence', of course, begins the morning after the storm. And even in retrospect, that roaring wind is more active and positive than Coleridge's 'Wind / Which long has rav'd unnotic'd', groaning, shuddering, bringing forth a corresponding 'Scream of agony' from the Eolian lute – so potent an emblem of creative and marital harmony in the Clevedon years, and for readers of his *Poems on Various Subjects*. Those early years, and most especially the Nether Stowey period, now appear for Coleridge as a high-water mark of happiness, followed by a fall into separation, literally and metaphorically. He is haunted by the great fear that he cannot hold things together, either in terms of his own creative imagination, or of relationships, doomed now to 'Indifference or Strife'. Just as he cannot respond to the thrush's wooing, so he fears that he cannot make the connection between self and other, or between different objects. 'Outward Forms' cannot be illuminated by inward 'Passion' and 'Life', they obstinately remain 'lifeless Shapes'. Where once allusions and associations served to connect and to relate, they now reinforce this sense of separation:

> Yon crescent Moon, as fix'd as if it grew
> In it's own cloudless, starless Lake of Blue –
> A boat becalm'd! dear William's Sky Canoe!
> – I see them all, so excellently fair!
> I see, not feel, how beautiful they are.

That 'boat becalm'd' looks back to the desperate isolation of 'Ancient Mariner': even the shared emblem of the 'Sky Canoe' marks out Coleridge's distance from mutual happiness. Contemplating the 'one happy Home' intensifies his loneliness, 'Eats out the pith of Joy, makes all Joy hollow'. It's a sense of separation only reinforced by his hopeless echoes of Wordsworth's exclamations in the 'Ode':

> The fullness of your bliss, I feel – I feel it all…

And

> I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!

But the dialogue is continued and altered by 'Resolution and Independence', where allusions to the 'Letter to Sara' signal both how Wordsworth shares and understands Coleridge's fears, and also show a desire to respond, and to present, as it were, a resolution. So the throstle which goes unanswered in Coleridge's lines *is* answered by the birds of Wordsworth's first stanza, where the stock-dove's brooding and cooing picks up the sound of the throstle's wooing. These echoes remind Coleridge that his

[31] This text from Coleridge's fair copy MS., repr. Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. Mays. I., ii, 677-691.

connections and associations are not hollow: they belong within a creative dialogue. Chatterton 'the marvellous Boy', for instance, belongs in Coleridgean self-mythology, from the marriage in St. Mary Redcliffe to the opening poem of *Poems on Various Subjects*, which invited Chatterton's wraith to join in the Pantisocracy scheme. Like the starved Otway, Chatterton is also a significant part of Coleridge's narrative of the unappreciated, unloved young poet, and indeed Otway does surface in line 120 of 'Dejection: An Ode', just as he had done in melodramatic mode in 1790s letters to Poole. So Wordsworth's use of Chatterton is a reminder to Coleridge that he *is* appreciated, that he has found a sympathetic response: an identification which might go some way to diminishing his sense of isolation.

Even that moment of lonely anxiety in 'Resolution and Independence':

> 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?

is also a movement of mutual identification and sympathy. As Mary Wedd has commented, the 'lines are overtly meant to refer to himself but one cannot miss also their appropriateness to his friend'.[32] I agree with her that Wordsworth seems in these beautifully Biblically inflected lines to be voicing a typically Coleridgean fear, since that call for love sounds so loudly and so often throughout Coleridge's writings. For a moment, Coleridge's fears become a part of Wordsworth's poetic identity: he voices them as his own.[33]

Is this another case of Wordsworth the egotist, relentlessly gathering and subjugating other voices to his own? Perhaps we could turn to another instance of a writer taking on Coleridge's voice for help on this point. 'Egotistical they have been pronounced by some who did not know, that what he tells us, as of himself, was often true only (historically) of another'.[34] Charles Lamb is defending Elia here, and, in particular, his 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago',

> where under the *first person* (his favourite figure) he shadows forth the forlorn estate of a country-boy placed at a London school … in direct opposition to his own early history. If it be egotism to imply and twine with his own identity the griefs and affections of another – making himself many, or reducing many unto himself – then is the skilful novelist, who all along brings in his hero, or heroine, speaking of themselves, the greatest egotist of all; who yet has never, therefore, been accused of that narrowness.

Even as he apparently elucidates the issue, however, Lamb is further complicating the identity of the writer, since this comes from the 'Preface' to *The Last Essays of Elia*, written 'by a friend of the late Elia' – it is both an assertion and a dissolution of the Elia persona, a teasing play with the reader's concept of the author. As such it's an appropriate passage to put alongside the ways in which distinctions between self and other, between reader, writer, and subject, are being collapsed in 'Resolution and

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[32] Wedd, 'The Leech Gatherer', 98.

[33] Although, these lines perhaps also express a touch of Wordsworth's exasperation with Coleridge from 1802 onwards.

[34] E. V. Lucas, ed., *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*. 8 vols. (London: Methuen, 1912) II, 171.

Independence' – and a good answer, from one reader of Wordsworth to another, to Carroll's assertion that Wordsworth doesn't listen to the leech-gatherer.

> Why, then, does he not hear his words?
>
> But now his voice to me was like a stream
> Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide.

Because he is exploring, I think, the creative possibilities of taking on another words, of 'implying and twining with his own identity the griefs and affections of another', a respite, however temporary, from the fear of separation and division – 'nor word from word could I divide' – which also offers strength in the face of creative isolation. The leech-gatherer seems to embody Wordsworth's vision of the strong poet: the self-possessed, stately man, who perseveres and fulfils his task although it involves placing himself outside society, 'wandering about alone and silently', a image at once fearful and compelling for Wordsworth. Yet the leech-gatherer also offers reassurance, since, if both poet and leech-gatherer are engaged in looking and reading, both, too, eventually manage to 'find': 'Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may'. Similarly, the poet finds consolation, reassurance, from the leech-gatherer, whilst emphasising that this is a movement of sympathy rather than of direct understanding. Wordsworth moves further away from the leech-gatherer's actual words, as reported by Dorothy, but becomes more interested in the difficulty of one person hearing, sympathising, and responding to the other.

This difficulty is emphasised by the lines of the closing stanza:

> I could have laugh'd myself to scorn, to find
> In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.

There's almost a movement of self-parody in that phrase 'laugh'd myself to scorn', which mocks the self-dramatization of the earlier stanzas. We have been shown from the start the difficulties both of listening and responding, and the poem seems to me to end with a wry admission of the possibility of sometimes getting it wrong. This self-parody and 'scorn' perhaps allows the certainty of the closing line to be questioned – 'I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor'. The poet's thoughts, after all, are, as we have seen through the poem, changeable and fluid, and his self-conscious difficulty in hearing and in understanding the leech-gatherer helps us to see that this is not a poem of egotism, but a poem *about* egotism; a poem of response which consciously dramatises the partial, problematic nature of that response.

Moreover, in placing the difficulties of response at the heart of his poem, Wordsworth perhaps shows an acceptance of readerly difficulties which is missing from his prose work. In 'Resolution and Independence', as he does not in his letters or in his prefaces, he acknowledges that neither poet nor reader are immune to difficulties of communication and interpretation. As Lucy Newlyn puts it, the encounter between leech-gatherer and poet

> might be said to call attention to the self-preoccupations, personal investments, lapses of concentration, which make for careless listeners and inattentive

> readers. It reminds us that in all our efforts to interpret we are in danger of missing the point.[35]

Alongside the exasperation with Wordsworth's monolithic dogmatism expressed by readers such as Carroll we should set the possibility raised by that admission, 'I could have laugh'd myself to scorn'. Perhaps Wordsworth, then, in his anticipation of these ongoing critical problems of interpretation and response, ends with the last laugh.

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[35] Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism* 117.

“‘Moods of my own Mind”: Wordsworth and the Spontaneous’

By SALLY BUSHELL

THE POEMS INCLUDED IN ‘MOODS OF MY OWN MIND’ in Wordsworth’s 1807 *Poems in Two Volumes* embody a contradiction. Many of them were the focus of criticism at the time of publication, for their slightness and simplicity, yet lasting expressions are contained here — most notably ‘The Child is Father of the Man’ and ‘I wandered lonely as a cloud’. My approach to these poems, however, will be to try and understand, if not resolve, that contradiction not by considering them individually but as a contained totality within the volume intended to work together to produce a certain effect. It is necessary to begin by considering the highly negative critical reception of this particular section of *Poems* and Wordsworth's defence of them, which first allows the possibility of a ‘collective’ reading. Then I want to go on to think about these poems as an attempt to represent and create a directly ‘spontaneous’ experience for poet and reader — one that runs across the individual pieces. The second half of the paper, then, will consider the larger issue of what we understand the ‘spontaneous’ to be within creativity, as well as what it might mean or do for Wordsworth.

It is important to remember that this was Wordsworth's first publication since the highly popular editions of *Lyrical Ballads* and the ‘Preface’. Many of the reviews of 1807-08 therefore compared the 1807 collection unfavourably with the earlier one on the grounds that it represented those principles taken to an extreme degree. The dominant response was that principles of simplicity of language and subject could be taken too far. A second key issue, related to the first, was that of language: true poetry requires a heightened form of expression in language. Reviewers pointed out that the most successful of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* were so, not because they held to the principle of simplicity, but because they broke it. Simplicity then is a key concern which recurs in the reviews. Another is the issue of whether a poet ought to seek to share the ‘moods of my own mind’ — is this really poetry at all?

Byron's early anonymous review in *Monthly Literary Recreations* (July 1807) explicitly singles out ‘Moods of my Own Mind’ for criticism:

> The pieces least worthy of the author are those entitled ‘Moods of my own Mind,’ we certainly wish these ‘Moods’ had been less frequent, or not permitted to occupy a place near works, which only make their deformity more obvious; when Mr. W. ceases to please, it is by ‘abandoning’ his mind to the most common-place ideas, at the same time clothing them in language not simple, but puerile: what will any reader or auditor, out of the nursery, say to such namby-pamby as ‘Lines written at the foot of Brother's Bridge’. (Woof, *Critical Heritage*, 170)

This review sets the tone for many which follow it — by use of the derogatory term ‘puerile’ which crops up again and again, and by labelling the poems as the wrong kind of simplicity: Wordsworth fails by stating the obvious in an unsophisticated way. Equally, the ‘Moods’ themselves are not felt to be an appropriate subject for poetry.

A second anonymous review in *Le Beau Monde* (October 1807) is useful for giving a clear idea of how Wordsworth's principles, as articulated in *Lyrical Ballads*, are seen to fail in these later poems:

> Feeling and nature are two very pretty words, and much in use with the philosophical and simple poets . . . but the descriptions of feeling and nature are not necessarily valuable in all their shapes, and that affection of the mind which employed on a great or universally interesting topic would inspire our general sympathy, is most likely, when exercised upon a mean object, or a chimerical idea, to excite no emotion but laughter. (Woof, *Critical Heritage*, 177)

This makes clear the way in which Wordsworth is being reviewed contextually — as part of a certain school of writing and as the earlier author of *Lyrical Ballads* — but it also does raise an important point. Wordsworth will fail to achieve his intended result if the sympathetic object at the heart of the poem excites not compassion, but ridicule. The danger, then, is that the poet self-indulgently gives an account of his own inner feelings which are unshared. The comment illustrates how much Wordsworth's poetics, in terms of simplicity and spontaneity as outlined in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, depends upon activating a certain kind of reader-response. If it is not activated then there is a problem. Such a criticism also anticipates Coleridge's later identification of 'Defects of Wordsworth's Poetry' in Chapter 22 of *Biographia Literaria* where he defines two failings which are present in 'Moods of My Own Mind'. One is:

> the INCONSTANCY of the style. Under this name I refer to the sudden and unprepared transitions from lines or sentences of peculiar felicity . . . to a style, not only unimpassioned but undistinguished. (*Collected Coleridge* 2, 121)

The other is 'mental bombast' which Coleridge defines as 'a disproportion of thought to the circumstance and occasion' (*CC* 2,136) or 'thoughts and images too great for the subject' (2,136). This last characteristic clearly looks back to the criticism made in the review above (that too much weight is being given to minor things). It is also worth remembering that exactly this criticism is applied to the ever-popular 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' by Lucy Aikin in the *Annual Review* (Spring 1808):

> The pieces entitled Moods of my own Mind, are some of them very happy, some quite the reverse. When a man endeavours to make his reader enter into an association that exists in his own mind between daffodils waving in the wind, and laughter . . . he fails, and is sure to fail . . . (Woof, *Critical Heritage*, 220-221)[1]

Such a disparity between past and present responses to the poem also raises questions on both sides about the ways in which expectation and preconception colours that response.

Wordsworth defended the 1807 poems in a letter to Lady Beaumont of 21st May, 1807. Although written immediately after publication of the collection (and thus prior to publication of the reviews), the letter is a characteristic example of Wordsworthian self-defence and one that strongly anticipates his public attack upon critics and readers in the 'Preface' of 1815 (and the division of readership there into the 'Public' of his own day and the 'People' of the future). Wordsworth's first stance is to deny the validity of current opinion, since those who live in the world are too bound up with the demands of society to appreciate poetry and will not possess the

[1] Coleridge also picks out the final stanza of the poem and the shift from its first two lines to the last two as an example of 'mental bombast' in *Biographia Literaria* (*CC* 2, 136). However, Wordsworth anticipates such charges in defending the same two lines (*MY* 1: 174).

higher feelings required to do so anyway. Wordsworth then turns his back on such readers and denounces the present readership in favour of a future one which will be able to appreciate him. So he tells Lady Beaumont:

> Trouble not yourself upon their present reception; of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny, to console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier, to teach the young and the gracious of every age, to see, to think and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office. . . (*MY* 1: 146)

Wordsworth protects himself from negative criticism by discounting such opinion altogether. In the second half of the letter, Wordsworth moves from a larger denial of critical opinion to a specific defence of certain poems in the collection. He defends both his 'Sonnets on Liberty' and 'Moods of my own Mind' on the same grounds: that it is not their individual but their collective worth that counts. So, of the sonnets he states:

> that those to Liberty, at least, have a connection with, or a bearing upon, each other, and therefore, if individually they want weight, perhaps as a Body, they may not be so deficient. . . . these Sonnets . . . do at the same time collectively make a Poem on the subject of civil Liberty and national independence. . . (*MY* 1: 147)

Wordsworth here makes an argument for the value of contextual organisation within the volume so that individual poems also 'collectively make a Poem'. Perhaps this is particularly clear in the case of a sonnet sequence — where the poems are already gathered together on a related theme — but Wordsworth is also making a point about the nature of literary texts: that they exist in a doubled context of intrinsic and extrinsic (contextual) meaning. The contextual reading, the way in which we make connections between poems within a collection, is a kind of 'gestalt' meaning, created by the mind finding patterns and links whether they are there or not. It is a form of secondary creativity in which poems are juxtaposed or grouped to create a meaning larger than themselves which was almost certainly not present at the time of writing individual poems. Such meaning is formed at the time of reading rather than intended at the time of writing. This comment then leads into his defence of the poems in 'Moods of my own Mind':

> Again, turn to the 'Moods of my own Mind'. There is scarcely a Poem here of above thirty Lines, and very trifling these poems will appear to many; but, omitting to speak of them individually, do they not, taken collectively, fix the attention upon a subject eminently poetical, viz., the interest which objects in nature derive from the predominance of certain affections more or less permanent, more or less capable of salutary renewal in the mind of the being contemplating these objects? This is poetic, and essentially poetic, and why? because it is creative. (*MY* 1: 147)[2]

Wordsworth's defence seems to be that the poems are about a certain kind of response to the world — a permanent renewal in small things. The collective meaning comes into being through repeated small examples of everyday events and acts in individual poems. It is not that poetry

[2] See also Jared Curtis's discussion of this letter, and of Wordsworthian composition in *Wordsworth's Experiments with Tradition*: *The Lyric Poems of 1802* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971) 33-38.

has to be written in everyday language or about the common man, but that the everyday itself is capable of being poetic if we respond to it as such. This idea is right at the heart of Wordsworthian poetics, I think, but it is often overlooked by the more obvious statements of the 'Preface' (concerning the ordinary man as subject and voice). It goes to the core of what Poetry is for Wordsworth — that it is not so much about words and language at all, as it is about a certain kind of attitude towards the world around you, and allowing yourself to be released into that attitude. The poems in 'Moods of my own Mind' could be considered as an experiment in attempting to produce such a response in the reader through their contextual relations and cumulative effect.

The second way in which I want to think about the 'Moods of my own Mind' is by engaging with the concept of the spontaneous in poetry. When something is described as 'spontaneous' what is generally meant by this is that it is unpremeditated or immediate. We act without prior planning or thought and use this term from the Latin '*sponte*', meaning, 'of one's own accord, willingly' or 'Arising, proceeding, or acting entirely from natural impulse' (*OED*). Thus, the concept of the spontaneous is associated with a willing loss of control, or giving up of the self to the moment, and is valued for that.[3] This is also worth considering further — What is it we value? Spontaneous acts are often pleasurable because they are unexpected and surprise us. But they also perhaps allow us to present ourselves to the world and to each other in a very unconstrained way, without the usual controls. So spontaneity could be seen as a shared opening up of the self. The spontaneous is most commonly concerned with actions or speech and thus we have phrases such as 'the spontaneous gesture' or 'a spontaneous utterance'. These modes of being both allow us very readily to be spontaneous. Finally, because spontaneity comes suddenly it has a temporal dimension involving the immediate present.

If we turn from action or speech to creative expression, then the concept of the spontaneous still retains a unique value since 'spontaneous thought' corresponds to the idea of inspiration. Again, it is valued for its unpredictability and for the way it occurs as a kind of unexpected gift, not given to all. In the Romantic period it also becomes associated with genius and with an organic model in which the work comes forth 'spontaneously' in a single harmonious act of natural growth. It is thus given high status within an aesthetic which values the unexplained higher workings of the mind. What really concerns us though, and what really concerned Wordsworth, is the translation of spontaneous thought into writing. Is there such a thing as spontaneous creative writing? Can we write in a state of absolute immediacy in which word is thought? Romantic myth-making works hard to present almost all composition as occurring in this way, but, as we now know, very few texts are written straight out in their final form. It is true that Keats's sonnets do strongly attest to spontaneous written composition but Wordsworth rarely composes directly through written draft with no prior working. If a poem is 'written in the mind' first, or spoken and then entered on the page, is this still a spontaneous act? Of course the actual act of writing is spontaneous but the content of the writing is pre-conceived. This means that the very concept of spontaneous writing by implication always has a double dimension to it: that of the thought word and the physical entry of the word on the page. For Keats, these two events occur either immediately together or with a minimal temporal space between them. For Wordsworth, especially where preceding oral composition has occurred, these

[3] I am aware that contemporary literary theory would be inclined to dismiss the notion of individual creative spontaneity in favour of concepts of pre-existing structures of language and codes which bring forth the work. It seems to me, however, that the problem of agency remains, even for such 'bringing forth' and that even if individual linguistic spontaneity is an illusion, it is one in which we all participate every day.

two events are separated. Defining what we mean by spontaneous writing is thus highly problematic in comparison with spontaneous speech or action.

Before returning to Wordsworth's conception of the spontaneous, I want to briefly consider Dorothy's *Journal* by comparison. The form of Journal or Diary as a genre is in part defined by immediacy, as Robert Fothergill points out in an article entitled 'One Day at a Time: The Diary as Lifewriting'. He states of the form:

> What the text lacks in perspective, it gains in immediacy. The relatively unmanaged nature of the final text, free from the master-minding of the autobiographer, becomes a promise of a particular kind of authenticity. 'This is how I saw things at the time. . .'[4]

The diary entry, by its very nature, is unpremeditated and thus 'spontaneous' since it works as a record of the factual events and feelings of each day's entry for the person concerned at a particular moment within it. But there is also a paradox here in that it is emphatically of the moment — emphasising the 'now' time of writing — and yet it looks back on the day and re-visits what has happened within it.[5] Thus it is both spontaneous (this is me, writing now) and not, since it must recall and repeat events in order to enter its daily record. In Dorothy's *Grasmere Journals*, the dominant temporal state of the text is that of a 'writing up' of the day's events. The normative tense of the *Journal* therefore is the immediate past, with Dorothy recollecting events that have occurred earlier that day, (although the level of detailed recreation involved is remarkable). Woven through this dominant time perspective, however, is a use of the immediate present. So, on Tuesday 23rd March, 1802, the entry reads:

> A mild morning. William worked at the Cuckow poem. I sewed beside him. After dinner he slept I read German, & at the closing in of day went to sit in the Orchard — he came to me, & walked backwards & forwards, we talked about C — Wm repeated the poem to me — I left him there & in 20 minutes he came in rather tired with attempting to write — he is now reading Ben Jonson I am going to read German it is about 10 o clock, a quiet night. The fire flutters & the watch ticks I hear nothing else save the Breathings of my Beloved.[6]

The entry moves between different time dimensions. It is set by the daily round which establishes the mood in the context of the larger journal (what is this day like compared to all the others? — A mild one). It records events within the day in order, factually, but with an emotional dimension in the writer's careful watchfulness over her brother. Towards the end it shifts from the record into the 'now' of writing, asserting itself as an absolutely immediate record of their life together ('he is now reading . . .' etc). The immediacy of the moment of recording asserts itself powerfully. Interestingly, on the manuscript page (DC MS 19) there is no physical distinction between the times of writing or the nature of entry.

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[4] R. A. Fothergill, 'One Day at a Time: The Diary as Lifewriting.' *A/B Autobiography Studies* 10.1 (Spring 1991): 51-91.

[5] See also Alan Liu's account of the 'autobiographical present' in Dorothy's *Journals* ('On the Autobiographical Present: Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals*,' *Criticism* 26.2 [1984]: 115-137) as 'an experience of the present that even at the moment of experience constitutes itself as a representation of presence' (115).

[6] Dorothy Wordsworth, *Grasmere Journals*. ed. Pamela Woof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 82.

There is also no crossing out or correction of the entry because of the text's dominant characteristic as a record of a particular moment.

Dorothy's use of the spontaneous makes clear to us how much it is concerned with time and the lapsing of time. The Journal entry moves between two dominant kinds of time lapse: the capturing of the experience soon afterwards (at the end of the day) and the capturing of the immediate at the moment of experience (which immediately begins to slip away from that moment).[7] Implicit in both is also the capturing of the immediate action or event in the act of writing, in words on paper. This means that there is always a doubled spontaneity in the written spontaneous. Even if what is being written about happened earlier in the day, the act of writing is always a fresh event. Thus, the *Journal* reveals the concept of a 'revisited' or 'repeated' spontaneity. Dorothy often writes with an astonishing level of recollection, as if she is there, but in fact she is revisiting the spontaneous response of her being <u>through</u> a second spontaneous act of writing.

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[7] Of course the degree of 'time-lapse' in the *Journals* does vary considerably across their extent, with Dorothy sometimes having to 'catch-up' or write up after returning from being away for some time and the presence or absence of William affecting regularity, length and purpose. See Pamela Woof, 'Dorothy Wordsworth's Grasmere Journals: The Patterns and Pressures of Composition'. *Romantic Revisions*. ed. Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 169-190.

It is interesting to compare Dorothy's *Journal* writing as record with that of a twentieth-century poet, Ted Hughes. In a collection of pieces called *Moortown Diary*, Hughes describes his life as part of an old farming community on the edge of Dartmoor, where he and his wife owned a farm. In the introduction he is clear about the nature of the writing presented:

> The pieces in this collection came about by the way. It occurred to me from time to time that interesting things were happening, and that I ought to make a note of them, a note of the details in particular, partly with the idea of maybe using them at some future time in a piece of writing, and partly to make a fleeting snapshot, for myself, of a precious bit of my life.[8]

The writings then, are a record of the immediate present but also potentially serve to be worked up into a poem. Hughes continues:

> I should say something about the form and style in which these pieces are written. I set them down in what appears to be verse for a simple reason. . . . I find I can move closer, and stay closer, if I phrase my observations about it in rough lines. So these improvised verses are nothing more than this: my own way of getting reasonably close to what is going on and staying close . . . This sort of thing had to be set down after the event. If I missed the moment — which meant letting a night's sleep intervene before I took up a pen — I could always see quite clearly what had been lost. (x)

The first poem in the collection, 'Rain', thus begins:

> Rain. Floods. Frost. And after frost, rain.
> Dull roof-drumming. Wraith-rain pulsing across
> purple-bare woods
> Like light across heaved water. Sleet in it.
> And the poor fields, miserable tents of their hedges. (1)

But of course, Hughes's point is that this writing is not in fact 'a poem' at all. He realises this when he is asked to write a poem for a magazine and turns to this material:

> It didn't take me long to realize that I was in the position of a translator: whatever I might make of this passage, I was going to have to destroy the original. And what was original here was not some stranger's poem but the video and surviving voice-track of one of my own days, a moment of my life that I did not want to lose. (xi)

It is interesting that here the value of the spontaneous act is strongly retained over time and felt as an intrinsic part of the product. The spontaneously written retains a sense of closeness for the poet: 'a moment of my life that I did not want to lose' (xi). What Hughes recognises, then, is that spontaneous writing in itself is not poetry, and yet it holds something unique and valuable for the poet. Moreover, because it is not written in the form of prose notes, but as a kind of verse, it occupies a strange intermediate ground. It is and isn't poetry. Instead, what Hughes is describing here is, I think, Moods of the Poet's Mind.

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[8] Ted Hughes, *Moortown Diary* (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) x.

To think more carefully about what the spontaneous means for Wordsworth, we need to turn back to the 1800 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth's famous description of the poetic act, which occurs twice within the piece. In the first use of it, the statement 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' is not explained except in so far as it can only be experienced by a man who 'possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply' (*Prose* 1: 127). In the second usage, Wordsworth famously articulates what he means more clearly:

> I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. (*Prose* 1: 148)

What is interesting about this definition is that spontaneity is linked to an entirely internal event. Even though the phrase 'spontaneous overflow' suggests an outpouring of shared expression this is not what Wordsworth is actually saying. Instead, it is the inner flooding of the self with feeling that provides the vital spontaneous act. Why, then, is the word 'spontaneous' needed here at all?

Paul Magnuson, in an excellent essay on 'Wordsworth and Spontaneity',[9] closely considers the definition of this word, in this context, and suggests three possibilities. At first, Magnuson suggests, we understand Wordsworth to mean spontaneous in the sense of 'sincere, natural feeling' as opposed to any hint of artificiality, so a 'spontaneous overflow' is a true outpouring of sincere emotion. Another interpretation offers the possibility that it means 'unpremeditated' (101) which is the common understanding of the term that I have been working with. Thirdly, Magnuson points out that in eighteenth-century dictionaries the word is defined, following Hobbes and Hume, in terms of 'voluntary actions' (103). He states: 'In its philosophical context "spontaneous" indicates freedom, and in its biological context it indicates self-generation' (103). Magnuson suggests that 'Wordsworth combines both of these meanings and does not imply a lack of premeditation' (103). Returning to the core statement in the 'Preface', Magnuson emphasises that there are two stages to the internal process which brings about poetry: 'original emotion' and 'poetic emotion' (107). Only the first of these corresponds to 'spontaneous' in the sense of the 1807 poems. For Wordsworth, then, 'spontaneous' <u>poetry</u> (as opposed to the merely spontaneous act or thought) is a controlled creative process within the mind asserting the 'self-sufficiency of the poet' (103). Wordsworthian 'spontaneity' is generated from within. This suggests that there is a distinction between what we might call the 'immediate spontaneous' and 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' or the 'internalised spontaneous', for Wordsworth's understanding of what poetry is. Neither definition is concerned with spontaneous <u>writing</u>.

In the 1800 'Preface' Wordsworth's core definition of the creative act is entirely focussed upon the pre-written stage of creativity. His account addresses only imagination, and poetic creativity within the mind, with memory, and a self-conscious awareness of the workings of memory, as a major constituent of the process. But imagination is also, of course, made active through the act of written composition. In reality there should therefore be two kinds of

[9] Paul Magnuson, 'Wordsworth and Spontaneity'. *The Evidence of the Imagination: Studies of Interactions between Life and Art in English Romantic Literature*. ed. Donald H. Reiman, Michael C. Jaye and Betty T. Bennett (New York: New York University Press, 1978).

spontaneous (self-generated) creation which occur in the early stages of composition. The first stage involves the internal translation of direct response to a scene or event into a new emotional form which constitutes the urge to make poetry, but remains internal. The second stage involves the translation of this internal emotion into external expression through words — either as speech and then writing, or directly into written form. This will then be followed by subsequent development of writing from material already written.

If we return to 'Moods of my own Mind', I want to suggest that underlying these simple poems for Wordsworth is an attempt to present written poetry as a directly spontaneous act which is very important to his self-conception as a poet, but which in fact contradicts his own practice and even his definition of the role of the spontaneous within the creative process in the earlier 'Preface'. Throughout *Poems, in Two Volumes* titles of poems, or headings for sections, frequently draw attention to the time and place of writing. Volume I includes five poems under the subheading 'Poems, Composed During a Tour, Chiefly on Foot' and sonnets in the two volumes have titles such as 'Composed after a Journey across the Hamilton Hills, Yorkshire'; 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 3, 1803'. In each case the title suggests an immediate response to the scene before the poet. Perhaps the most interesting example, in terms of poetic spontaneity, is one of the poems in 'Moods of my own Mind' entitled 'Written in March, While resting on the Bridge at the Foot of Brother's Water' which Byron singled out for criticism. This begins:

> The cock is crowing,
> The stream is flowing,
> The small birds twitter,
> The lake doth glitter,
> The green field sleeps in the sun;
> The oldest and youngest
> Are at work with the strongest;
> The cattle are grazing,
> Their heads never raising;
> There are forty feeding like one!
> (Curtis, *Poems*, Reading Text, 206-7)

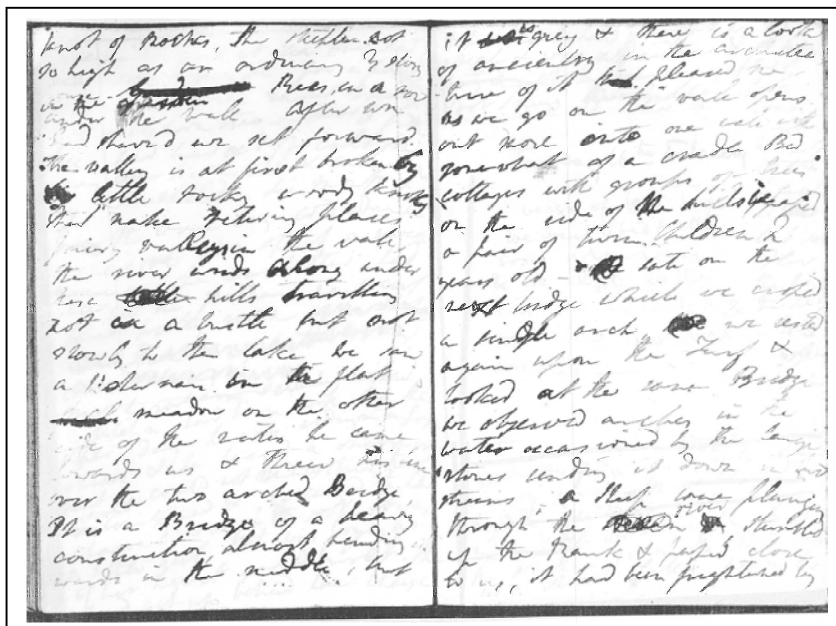
The poem presents itself in terms of a direct and immediate sensory response to the world around it — as a straightforward written record of a particular moment, as the momentary capturing of a particular fleeting state — which poet and reader can experience equally as if at the same moment. The immediate present converges the times of experiencing and reading about the experience (implicitly eliding the act of writing which has allowed the two to be brought together).

We can place alongside the poem on Brother's Water, Dorothy's account of Wordsworth writing the poem, dated Friday 16th April, 1802:

> When we came to the foot of Brothers water I left William sitting on the Bridge & went along the path on the right side of the Lake, through the wood — I was delighted with what I saw — the water under the boughs of the bare old trees, the simplicity of the mountains & the exquisite beauty of the path. There was one grey cottage. I repeated the Glowworm as I walked along — I hung over the gate, & thought I could have stayed for

ever. When I returned I found William writing a poem descriptive of the sights & sounds we saw and heard. There was the gentle flowing of the stream, the glittering lively lake, green fields without a living creature to be seen on them, behind us, a flat pasture with 42 cattle feeding, to our left the road leading to the hamlet, no smoke there, the sun shone on the bare roofs. The people were at work ploughing, harrowing & sowing — Lasses spreading dung, a dogs barking now & then, cocks crowing, birds twittering, the snow in patches at the top of the highest hills, yellow palms, purple & green twigs on the Birches, ashes with their glittering spikes quite bare. . . William finished his poem before we got to the foot of Kirkstone. (*Grasmere Journal* 86-7)

We are used to reading Dorothy against William and William against Dorothy. The case has been made, initially for Dorothy as a vital textual support for her brother and more recently for a valuing of her as a different kind of writer to be appreciated in her own right.[10] In this instance, however, I want to suggest that they are doing the same thing — only William tries to write his spontaneous response in verse, whilst Dorothy writes in prose. Dorothy keeps her *Journal* as a record of fleeting states of mind, moods, scenes and in this section of *Poems, in Two Volumes* Wordsworth attempts to use poetry in the same way. However, although Dorothy's *Journal* text at first appears more naturally spontaneous than William's poem, this is not strictly true. In an article discussing the manuscripts of Dorothy's *Journals*, Pamela Woof reminds us that it must have been on the next day, April 17th 1802, that ‘she must have written up the two-day walk she and WW had just taken from Ullswater to Grasmere’ (‘Dorothy Wordsworth's Grasmere Journals: Readings in a Familiar Text,’ 39).[11] Unlike the earlier clean manuscript page, this page of DC MS 19 is clearly re-worked by Dorothy, with characteristic circular crossings-out.



[10] A very persuasive case for Dorothy’s distinctiveness is made by Anne K. Mellor in ‘Writing the Self/Self Writing: William Wordsworth's *Prelude*/Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Journals*’. *Romanticism and Gender*. ed. Anne K. Mellor (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 144-169.

[11] I am not entirely sure about this. Wordsworth writes to Coleridge on the evening of the 16th April (see n13 below), so it seems to me at least possible that Dorothy might also write the Journal that evening.

Woof tells us: 'In the writing-up of these two days, April 15th and 16th, 1802 there are some seventeen tiny crossings-out and insertions' (39). This almost certainly reflects her awareness that Wordsworth would also be reading the material — most memorably as it turns out, since this was the same trip on which Dorothy described the daffodils, which William would respond to, poetically, at least two years later.[12]

For his part, Wordsworth also tidies up what he sees in Brother's Water, and adds rhyme, but on the day he writes it, (a significant day — Good Friday — noted by Dorothy) he does attempt to write a poem which purports to describe exactly what he sees around him and we know, from this record, that he does write it in that place at that time. He also sends a copy off to Coleridge the same day.[13] What Wordsworth seems to be doing is trying to create purely spontaneously, whilst also trying to produce a poem that activates the reader into a shared experience. These two aims are largely incompatible. Moreover, as Hughes has made clear, and as Wordsworth himself had articulated in the earlier 'Preface', poetry is not spontaneous writing, actually these are two different forms. In the end this is why Wordsworth has to justify the 'Moods of my own Mind' collectively. When read in a cumulative way the merely spontaneous becomes one state, or mood, which sets off another — a whole which is more than the sum of its parts.

It should be clear by now that many of the negative reviews of 'Moods of my own Mind' are touching upon the fact that a doubled process — acting upon the spontaneous moment rather than simply presenting the spontaneous — has not occurred. Byron accused WW of 'abandoning his mind to the most common place ideas' (*Critical Heritage*, 170) and Montgomery of producing 'mere reveries in rhyme' (*Critical Heritage*, 210). But Wordsworth's request for a collective reading, articulated in the letter to Lady Beaumont, does overcome the problem to some extent. What it reveals, or allows, is a certain kind of movement, in the mind of poet and reader, a sudden shift from the common-place, or even the banal, into a moment's realisation. Of course, from one perspective this simply corresponds to Coleridge's 'INCONSTANCY of the style' but when the poems are read as a whole, the froth and simplicity between these clear moments simply works to punctuate them and make them stand out more sharply. Amidst the slightness of the subjects, suddenly a poem will sharpen and clarify into a perfectly articulated core expression.

All of the most memorable poems in 'Moods of my own Mind' possess such clear moments of transformation. 'The Sparrow's Nest' is a good example of this:

> Look, five blue eggs are gleaming there!
> Few visions have I seen more fair,
> Nor many prospects of delight
> More pleasing than that simple sight!
> I started, seeming to espy
> The home and shelter'd bed,
> The Sparrow's dwelling, which, hard by
> My Father's House, in wet or dry,

[12] The Cornell edition dates 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' as 'Composed probably between late March 1804 and early April 1807, possibly by the end of 1804' (Curtis, 207). It only survives in fair copy.

[13] The draft of this poem has not survived. The earliest surviving fair copy is in the letter to Coleridge of April 16th, 1802 (Curtis, 206) in which Wordsworth tells him that 'This morning was delightful; we set off about half past ten and walked slow with many rests; I wrote the little description you will find over leaf during one of them' (*EY* 347).

My Sister Emmeline and I
Together visited.
She look'd at it as if she fear'd it;
Still wishing, dreading to be near it:
Such heart was in her, being then
A little Prattler among men.
The Blessing of my later years
Was with me when a Boy;
She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;
And humble cares, and delicate fears;
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
And love, and thought, and joy.
(Curtis, *Poems*, Reading Text 212-213)

The poem begins by emphasising the immediate, presenting itself as a pure record of an every-day act, starting with a direct address to sister or reader — 'Look' — and then shifting into a recollection stimulated by it. The poem opens each stanza with an ambiguous temporality and audience, so that both moments of looking on the nest (first by the brother, then by the sister as recalled by the brother) are shared, immediate and in a suspended time until they are resolved later in the stanza. The final lines, as declaration, statement, prayer of thanks, at first read like a poem within a poem. The clear declaration and certainty of those lines contrasts with the present, past and re-imagined mini-narratives that came before. But of course, those repeated, slight, moments also serve both to authorise and to illustrate the statement: What would the poet see if he did not also see empathetically through the eyes of his sister? What will the reader see if he will only allow that temporal ambiguity to include himself? Read in the collective context of 'Moods of my own Mind', then, the poem exemplifies a movement, from the everyday into something higher, which recurs at key points throughout those poems.

Nevertheless, these poems ultimately raise the problem of how much credit or weight should be given to authorial intention. There is little doubt that Wordsworth has strong and clear aims for his reader and that an argument can be made for reading the poems collectively. However, the 'collective' defence would be more convincing if it weren't for the fact that the poems only appear together in this form in the 1807 volumes. When Wordsworth re-published them in 1815 he divided the poems up and lost the sub-heading. Coleridge's criticism also stands against Wordsworth's defence — suggesting that such an effect is certainly there but that it does not work. Is either position 'right' or 'wrong' or are they just a less, or more, generous way of interpreting the poems? Ultimately, I want to suggest that what a collective reading of 'Moods of my own Mind' attempts to do (whether it succeeds or not) is to enact a movement from the merely immediate spontaneous (with which the reader cannot connect) into the higher acting of words, upon him or her, that is poetry. The weaknesses identified by Coleridge occur as a result of the distinction between the attempt to capture a spontaneous moment by the poet, and the secondary transformation of that response into an empathetic point of connection to the reader. What the poems try to do, overall, is to present the reader with the raw materials of poetry but also with the experience of its translation into something more. In other words, 'Moods of my own Mind actively puts into practice what the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* merely describes.

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'The Solitary Reaper' and other Poems 'Written During a Tour of Scotland'[1]

By GEORGE SOULE

I HOPE YOU WON'T MIND MY STARTING ON A PERSONAL NOTE and adding a few more such notes along the way. I must confess that I hadn't read a word of Wordsworth until I was almost 19 years old. When I was led to him in a college class, I was stunned. We read a number of the most famous poems, but when it came to memorizing a passage (an assignment, and a good one, that I used through my teaching career), I chose the passage that most captivated me—a passage which included:

> A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
> In springtime from the Cuckoo-bird,
> Breaking the silence of the seas
> Among the farthest Hebrides.

This passage was from a later revision of the 1807 text, but I'm sure if the passage in my book had begun 'No sweeter voice was ever heard', I would have memorized it anyway. The passage has had a great effect on me. It remained in my mind as a touchstone of what thrills great poetry can call forth. And when I formally retired from teaching eleven years ago, I gave myself a present before getting to Grasmere for the Summer Conference: I took a tour of the Outer Hebrides. The month was July, and I heard no cuckoo-birds. The weather was very hot, and the seas were not exactly silent. But I was thrilled (that word again) nevertheless.

When writing this paper I worried a little about how some of you might react to an American speaking about Scotland. I consoled myself that nobody has openly objected to me discussing the Englishman Wordsworth, so why couldn't I speak about Scotland? I've been to Scotland quite a few times—as far from the border as Aberdeen, Inverness, the Isle of Skye (twice), Oban, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and of course Lewis and Harris, North and South Uist, and Barra. I even have some Scottish blood in me: my great-grandfather came from Dumfries and led Burns night celebrations in the wilds of North Dakota for many years.

So let us turn to 'Poems Written During a Tour of Scotland'. This title is not completely accurate. The tour Wordsworth speaks of is of course the trip he and Dorothy (and for a while Coleridge) made, leaving Grasmere on August 15, 1803, and returning September 25. One critic has suggested that Wordsworth wanted to make the trip not only for the usual reasons we all travel, but to gather material and inspiration for poetry; after all, his trips to the Alps and to Wales had inspired him in the past. Yet according to the best information I can get, only two of the poems were actually written during the tour: 'To a Highland Girl' and the sonnet 'Degenerate Douglas!' 'Yarrow Unvisited' appears to have been begun during the tour and finished later. The rest were written

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[1] This paper was first presented at the Wordsworth Winter School in Grasmere, Cumbria on February 22, 2007. I have revised it slightly since then. A song 'Recovery' by the Celtic-rock band Runrig was played as audience assembled.

between 1804 and 1806, the majority in 1805 and 1806.[2] All but one of these were composed in typical Wordsworthian fashion: the poet mulled over his material for a few years, and then composed poems. (In one case, a poem did not appear until 1842.)

These poems can all be read with pleasure after two hundred years. That's a lot to be said for any piece of verse or prose, and as a matter of fact I found myself liking the minor Scottish poems more and more as I read them. Wordsworth hits a great range of tones from serious to playful, and his turns of thought are always original and interesting. I want to begin by making rather brief remarks on the seven less remarkable poems, before focusing on the two really memorable poems, 'Stepping Westward' and 'The Solitary Reaper'.

Perhaps the least gratifying is 'To the Sons of Burns', which Wordsworth tells us was written 'after visiting their father's grave (August 14th, 1803)'. The date is possibly wrong.[3] We know from 'Resolution and Independence' that Wordsworth revered Burns, but also that he deplored how whiskey led to his death. This poem, which was written a few years after 1803, is a simple warning to his aging sons to avoid people who want to stand them drinks and not to follow in their father's path.

'Glen-Almain' is based on the Wordsworth's experience on September 9, 1803, when he and Dorothy visited a 'narrow glen' where they later were told that the poet Ossian was supposedly buried. Now is not the place to go into the Ossian controversy, but Wordsworth undoubtedly knew that many people doubted that the ancient bard, as resurrected by James MacPherson, ever existed. Nevertheless, Wordsworth was moved by *the idea* that he might have been buried in that glen. He reflects that it is odd that a poet of battles came to be buried in such a secluded and calm place. The poet then reflects that it does not matter if what he has been told is only a myth. The people who sustain the myth have been moved by the idea of 'perfect rest' in such a spot—the rest 'of the grave; and of austere / And happy feelings of the dead'. Therefore it is good to think of Ossian as buried here.

The sonnet 'Degenerate Douglas!' need not detain us long. It was actually written during the 1803 tour; some have dated it the 13th of September, but it was probably written on the 19th after Walter Scott told the Wordsworths about the felling of trees.[4] In the octet Wordsworth denounces Douglas, Duke of Queensbury, for letting his 'love of havoc' lead him to cutting down a 'brotherhood of venerable trees' near his castle. This personification continues in the sestet, in which the poet adds a new and moving idea. Wordsworth says that however much the native people and the present-day travelers deplore the Duke's action, in the long run Nature

> scarcely seems to heed:
> For shelter'd places, bosoms, nooks and bays,
> And the pure mountains, and the gentle Tweed,
> And the green silent pastures, yet remain.

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[2] My authority for these dates is John O. Hayden in his edition of *William Wordsworth: The Poems*, Volume One (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981). These poems were written later than most of the poems in the two volumes of 1807.

[3] See Donald E. Hayden, *Wordsworth's Travels in Scotland* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: University of Tulsa, 1985), 12. He dates the visit as August 19.

[4] Donald E. Hayden, 28.

'The Matron of Jedborough and Her Husband' is another rather simple poem, but again the more I read it the more I liked it. The Wordsworths stayed (along with Walter Scott) at Jedborough on September 20, and Wordsworth was impressed by their hostess—the Matron of the title. What impressed him was that despite her advanced age (73!!!) and her almost comatose husband (he seems to have suffered a stroke), she is vigorously happy and cheerful. (She has the will to live the poet was to honor among the people buried in Grasmere churchyard in *The Excursion*). Wordsworth, who was 33 at the time, is overjoyed to see such energy and happiness in an older person, and rejoices too that 'Human-nature' can look to old age as

> A Land of promise and of pride
> Unfolding, wide as life is wide.

There is more to come. Her energy has a real effect. The poet senses that even though the husband seems dead to the world, his wife's motions and her 'bouyant Spirit' affects him: 'he tracks her motions, quick or slow'. Then Wordsworth looks more closely at the Matron and sees that despite her energetic behavior, life has been hard for her. Yet the poem ends with a rejoicing in her 'second Spring'.

'To a Highland Girl' is based on an experience William and Dorothy had earlier in the tour—August 28, when they were staying near Loch Lomond. Dorothy in her *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland* reports that they met two girls and were impressed by 'the beautiful figure and face' of the elder and their general 'innocent merriment'.[5] William's poem, written a short time after their return to Grasmere, makes much the same point. He notes that the elder girl was 14 years old. The girl's beauty is such that she seems like a dream, yet he rejoices that she is real. She is lucky that she lives in such a sheltered place so 'remote from men' that she is 'ripening in perfect innocence' without normal feminine shyness. She radiates 'freedom' and 'gladness' and courtesy. She speaks little English. He wishes he could be like a brother or father to her. He does worry, however, what the future might bring, so he prays

> God shield thee to thy latest years!
> I neither know thee or they peers;
> And yet my eyes are filled with tears.

The tears are presumably for what may happen to stain her innocence. The poet then turns to himself and to one of his major themes: 'In spots like these it is we prize / Our Memory', and that he will remember her forever. The Fenwick notes confirm that at age 73 Wordsworth did still remember her.[6]

I have a particular tie to Wordsworth's 'Rob Roy's Grave'. His real name was Robert McGregor, and he died in 1734. He was an outlaw who plundered the possessions of rich people and thus came to be revered by the poor—much like Robin Hood in England, as Wordsworth points out in the poem's opening line. His popularity in Scotland was also probably due to his Jacobite sympathies. In America our equivalent is Jesse James—a popular gentleman bandit, a relic of the Confederate army, who was finally routed in

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[5] Dorothy Wordsworth, *Journals,* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1952) I, 283.

[6] *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth,* ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 26.

September, 1876, in Northfield, Minnesota, where I have lived off and on for 60 years. At any rate, on September 12, William and Dorothy saw what they were told was Rob Roy's grave. They were wrong; the real grave was nearby, but that does not matter to William's poem written two to three years later.[7]

After a nine-line first stanza, 'Rob Roy's Grave' is a ballad with three lines of eight syllables and one line of six. Its tone is surprisingly and delightfully mixed. The introductory long stanza seems to praise Rob Roy by words like 'daring', 'brave', and 'Hero'. Yet Wordsworth signals his ambivalence. He evokes Robin Hood and says that 'Scotland has a Thief as good'. The next stanza praises his 'wondrous length and strength of arm' (Rob Roy *did* have very long arms) by which he could 'keep his Friends from harm'—seemingly a good thing.

Then Wordsworth's argument takes a different tack. He praises, in a way soon revealed to be ironic, Rob Roy's wisdom: he was a man of principle. Rob Roy's principle seems to be that because human laws are false and divisive, he will act on the principles he finds in his heart. Like the beasts of the field,

> . . .they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can.
>
> . . . . to the measure of his might
> Each fashions his desires. . . . .
>
> Tis God's appointment who must sway,
> And who is to submit.

So Rob Roy the powerful can take what he wants from anyone. Some wisdom!

Wordsworth then remarks that because he was defeated by forces of law and order, 'He came an age too late'. Then in a wonderful switch, Wordsworth asks 'Or should we say an age too soon?' If he were living now, he would not bother with Scottish things, but would turn to the world's stage, wiping away old institutions (Wordsworth always had a deep sense of mutability), proclaiming:

> Kingdoms shall shift about, like clouds,
> Obedient to my breath.

So Rob Roy would rule in Britain much as the hated despot Napoleon was ruling then in France.

But then Wordsworth changes his tone and his attitude once more. Rob Roy can at least be praised for loving 'the *liberty* of Man'. If he was living now, he perhaps would act 'nobly'. Therefore, the poor of the Highlands are right to honor him.

Dorothy records in her *Recollections* that on September 18th, the day before they were to meet Walter Scott, that 'At Clovenford, being so close to the [the river] Yarrow, we could not but think of the possibility of going thither, but came to the conclusion of

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[7] William Wordsworth, *Poems in Two Volumes*, *1807*, ed. Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914) 412.

reserving the pleasure for some future time'.[8] I drove alongside the Yarrow ten years ago, and it is indeed lovely. But the Wordsworth's were intrigued by it as a subject for poetry. Helen Darbishire in her note to this poem tells us that 'perhaps no valley in Scotland or England has been the source of so much legend and charm. . . .There are pathetic ballads' and 'a great tragic ballad. . . .There are many songs in praise of a beautiful maid, the "Rose of Yarrow"'.[9]

The poem itself is a slight, playful performance. Wordsworth intentionally includes some Scottish phrases from earlier Yarrow ballads, especially when he calls Dorothy his 'winsome Marrow'—that is not to call her a vegetable but a companion. The companion insists that they have seen so many Scottish rivers that they need not visit the Yarrow: 'What's Yarrow but a River bare . . .?' The poet replies that he thinks Yarrow is probably very beautiful, but we will not go to see it. 'Enough if in our hearts we know, / There's such a place as Yarrow'. Yarrow unseen, unvisited can remain in our mind as a 'vision' or a 'dream'. When we are old we can sooth us 'That earth has something yet to show, / The bonny Holms of Yarrow'. A typical Wordsworthian theme about the consolations of the imagination.

In passing, let us note that Wordsworth wrote two more poems about the Yarrow. In September, 1814, he finally visited the river accompanied by his wife Mary. He then wrote 'Yarrow Visited', in which he said that although he was sad to lose the ideal vision he had of the river, he was happy that the 'genuine image' was just as lovely. He returned in 1831 with his daughter Dora and the dying Sir Walter Scott and reflected with sadness that although the river was unchangingly lovely, human beings change. I like this Yarrow poem the best.

Now to the two poems that most critics agree are the finest of this group. 'Stepping Westward' takes off from a real experience. Dorothy records in her *Recollections* that on Sunday, September 11, 1803, while she and William were walking along Loch Ketterine, or as it now is called Katrine, not far from the hut in which they were to spend the night, 'we met two neatly dressed women, without hats, who had probably been taking their Sunday evening's walk. One of them said to us in a friendly, soft tone of voice, "What! You are stepping westward?" I cannot describe how affecting this simple expression was in that remote place, with the western sky in front, *yet* glowing with the departed sun'.[10]

Wordsworth himself tells us much the same thing in his prefatory note. He calls the women 'well dressed'. I think we can assume from what Dorothy tells us of their hostess a page later that the women are in what we would call their 'Sunday best'. The date of this poem is significant: Hayden says it probably was composed on June 3, 1805, less than four months after John Wordsworth's death and only a few weeks after Wordsworth put the finishing touches on *The Prelude.* In a lecture I delivered two years ago, I built upon what Duncan Wu had written about John's death in February, 1805. The death caused a great change in William's outlook, caused him to move beyond the original impulse behind *The Prelude* and to take a more sober look at what life held in store. He came in my view to a moment of muted theodicy; because of the spiritual preparation described in most of *The* Prelude, he was able to accept God's will in John's death. I

[8] *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, I, 391
[9] Darbishire, 419.
[10] *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth,* I, 367.

think this poem is one of the first evidences of this change—resignation or maturity, call it what you will.

The phrase uttered by one of the well-dressed women in 1803 would be memorable and evocative in any context: ‘What! are you stepping westward?’ (I like Dorothy’s punctuation.) ‘Stepping westward’ is clearly not just literal, though I think the Wordsworths were literally walking west to their hut. It suggests getting on with life in our journey to death. I’ve asked lots of people about this over the past few months, and they all agree. My son-in-law points out that that’s the meaning in Tolkien. I have a guitar-playing friend who wrote a song with a title ‘Walking West’, and when I asked him what he meant, he said ‘Death’. The only exception to this universal archetype seems to me Horace Greeley’s mid-19th century call to Americans: ‘Go west, young man!’

So the poem starts with what really was said on September 11, 1803, on the shore of Loch Katrine. The first stanza is I think unnecessarily complicated, though in a typically Wordsworthian way.

> – ’Twould be a wildish destiny,
> If we, who thus together roam
> In a strange land, and far from home,
> Were in this place the guests of Chance:

I think what Wordsworth says is that, in reply to the question of where he and Dorothy were going, it would be silly to think that they were there simply by happenstance (they were in fact going to a hut where they had stayed before).

> Yet who would stop, or fear to advance,
> Though home or shelter he had none,
> With such a sky to lead him on?

Nevertheless, given the beauty of the sunset, who would stop walking on—even if he did not know where he was going? A nice hyperbole.

But then as we might expect Wordsworth raises the stakes—in two ways. The human contact with the two women of the place was wonderful. ‘I liked the greeting. . . The voice was soft, and she who spake / Was walking by her native Lake: / The salutation had to me / the very sound of courtesy: / it’s [sic] power was felt. . .’. And the human contact was mingled with a heightened awareness of what ‘stepping westward’ meant in his life. It is a ‘kind of *heavenly* destiny’. He could travel through the ‘region bright’—the land illuminated by the wonderful sunset—with a spiritual right, a spiritual assurance.

The end of the poem works well, though I am not sure that I can explain it well enough. Wordsworth combines the metaphor of stepping westward into the rest of his life—calmly and confidently after the death of his brother—with the ‘courtesy’ and ‘sweetness' of the Highland woman who uttered the phrase. As is often the case in Wordsworth, the words are not only heard, but remembered as an ‘echo’ as he moves on in the sunset on that day. But the echo conjures up what lies ahead in the rest of his life.

> The echo of the voice enwrought
> A human sweetness with the thought

Of traveling through the world that lay
Before me in my endless way.

There is a lovely calm in these lines, a calm enhanced by courtesy and human sweetness.

Now to the poem I want most to talk about—'The Solitary Reaper'. At first glance—and this is what I told my students for years—this one of the Scottish poems appears not to be based on Wordsworth's experience at all, but on a passage he read in the manuscript of a friend. The truth of the matter is more complicated and perhaps impossible to unravel at the distance of two hundred years.

First of all, the friend, who was a man named Thomas Wilkerson, made a tour of Scotland in, I think, the last years of the Eighteenth Century.[11] In her edition of the Poems of 1807, Helen Darbishire, drawing on Wordsworth's own extensive Fenwick notes, describes Wilkinson as a 'Quaker gentleman of delightful character and studious tastes who lived and worked upon a small hereditary estate . . . not far from Penrith'. Sometime after he made his Scottish tour, he wrote an account of it, though it was not published until 1824. Wordsworth met Wilkinson for the first time in 1801 or 1802.[12] In his book Wilkinson wrote that in Scotland he 'Passed a female who was reaping alone: she sung in Erse as she bended over her sickle; the sweetest voice I ever heard: her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious, long after they were heard no more'.[13] In passages near this famous one, Wilkinson tells us that he probably saw the female reaper on one of the many islands in Loch Lomand. Wilkinson also describes how ordinary Highland woman like the Reaper appeared. In contrast to the well-dressed women of 'Stepping Westward', they 'dress very lightly; their clothing consists of a jacket, a petticoat, and a handkerchief; in common they wear nothing on their heads or feet. . . it is no uncommon thing in the severe frosts of winter to see the roads tinged with drops of blood from the naked feet of the inhabitants'.[14]

Wilkinson also tells us what she may have been may have been reaping—corn or oats. The website of the Loch Lomand Tourist Board assures me that several of these islands are large enough to be farmed to this day. Down through history their principal product seems to have been whiskey—perhaps some of which went to Robert Burns. So the reaper herself could have been part of the whiskey-making process!

At any rate, Wordsworth may have read Wilkinson's manuscript any time after 1802. Wordsworth and Dorothy then toured Scotland in 1803, taking in the atmosphere of Scotland. In her *Recollections* Dorothy tells us that on September 13 (two days after they encountered two well-dressed women of 'Stepping Westward'), she and Wordsworth were at Loch Voil after they climbed over the mountains from Loch Katrine. She writes that 'It was harvest time, and the fields were quiet—might I be allowed to say pensively?—enlivened by small companies of reapers. It is not uncommon in the more lonely parts

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[11] I read that recently but do not now have precise documentation.

[12] Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: the Early Years* (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1969), 519.

[13] Thomas Wilkinson, *Tours to the British Mountains* . . . (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1824), 12.

[14] Wilkinson, 5, 7. Note too that Wordsworth assisted him one day in the late summer of 1806 in his favorite work of 'twining [that is weaving the plants in] pathways along the banks of the [Emont] river supposedly so that people could enjoy walks along the river more'. Darbishire, 441-442. That day Wordsworth wrote 'To the Spade of a Friend' included in the 1807 volumes. That poem has not caught the fancy of many critics, perhaps because of the banality of its title. But it is a charming, playful, yet serious tribute to his friend's work.

of the Highland to see a single person so employed'. Scholarly editions will usually give us this quote, implying that as had often happened before, Wordsworth used Dorothy's writing to stimulate his own. But they don't mention what Dorothy writes next. Without much of a transition, she quotes 'The Solitary Reaper', which was not written until two years later—1805.[15]

The chronology is unclear. John Hayden, Wordsworth's editor, believes Wordsworth wrote 'The Solitary Reaper' 'probably' on November 5, 1805.[16] DeSelincourt emphasizes that Dorothy's writing about 1803 is not a journal, but *Recollections*, much of which was written as late as 1806.[17] So Wordsworth's poem may or may not owe anything to Dorothy's writing; in fact, the influence may work the other way around. Of course they saw some reapers together and probably talked about the incident.

At any rate, we can now see that 'The Solitary Reaper' is a thoroughly Wordsworthian poem based on his own experiences in Scotland in 1803 (and probably in 1801) as well as (possibly) Dorothy's *Recollections* and certainly her conversation. I think we can say that the poem was then triggered by a beautiful sentence he may have read in November, 1805—or possibly earlier. The poem may well have been gestating in Wordsworth's mind for several years.

It is easy to imagine why Wordsworth was attracted by Wilkinson's passage. It struck a familiar chord. Just as in the opening paragraphs of 'Tintern Abbey', a wonderful experience (here the song of the Reaper, there the beauty of the valley) is enjoyed when it happened and long afterwards. In 'Tintern' the experience gives 'sensations sweet' in 'lonely rooms' (26-28); in 'Reaper' more simply the narrator after Wilkinson says he 'bore' the 'music in my heart . . . / Long after it was heard no more'. And Wordsworth recognized that Wilkinson's very words in prose made eloquent poetry—*found poetry* if you wish to call it so. As he tells us, his last line is taken almost exactly from Wilkinson (Wordsworth changes 'strains' to 'music' and therefore must change 'they were' to 'it was'.) Even so, the first and fourth stanzas of 'The Solitary Reaper' clearly owe a lot to Wilkinson.

Let us now look at what Wordsworth did with Wilkinson's material, especially in the first and fourth stanzas. Wordsworth kept the singing and bending female reaper; he kept her unintelligible song (though he didn't explain why it was unintelligible); he kept the song's melancholy sound and of course the lasting impression it made. But Wordsworth adds more. She is not a 'female . . . reaping alone' but a 'solitary Highland Lass'. 'Highland' is necessary to locate the poem; Wilkinson's passage was already in a Highland context. 'Solitary' somehow makes the girl even more isolated than the simple 'alone'. Wordsworth's 'Lass', however, adds a new dimension to the scene. 'Lass' has a range of meaning according to the *OED*: unmarried girl, but more especially a beloved and attractive girl. You can all think of how Shakespeare used the word, and Wordsworth used it elsewhere as well: 'Some Sweet lass of the valley' (*Prelude*, VIII, 38). And one of the Scottish poems of 1807 based on an experience he had a few days before his visit to Loch Voil: as we have seen, 'To a Highland Girl' is clearly a modestly erotic tribute to a beautiful adolescent girl. I suggest that this memory eroticized the Solitary Reaper as well, making it appropriate to call her a 'lass'.

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[15] *Journals*, 380.
[16] Hayden I, 1013
[17] *Journals,* vii-ix.

Note too her song fills a 'Vale profound' or a deep valley. Wilkinson's girl apparently sang on a small island; no deep valleys there. But Wordsworth's girl sang in the deep valleys of the territory he and Dorothy had been climbing through on the days leading up to their seeing reapers on September 13. Dorothy's *Recollections* makes it clear how difficult the climbing was. The Reaper's song 'overflows' the vale—clearly an hyperbole. The vale is 'profound'. Profound, certainly, meaning very deep but with overtones of imaginative significance. Later on in stanza 4, we are told the 'Maiden sang / As if her song could have no ending'. Wordsworth is clearly heightening the significance of the Reaper in excess of what he found in Wilkinson. And of course the song could almost have no ending. Wilkinson remembered it, and Wordsworth remembered it for a long time.

I will say more of this heightening soon, but first I must also note the overall calm of the poem. Each of its four stanzas are eight lines long, generally rhyming ababccdd. The lines are generally octosyllabic, except for the fourth lines of each stanza, which have only six syllables. The effect of these short lines are to slow the poem down. All the lines are paced in a measured way; there is very little enjambment. Wordsworth's account of the experience of the Reaper's song has none of the excited and almost headlong urgency of, say, the blank-verse opening of 'Tintern Abbey' or of the most memorable passages from *The Prelude*.

Still, although the overall tone of the poem is calm, it is an energized calm. For one thing, in the first stanza echoes many other of his poems that can be called *epitaphic* in the mode of many of Wordsworth's early poems. 'Behold . . . Stop . . . O listen!'—these imperatives call the reader to regard the Reaper's song as important, as demanding attention.

This significance is heightened even more by stanza two. The comparisons of the effect of the nightingale's song in the desert and the cuckoo's song in the Hebrides have always seemed just right to me and I assume to other readers, but think of how *unexpected* they are. Here is a poem about the effect of the song of a Highland lass, and we are suddenly transported far or somewhat far away, in both cases beyond the edges of Wordsworth's own experience. Wordsworth had traveled to Italy, but not to Africa, to the Highlands, but not to the Hebrides. Now the image of travelers in a Sahara oasis could have come to the poet from any popular reading. A group of people hearing the song of a wonderful bird after a day of difficult traveling is a fine image of the effect of the Lass's song: it is not only melancholy but sweet and refreshing.

The Cuckoo-bird is a different matter. I asked Duncan Wu about this, and he pointed me in the direction of two books Wordsworth is known to have read: Martin Martin's *A Late Voyage to St. Kilda* (1698) and his *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* (1703).[18] In both cases (and you can find these books on the internet), Martin reports that the appearance of the cuckoo in the Hebrides is very rare, but when it does appear and sing, it is a portent. On both St. Kilda and on a small island just off Lewis—the farthest Hebrides indeed!—the cuckoo's song is said to portend the death of the island's owner or his steward, or the arrival of a notable stranger.[19] Now I can't see much of this portentousness in 'The Solitary Reaper', but Wordsworth clearly associated the cuckoo in

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[18] Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading, 1800-1815*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 142, 256-7.

[19] See the texts of these books online.

the ‘farthest Hebrides’ with heightened significance. By this time the cuckoo’s song had become aligned with Wilkinson’s word ‘sweeter’ [I personally prefer his later revision—the one I memorized 50 years ago: ‘A voice so *thrilling* ne’er was heard’]. In any case, Wordsworth’s passage raises the intensity of this sweetness or thrillingness by placing it in ‘the *farthest* Hebrides’. But making it break ‘the silence of the seas’ is both wonderful (that phrase is what made me memorize the lines) and puzzling. The sea as far as I know is never silent; I would imagine the Atlantic is usually particularly noisy out there. It was when I visited. Could it be that the sea is silent because there are no humans there to hear it? One of my favorite lines still puzzles me.[20]

So the first and fourth stanzas of the poem set up the basic Wordsworthian situation of personal response to an experience, heightened by Wordsworth’s and Dorothy’s memories of their 1803 trip and by the poet’s address to his reader. The verse in these stanzas is quite regular and plain: little enjambment, few figures. What modest figurative language there is can be found in each case in the final couplet (‘vale . . . overflowing’, ‘music in my heart’). These final couplets also change the poem’s music somewhat: they move to a preponderance of low, back vowels, suggesting seriousness and closure.

The second stanza heightens the intensity of the experience even more, and in new ways. It is highly figurative, dominated by two (as we have seen) extravagant comparisons. There is much enjambment and in the last four lines a preponderance of bright, front vowels. The most emphatic line of the poem is here: the strong accent and alliteration of ‘Breaking the silence of the seas’ is remarkable. Wordsworth changes his poetic tactics when he writes the intense and lovely second stanza.

The second stanza is where my heart was fifty years ago. Great lines. I love them even today. But let’s move on to Stanza three. Wordsworth begins with the poem’s only question—one that Wilkinson did *not* ask: ‘Will no one tell me what she sings?’ We know from Wilkerson that the Reaper sang in Erse, which we assume neither he nor Wordsworth could understand. Wordsworth’s question remains unanswered. No one is there to help, so the poet suggests several topics that the Reaper could be singing about. Let’s look at the last topic first. In the kind of regular and calm verse we see in most of stanzas one and four, he thinks she might be singing of some melancholy, sorrowful, humble, and familiar (that is, ordinary) unhappiness.

> Some natural sorrow, loss or pain.
> That has been, and may be again.

In these lovely, simple lines, the poet sympathizes with what the Reaper’s life may be like, as he often did with his humble characters in *Lyrical Ballads.*

But Wordsworth’s first conjecture is more important:

> Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
> For old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago:

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[20] After reading this paper, my friend Robert Granum suggested that there is kind of cacophonous ‘silence’ that the sea often has.

Even my rudimentary knowledge of Scottish history, especially Highland history, tells me that it was filled with unhappy disappointments and with bloody battles. In what was believed of the distant past, Ossian chronicled fierce battles. In recorded history, the Scots often raided England: hence, the defensive crenellated tower on St. Oswald's church in Grasmere; hence, the Penrith beacon, from which the young Wordsworth so memorably wandered in *The Prelude.* For another, English forces often invaded Scotland. Northumberland changed rulers fairly often. But then the Scots fought among themselves: clans vs. royalty, clans vs. clans. My next-door neighbor is a McNeil, a clan whom I seem to remember either defeated or were defeated by the MacDonald's in a famous and bloody battle on either South or North Uist. Most recently for Wordsworth, Bonnie Prince Charlie's army of Highlanders were routed at Culloden in 1745. And Scottish people remember. The music you heard when you entered was by the Celtic rock group Runrig, who bemoaned the clans and the clearances or 'clearings'. Now the clans were banned in 1745 and the clearances had barely begun by 1803, but the pattern is there. Ten years ago when I visited the Outer Hebrides I sensed this aura of melancholy, of remembrance.

Think of the two lines, the 'plaintive' (that is, mournful) lines, the first gently emphatic (five accents rather than four), the second heartbreakingly evocative: 'For old, unhappy, far-off things, / And battles long ago'. Now in 'Tintern Abbey' and the Intimations Ode and *The Prelude*, Wordsworth was writing about himself. In 'The Solitary Reaper', he gives us the usual personal focus in the framing stanzas. But in the third stanza he goes outside himself and profoundly evokes Scotland itself. My guess is that this turning out was again the result of his personal change after the shock of his brother's death in February, 1805. 'The Solitary Reaper' was written in November. And he was soon to write in 'Elegiac Stanzas' about the effect of John's death: 'A deep distress hath humanized my soul'.

One last note. The Reaper here is solitary. The poet, as opposed to his social stance in 'Stepping Westward', is solitary as well. So the poem is not only about Scotland, it is about loneliness. But also note: the Solitary Reaper is singing, and so is Wordsworth.

Carleton College

But this school certainly has no monopoly on the notion of a "historical situation." Stephen Gill's *Wordsworth and the Victorians* includes studies in reception and influence, two quite different kinds of literary and cultural history. Several chapters attempt to document the steadily-growing "cultural significance" of Wordsworth's work from the 1830s through to the end of the century. Fame came slowly for this poet. *Lyrical Ballads* did go through four editions between 1798 and 1805, but when a new collection in 1807 was harshly attacked by *The Edinburgh Review*, Wordsworth did not publish another book of poetry for seven years. Wordworth in these decades had only a cult following; he was, Gill says, "the property of a coterie" (16). *The Excursion*, printed in 1815, was by no means a success; twenty years later it had not even sold out its 500-copy print run. Then, sometime during the 1830s, the public response to Wordworth's poetry changed. "No doubt sheer survival was an important factor," Gill dryly notes, "as it is in the recuperation of nearly all writers who live long enough and continue to produce" (18). A measure of this sea-change was that, thirty years after his most important work had been written, hundreds of eminent and not-so-eminent Victorians began making pilgrimages to Wordsworth's home at Rydal Mount. Many of these visitors were "Wordsworthians": people who believed their lives had been touched by what Gill calls Wordsworth's "spiritually active, empowering force." The most famous Wordsworthian was John Stuart Mill, who credited Wordsworth's poetry with pulling him back from the brink of a nervous breakdown. The poems, Mill wrote, were "a medicine for my state of mind ... they seemed to be the very culture of the feelings which I was in quest of" (qtd. in Gill 47).

After the death of Wordsworth the man, a flood of new editions of his poetry appeared, and the work was disseminated (sometimes copyright-protected, but more often not) throughout the English-speaking world. For Victorian writers and intellectuals, the biggest problem with inheriting Wordsworth's poetry was in accomodating its grand, metaphysical claims. "Faced with poetry of such palpable design," Gill writes, "readers adopted (and still adopt) various

strategies" (170). One was to dwell on Wordsworth's "poetry of humble life" (i.e., its egalitarian aspects); another was "to confront the philosophical pretension head on -- and dismiss or contain it"; another (our preferred option) was to historicize it. But the most common Victorian response was to interpret Wordsworth's "philosophy" in the light of orthodox Christianity.

The major Victorian poets, almost without exception, rejected Wordsworth the sage and seer, while mounting rescue operations on one or another aspect of the poetry. Gerard Manley Hopkins, though, was convinced of Wordsworth's charisma. In a remarkable 1886 letter to his friend Richard Dixon (who had slighted the Immortality Ode), he defended the "Wordsworthians":

> There have been in all history a few, a very few men, whom common repute, even where it did not trust them, has treated as having had something happen to them that does not happen to other men, as having *seen something*, whatever that really was.... [H]uman nature in these men saw something; wavers in opinion, looking back, whether there was anything in it or no; but is in a tremble ever since. Now what Wordsworthians mean is, what would seem to be the growing mind of the English speaking world and may perhaps come to be that of the world at large is that in Wordsworth when he wrote that ode human nature got another of those shocks, and the tremble from it is spreading. (qtd. in Gill 173)

Reviews

Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays, Edited by Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin and Duncan Wu, Routledge, 2005.

Bullshit, argued the American septuagenarian philosopher, Harry Frankfurt, in his best-selling essay of last year, is a matter that we should take very seriously in a world of empty political rhetoric and guileless audiences. Rather unusually for a work of philosophy, *On Bullshit* made headlines and in so doing obscured another recent book of Frankfurt, in which he suggested, controversially and in the face of the historical orthodoxy, that pure self-love is something that we should celebrate. Philosophers have tended to see the love of the self as an inevitable, if embarrassing fact of life, one that needs to be negotiated in any benevolent system of ethics. It was an issue that much concerned William Hazlitt, whose own philosophical career enjoyed none of the popularity of Frankfurt, but who may nevertheless have been excited by these books, which point towards two of his key intellectual concerns. We have grown used to considering Hazlitt as a sharp analyst of the rhetoric of conservatism, but it is only recently that critics have begun to recognise the centrality to the whole oeuvre of his earliest investigations into the nature of personal identity. The irrationalism of self-love, and 'the sense', in the precise words of David Bromwich, 'that our thoughts of the future are steeped in feelings about more than a single self' (17) are ideas that remain with Hazlitt as he turns to the analysis of politics, literature and the visual and performing arts. It is the aim of this excellent collection of essays to tease out the place of his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* in a reconsideration of Hazlitt's place in the culture of the Romantic Period.

Tom Paulin, in his foreword, suggests that the spark for all of Hazlitt's later thought is contained in that early essay. But, as the varied and suggestive contributions of this book make clear, it is wrong to say that he does not build upon its implications, nor that he does not move beyond them. Stanley Jones, whose presence lurks behind this volume, points intriguingly in its epigraph towards a dyad in Hazlitt's thought between transubjective sympathy and the phenomenological experience of the individual. His early theory of human action specifically neglected the importance of the latter even though Hazlitt is one of the greatest analysts of the intense, subjective experience that makes us aware of being alive. The 'refusal of individuality', Jones notes, 'was a limitation amply to be corrected in his later work'. (Epigraph). And Hazlitt, who, like Hume, was deeply concerned with the question of on-going personal identity and with the role of imagination in casting a disinterested glance forward into our future selves, never lost sight of his earliest concerns with the relationship between the individual and the community. Tom Paulin notes that critical attention to Coleridge has contributed to a neglect of Hazlitt but the lesson of some of the most exciting essays here is that he was himself continually in dialogue with his contemporaries and that the *Essay* itself formed a part of that which we have since forgotten. Duncan Wu's excellent 'The Road to Nether Stowey' details some of the ways in which Hazlitt contributed to the intellectual habitus that has come to be seen as central to the Romantic project. He focuses upon Hazlitt's three-week stay at Alfoxden and Nether Stowey in May 1798, drawing out the relationships with Wordsworth and Coleridge at the time of his composition of the *Essay*, which was, of course, not published until 1805. Wu neatly summarizes Hazlitt's eventual critique of Wordsworth's poetry against the background of a dialogue between the two

men over the composition of *Lyrical Ballads*, and builds towards a clever reading of *The Old Cumberland Beggar* with its suggestion that the mind of the individual has an inbuilt mechanism that leaves one no choice but to perform acts of directed benevolence ('in preparation for "that after-joy / Which Reason cherishes"'). He reminds us in the process of Coleridge's avowed aversion to Hume, evident from *My First Acquaintance*, and a divergence of loyalty that inscribes itself implicitly within the productive, metaphysical argument that took place on the road to Nether Stowey. These themes are continued in Tom Paulin's own outstanding contribution, an essay on the connections between the *Essay* and Wordsworth, Coleridge and De Quincey. Paulin grapples with a footnote to the *Essay* in which Hazlitt cites from *Anthony and Cleopatra* a line in which the mind is said to 'dislimn' perceptions, and then traces out this word in his later writings. It is a fascinating journey in which Hazlitt's nationalism is exposed in terms that unpick his intellectual relationship with Coleridge and Wordsworth (whose own theory of imagination is related to Hobbes), and Paulin then turns to De Quincey in order to demonstrate that Hazlitt played a key role in moulding his critical vocabulary against the earlier writers. In a deft reading of Shelley's philosophical writings, Uttara Natarajan, meanwhile, examines Hazlitt's influence upon another central writer in the second generation.

These essays form the second section of the book on Hazlitt's influence upon the intellectual climate of the time and they are preceded by a series of splendid pieces, which describe the philosophical foundations of his early metaphysics. David Bromwich's brilliant essay corrects his earlier work by focusing upon a psychological implication of the *Essay*, that we have an instinctive attraction to the good, and he suggests both that Hazlitt was read by Shelley and that he had himself one of the key concepts of human agency articulated in Wordsworth's *The Borderers* in mind when he wrote. Hume is a central presence throughout and James Mulvihill extends our understanding of the eighteenth-century background by examining the idea of the empirical self against Hazlitt's thoughts on abstraction, demonstrating that these impact upon his writings about portraiture in art. Theatre is a related concern, which emerges in Philip Davis' contribution. With Mrs Siddons in mind, the abstractions of genius are differentiated from the affected ideals of Reynolds' portraiture, and Davis suggests that, for Hazlitt, Shakespeare achieved instantaneous disinterestedness by throwing himself into character. One is put in mind of Keats, but Davis draws out connections to Coleridge. This section ends with learned contributions from two of our finest scholars of the period, John Whale and Paul Hamilton. The former discusses sexual love in Hazlitt's writing with delicacy while Hamilton's essay is a clever, difficult and characteristically thoughtful analysis of Hazlitt's theory of language.

Tom Paulin describes an opposition between Rousseau and Locke that is implicit in the *Essay*, and Locke is himself an absent presence throughout, appearing fully only in an essay of Tim Milnes, which alongside learned contributions by Frederick Burwick on Schelling and A. C. Grayling on the philosophical legacy of Hazlitt in the British tradition make up the last part of this book. Together with intriguing preliminary materials that detail the bibliographical and critical histories of the *Essay*, these parts frame an extraordinary series of readings of Hazlitt's philosophy, which fulfil a real need in current scholarship to deal with this rich seam of his thought and both the editors and contributors are to be commended for turning this ostensibly recondite subject into one that will be required reading for all serious students of a writer who is finally being seen as an essential figure in the Romantic world.

Matthew Scott

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2006,
DELIVERED AT THE AGM ON 12 MAY 2007

It has long been the practice for this report to cover the calendar year preceding the AGM, so it spans the last part of the season 2005/6 and the first part of the season 2006/7. The year 2006 opened, so far as our Society is concerned, with a perfectly splendid lecture on Leigh Hunt by Professor Nick Roe at the birthday celebration lunch, and then in April we heard James Vigus from Cambridge University on 'Teach Youself Guides to the Literary Life in the 1820s'. David Wickham was prevented by illness from giving 'Further Selections from my Collection of Elian Theatricalia' – a talk that is now rescheduled for May 2008 – and the AGM was therefore followed by a rendering of Lamb's little-known poem 'Satan in search of a wife' by yours truly and Cecilia. On 2 April some of us assembled at Lamb's Cottage in Edmonton for the presentation to the Society of the portrait of Lamb's father, John Lamb, by Society member John Moxon to whom it had passed by descent from Edward Moxon and Emma Isola – a most generous gift for which we are extremely grateful. The portrait currently hangs at Lamb's Cottage in accordance with the donor's wish.

Several members were present as usual at the 2006 Wordsworth Winter School in Grasmere (the last to be directed by Professor Jonathan Wordsworth, one of our very long-standing members, who died in the summer) and at the Friends of Coleridge Conferences at Cannington and Kilve later in the year. For the first time, the Society made a donation to the Friends of Coleridge of £1,000 to help fund bursaries to enable post-graduate students to attend and these were gratefully taken up. This is the point to mention our continuing support for academic conference bursaries in the name of our late Editor, Bill Ruddick, which are available to Manchester University postgraduates each year; another £2,000 was donated for this purpose in 2006. And a donation of £1,000 was made to the Wordsworth Trust's appeal in memory of its director, Robert Woof.

Our own programme of lectures continued in the autumn with Dr John Strachan's marvellous account of 'Romantic-era angling literature' and I must say I await with great expectation his book on sport during the late Georgian period. And to round off the year we were privileged to hear Professor Tim Webb from Bristol who nicely brought us back to Leigh Hunt (with whom we had begun the year) and his perspectives on Lamb.

In some ways, though, the highlight of the year was the conference devoted to Charles and Mary Lamb held at Christ Church, Oxford, on 11 November and organised jointly by Felicity James and Tim Milnes from Edinburgh. The Society supported this event financially and a number of our members attended. In addition to hearing a series of interesting papers, we received a rousing appeal from Duncan Wu for non-members to join the Society – and I'm pleased to say this has had a good response! I describe this as a highlight because it is, I believe, the first such academic conference devoted to Lamb for more than 20 years. It was deemed a success and should be repeated; and many of the papers are to be published in a forthcoming number of the journal *Romanticism*.

Our Editor, Rick Tomlinson, beavers away at the *Bulletin* from his home in Illinois and as he cannot be here today I shall present his report in a moment All of the foregoing demonstrates that the Society is pursuing its first objective with vigour – that is to say 'to advance knowledge and publish studies of the life, works and times of CL and his circle'.

I therefore now turn to our second objective which is 'to form and preserve for the public a collection of Eliana'. I have mentioned already the important addition to our collections made in 2006 – the portrait of John Lamb. Our other main ongoing endeavour in this direction is the long-awaited catalogue of Elian books. There has been slow but definite further progress on this: David Wickham's multifarious corrections to the basic catalogue produced by Guidhall Library have recently been entered onto the database which will form the basis for the publication. Once these entries have been checked and the introduction is written the whole thing can progress to publication. I hope and expect the publication to appear before the next AGM.

The decision taken a year ago to pay for the repair and renovation of Lamb's grave has been carried out. We are very grateful to George Willox for overseeing this project and to the contractors who completed the work so sympathetically. I hope the Society can arrange another visit to Edmonton to inspect the result in the course of the next 12 months, and have had some discussion with Sandra Knott about this. We believe it would be attractive if this visit could be timed so as to incorporate the premiere showing of the film of Leslie Iron's performane of 'Lamb's Tale' at Lamb's Cottage which the Society commissioned last year. I can also report progress on this project. Filming took place over several days in the autumn. Editing and production of the film is underway, though has been delayed by the illness of the director. We hope this part of the process will be complete later this summer in time for a first showing of the film in the autumn and, perhaps, its distribution to our members in the form of a DVD in time for Christmas! The plan is to distribute the DVD free to all members with the Bulletin and an encouragement for them to make it available to academic institutions, schools, etc. We don't anticipate any form of commercial distribution, but it will be good if knowledge of Lamb and his life can be disseminated by this medium, in addition to our regular *Bulletin*.

So, as you can see, the Society has in sundry ways been as active as ever in 2006. I remain immensely grateful to all the officers and Council members who help to keep it going. To Rick Tomlinson who puts in more hours than any of us in his work as Editor of the *Bulletin*; to Duncan Wu, my vice-chairman, with his invaluable advice and contacts; to Cecilia Powell our membership secretary (and my helper in so many ways), Veronica Finch, the minutes secretary, Tony Beardwell, our assiduous registrar and keeper of the Bulletin stock, Robin our indefatigable representative at the Alliance of Literary Societies; and to David Wickham, Mary Wedd, Madeline Huxstep, Felicity James, Karen Gunnell and other Council members for all their help. Small societies such as this usually rely on just a few volunteers and we are no exception. This is the moment to thank you all on behalf of the Society in general.