The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

January 2009 New Series No. 145

Contents: Wordsworth Winter School Issue –

All articles in this issue were presented as lectures at the school held in Grasmere, between 18 and 22 February 2008.

‘A Deeper and Richer Music’: Felicia Hemans in Dialogue with Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley[1]

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DISCUSSING *THE SCEPTIC* IN A LETTER TO JOHN MURRAY, Byron in 1820 puts the case mainly against, if just a little for: ‘Mrs. Hemans is a poet [...], but too stiltified and apostrophic’.[2] Arguably Felicia Hemans’s apostrophes and invocations often free up her poems, allowing us to glimpse their compelling blend of hope and yearning. They are rhetorical and, yes, to that degree on their stilts, but they alert us to the fact that Hemans’s supposed sentimentality turns out to mask complex emotions. She may seem to champion home and hearth, but it is clear that she views the domestic as both vulnerable to threats and as potentially oppressive.

Reading Hemans’s poetry as ideologically conflicted is nothing new and is not this essay’s central point, which is, rather, to praise it for the nuanced art with which it articulates a complexly balanced vision.[3] The poetry is full of female speakers who have experienced lack of emotional fulfilment or sorrows caused by the injustices of a world ruled by men. These speakers memorably populate *Records of Woman*: *With Other Poems* (1828), a volume that gives us access, through an array of monologues, narratives and lyrics, to a wide range of female voices, all engaged in an updated form of the ‘complaint’.

It is in dramatic and lyrical poems in this and subsequent volumes that Hemans shows her poetic skills at their finest. These skills have much to do with and bear witness to a process of self-aware mimicry in Hemans’s work. That is not to say that she is inauthentic. It is, rather, to recognize that in, for example, ‘The Homes of England’ she can both call on and up an idealized myth of national harmony and admit that she is constructing such a myth. Shifts of tone or style signal the presence of admissions of this kind. Works such as ‘The Graves of a Household’ move between and hold in balance different temporal perspectives in ways that look ahead to Hardy’s poems. Simultaneously the poetry affirms and laments, making it exceptionally hard to pigeonhole ideologically. Hemans, a poet of subtle tonal control, is capable of jolting surprises. So, at the end of ‘The Graves of a Household’, an exclamation concedes what seems unsayable, given the seemingly Christian orthodox terms of her poetry: the fear that there may be nothing beyond this life. Here is the whole poem:

> They grew in beauty, side by side,
> They fill’d one home with glee;–

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[1] This essay, a revised version of the talk given at the Wordsworth Winter School in 2008 under the title ‘Felicia Hemans, Rydal Mount and *Records of Woman*’, draws on material from my section on Hemans in *Romantic Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, eds. Michael O’Neill and Charles Mahoney (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007).

[2] Quoted from *Felicia Hemans*: *Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), p. 536. Unless indicated otherwise, this edition, hereafter Wolfson, is used for quotations from Hemans’s writings.

[3] See Wolfson (pp. xv-xvi) for a deft summary of the ‘doubleness’ in Hemans discovered by critics such as Isobel Armstrong, Anne K. Mellor, Jerome J. McGann, and Tricia Lootens, whether operating with a ‘surface-and-depth paradigm’ or a more ‘sideways’ structure in which the poetry follows ‘an erratic course through contradictions’ (Lootens, qtd. Wolfson, p. xvi).

Their graves are sever'd, far and wide,
By mount, and stream, and sea.

The same fond mother bent at night
O'er each fair sleeping brow;
She had each folded flower in sight,–
Where are those dreamers now?

One, midst the forest of the west,
By a dark stream is laid–
The Indian knows his place of rest,
Far in the cedar shade.

The sea, the blue lone sea, hath one,
He lies where pearls lie deep;
He was the lov'd of all, yet none
O'er his low bed may weep.

One sleeps where southern vines are drest
Above the noble slain:
He wrapt his colours round his breast,
On a blood-red field of Spain.

And one–o'er *her* the myrtle showers
Its leaves, by soft winds fann'd;
She faded midst Italian flowers,–
The last of that bright band.

And parted thus they rest, who play'd
Beneath the same green tree;
Whose voices mingled as they pray'd
Around one parent knee!

They that with smiles lit up the hall,
And cheer'd with song the hearth,–
Alas! for love! if *thou* wert all,
And naught beyond, oh, earth!

The poem, written in ballad form, presents in distilled terms Hemans's obsession with the sacredness of hearth and home, and her anxiety over its possible violation. The poem builds towards a larger question about the end of life, about whether earth is, in fact, our only 'home', in which case we are doomed to the loss of the homes we carefully construct, or whether human beings can assert, with Wordsworth, that 'Our destiny, our nature, and our home, / Is with infinitude, and only there' (*The Prelude*, 1805, VI, 538-9).[4] Where Wordsworth affirms, even if with a degree of latent desperation, Hemans leaves a doubt hanging in the poem's air. The poem's control of tone is again remarkable, shifting from the seemingly sentimental opening to an

[4]Quoted, as are all poems by the Romantics, unless indicated otherwise, from *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, 3rd. ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

altogether less comforting close. It moves from initial togetherness to subsequent apartness, before circling back to reminders of familial intimacy, until it breaks off to pose the final, unanswerable question (implicit in the exclamation with which the poem closes).

The poem may, as Wolfson suggests (p. 423), recall Wordsworth's 'We Are Seven'. Wordsworth's speaker also enumerates the scattering of a family, including the death of a sister and a brother, yet she refuses to accept the reality of death. Hemans is less assured of the ultimate unreality of death. Even her use of the word 'One' (see lines 9, 13, 17, and 21) serves to bring out the disintegration of the family into isolated individuals. Again a relatively straightforward-looking line such as 'And parted thus they rest, who play'd' vibrates with verbal life: they who 'play'd' were first 'parted' and now 'rest' (in death). But it is in the final two lines, which emerge out of as they break into and up an only semi-completed sentence, that Hemans delivers a shock to her most cherished hopes. 'Love' would be cruelly disappointed, the poem suggests, if '*thou*' (that is, 'earth') were the final reality of life. Hemans may be recalling Shelley's question to the mountain at the end of 'Mont Blanc': 'And what wert thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind's imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?' (142-44). *Pace* Byron, there is an affecting use of apostrophe in the final two words of her poem, which appeal to 'earth' as if it were capable of response, even as the last two lines' exclamation worries that 'earth' is indifferent to human need.[5]

Hemans's work owes much to the example of other women writers; she addresses Mary Tighe in 'The Grave of a Poetess', projecting on to Tighe her own concerns with the tension between 'the woman's heart' (51) and 'the poet's eye' (52). But even more marked as literary influences are the productions of the canonical male Romantic poets: Wordsworth, whom she knew and addresses in 'To Wordsworth' as a poet who 'Sees where the springs of living waters lie' (28), Byron and Shelley. All are presences in her work, at once admired and revised through intertextual dialogue. Hemans might seem to feminise the accents of male Romantic assertion in Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley, even to rob the latter two poets of their impulses of rebellion and revolt.Yet such an account of her interaction with these poets would over-simplify. Hemans allows those accents and impulses to resonate in a carefully constructed poetic space, from which explicit opinion is eliminated and in which values associated with Christianity assume a perilously high but forlorn persistence. It is in the silences between assertions and in the disquiet held at harmonious arm's length by the poetry's music that Hemans arrives at distinctive and enigmatically unparaphrasable utterance.

The poetry supplies its own self-images, its own metapoetic tropes. 'The Mirror in the Deserted Hall', for instance, offers its 'dim, forsaken Mirror' (1) as a figure for the poem's final wish to attain to a position beyond 'the forms and hues of this world' (27), 'Reflecting but the images / Of the solemn world on high' (31-2). Its likeness to and difference from Byron's metapoetic image in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto III, of the 'broken mirror, which the glass / In every fragment multiplies' (33, 289-90) offers, in miniature, an example of the relations charted in this essay.[6] Hemans

[5] See Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993) for commentary on 'the undermining possibility registered in the word "if"', p. 129. My emphasis lies on the artistry with which Hemans opens her poem to a voice at odds with its deepest wishes and yet inseparable, as a shadowy possibility, from her hopes of something beyond 'earth'.

[6] Byron is quoted, here and elsewhere, from the Oxford Authors edition, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986).

presents conflict as so long endured its sources have vanished, leaving behind the serene heartache of an endless yearning; Byron enacts conflict and the pain of aftermath as ongoing and present. Hemans wishes to sublime imperfection into perfection; Byron to allow its turbulence into his verse. Hemans offers poetry a transcendent role, yet sees it as somehow 'forsaken' by the culture whose insatiable appetite she seems to be feeding; Byron depicts poetry as a vehicle that permits his scarred public self to go on communicating with an audience from whom he has experienced intimate alienation.[7]

Hemans appears to have come to appreciate Wordsworth fully quite late in her career, in 1826, inspired to do so by the recommendation of her friend Maria Jewsbury, who lent Hemans her copy of Wordsworth's *Miscellaneous Poems* (1820) (Wolfson, pp. 491-3). Hemans speaks in her letter to Jewsbury of Wordsworth as 'the true Poet of Home, and of all the lofty feelings which have their root in the soil of home affections' (Wolfson, p. 492). She does not merely sentimentalise him, however. Hemans herself is the true 'Poet of Home' precisely because she is alert to all that threatens to erode 'the soil of home affections'. She is alert to the 'power Wordsworth condenses into single lines', quoting as examples 'The still sad music of humanity', 'The river glideth at his own sweet will', 'Over his own sweet voice the stock-dove broods' (all cited as given in Wolfson, p. 492). It is as though she were seeking to crystallise an essence of poetic authority, a cadence won from meditation and response to nature. In her own work, the shaped phrase serves often to arrest and distil, whether brooding on the preservative effect of volcanic destruction in 'The Image in Love', 'Thou thing of years departed!' (1), or counting the cost of impossible bravery in 'Casabianca', 'The boy stood on the burning deck / Whence all but he had fled' (1-2), or, meditating in 'The Diver', by way of Shelley's Maddalo, whose words 'They learning in suffering what they teach in song' provides the poem's epigraph, on 'the price of bitter tears, / Paid for the lonely power' (41-2), lines that demand to be read with covert reference to their author.

Hemans spent some time both at Rydal Mount and in the Lakes in the summer of 1830, when she met and, it seems, rather enchanted Wordsworth, though less so, perhaps, the women in Wordsworth's household. Wordsworth and Hemans walked together; he recited poetry to her: 'I begin to talk with him as with a sort of paternal friend' (Wolfson, p. 505). Her anecdotes again illustrate her wish to find a 'spiritualizing' virtue in contemporary male poets. On one occasion, she writes: 'His expressions are often strikingly poetical; such as – "I would not give up the mists that spiritualize our mountains, for all the blue skies of Italy"' (Wolfson, p. 505). On another, she writes that his treatment of her has been 'like balm to my spirit after all the fades flatteries with which I am blasée', and goes on:

> One little incident I must describe. We had been listening, during one of these evening rides, to various sounds and notes of birds, which broke upon the stillness, and at last I said – 'Perhaps there may be a deeper and richer music pervading all Nature, than we are permitted, in this state, to hear'.

[7] For important work on Hemans's relationships with Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley, see, *inter alia*, essays by Isobel Armstrong, Julie Melnyk, and Susan J. Wolfson in *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Julie Melnyk and Nanora Sweet (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), and relevant sections of Jerome J. McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility*: *A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996).

He answered by reciting those glorious lines of Milton's:

> Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,
> Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep &c.

and this in tones that seemed rising from such depths of veneration! I cannot describe the thrill with which I listened; it was like the feeling which Lord Byron has embodied in one of his best and purest moments, when he so beautifully says, –

> And not a breath crept through the rosy air,
> And yet the forest leaves seemed stirred with prayer. (Wolfson, pp. 508-9)

Hemans manages to bring together the nature poetry of Byron (*Don Juan*, 3.102) and Wordsworth (via Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 4.677-8), no mean feat when one thinks how annoyed Wordsworth was by Byron's plagiarism, as he saw it, of 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' (hereafter *Tintern Abbey*) in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, III: Byron, he says in a letter of 1817 he had been told, had 'been poaching on my Manor'.[8] Byron for his part was equally contemptuous of Wordsworth and Hemans: 'no more modern poesy – I pray—', he wrote to his and Hemans's publisher John Murray with splenetic scorn, 'neither Mrs Hewoman's—nor any female or male Tadpole of Poet Turdsworth's—nor any of his ragamuffins' (Wolfson, p. 536). The letter is a masterpiece of critique by way of sarcastic wordplay. Byron's contempt shows in his denigratory mockery of the poets' names. It is as though he sensed an unholy alliance between Lake-ist nature-worship of what, in the end, is worth as much as a 'Turd' and the 'unfeminine' ambition that he saw lurking behind Hemans's simperingly decorous 'poesy'. Walter Scott also, a few years later, found Hemans 'somewhat too poetical for my taste—too many flowers I mean, and too little fruit' (Wolfson, p. 545).

But Hemans could hold her ground. Her very lack of 'fruit' is among her themes, if one sees her poetry as concerned, ultimately, with the final insufficiency of poetry, even though she sees it taking us further than any other mode of expression; such a barren but eloquent 'fruit' is entwined with 'flowers' in a fascinating way, as is her sense that other poets' entwining of flowers and fruit had its problems and complexities. Her 'one of his best and purest moments' shows a readiness to winnow 'spiritualizing' wheat from mocking chaff in her response to Byron, in its own way a form of vigorous revisionism that obliges Byron (like Wordsworth) to accord with her emphasis on spiritual intimations. 'The Spirit's Mysteries' is a poem by her which operates in this area. Here is the poem:

> *And slight, withal, may be the things which bring*
> *Back on the heart the weight which it would fling*
> *Aside for ever*; *– it may be a sound –*
> *A tone of music – summer's breath, or spring –*
> *A flower – a leaf – the ocean – which may wound –*
> *Striking th'electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound.*
> *Childe Harold.*

[8] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd. ed., *III: The Middle Years: Part II: 1812-1820*, rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 394.

The power that dwelleth in sweet sounds to waken
Vague yearnings, like the sailor's for the shore,
And dim remembrances, whose hue seems taken
From some bright former state, our own no more;
Is not this all a mystery? – Who shall say
Whence are those thoughts, and whither tends their way?

The sudden images of vanish'd things,
That o'er the spirit flash, we know not why;
Tones from some broken harp's deserted strings,
Warm sunset hues of summers long gone by,
A rippling wave – the dashing of an oar –
A flower scent floating past our parents' door;

A word – scarce noted in its hour perchance,
Yet back returning with a plaintive tone;
A smile – a sunny or a mournful glance,
Full of sweet meanings now from this world flown;
Are not these mysteries when to life they start,
And press vain tears in gushes from the heart?

And the far wanderings of the soul in dreams,
Calling up shrouded faces from the dead,
And with them bringing soft or solemn gleams,
Familiar objects brightly to o'erspread;
And wakening buried love, or joy, or fear,–
These are night's mysteries – who shall make them clear?

And the strange inborn sense of coming ill
That ofttimes whispers to the haunted breast
In a low tone which nought can drown or still,
Midst feasts and melodies a secret guest;
Whence doth that murmur wake, that shadow fall?
Why shakes the spirit thus? 'Tis mystery all!

Darkly we move – we press upon the brink
Haply of viewless worlds, and know it not;
Yes, it may be that nearer than we think
Are those whom death has parted from our lot!
Fearfully, wondrously, our souls are made –
Let us walk humbly on, but undismayed!

Humbly – for knowledge strives in vain to feel
Her way amidst these marvels of the mind;
Yet undismay'd; for do they not reveal
Th' immortal being with our dust entwin'd? –
So let us deem, and e'en the tears they wake
Shall then be blest, for that high nature's sake![9]

[9] Quoted from Wu.

Taking its epigraph, with some slight rewordings, from Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 4. 23. 202-7 (in line 205, Byron has 'summer's eve', not 'summer's breath' and in line 206, Byron has 'the wind', not 'a leaf', and he has 'shall wound', not 'may wound'), the poem meditates on the source of spiritual and imaginative intimations and presentiments in a manner that is Wordsworthian as much as Byronic. Byron is fascinated by the 'electric chain' of often painful emotional associations; Hemans, like Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, book 2 (not published until 1850), is intrigued and finally heartened in an explicitly Christian sense by the fact that we cannot trace our mental and imaginative experiences to their origins. Like Shelley in places (such as the 'Conclusion' to *The Sensitive Plant*), she draws comfort from human ignorance. Hemans's syntax exploits the capacity of the roomy six-line stanza to mimic the mind's process of reflection and self-questioning.

In the first stanza Hemans does what she so often does in her dealings with male Romantics: she subdues agitation into yearning. If the lacerating pain of Byron's stanza supplies her text, her sermon, so to speak, is closer to wonder, to a mood in which pain, still felt, passes into ultimate acceptance. In lines 1 and 3 the feminine rhyme lends a lilt to the lines in accord with their sense of coming upon 'mysteries'. Cleverly Hemans makes the second verb ('taken') passive rather than active, transferring attention to 'some bright former state' (4). In the next two lines, Hemans shows that the impulse to pose questions binds her practice firmly to that of Wordsworth and Shelley, in particular. But Shelley's interrogation pushes harder at the doors of the unknowable: 'Whence are we and why are we? of what scene / The actors or spectators?' (184-5) he asks, for instance, in *Adonais*. Indeed, Wordsworth's own 'Whither is fled the visionary gleam?' (56) in his 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' is also not so resigned to never knowing the answer as is Hemans's questioning manner.

Yet there are genuine affinities, too. In line 9, 'Tones from some broken harp's deserted strings', Hemans plays her own variation on Shelley's 'music by the night wind sent / Through strings of some still instrument' (33-4) in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'. If, for Hemans, the spirit's mysteries are ultimately Christian, whereas intellectual beauty is located, however uncertainly, in a humanist realm, both poets are interested in fugitive effects streaming from unknown cases. By the penultimate stanza, opening with a distinct key-change that shows in the stress shift of 'Darkly we move' (31), the poem no longer asks questions; it tries to find tentative answers that are based on the hope that the 'mysteries' recorded in the poem correspond to realities beyond our ken. It is here, again, that Hemans seems to recall her reading of Shelley, already glimmering in the phrase 'that shadow fall' (29), which echoes and mutes the male poet's moment of shrieking ecstasy when, in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', 'Sudden thy shadow fell on me' (59). So, 'brink' (31) placed deftly at the line-ending, summons up Shelley's advice in *Adonais* to 'keep thy heart light lest it make thee sink / When hope has kindled hope, and lured thee to the brink' (422-3).

Hemans senses that we 'press upon the brink' and 'know it not'; Shelley counsels against toppling over the edge. Hemans is a large-souled, intuitive seer, Shelley a driven, near-suicidal quester, whose 'spirit's bark is driven / Far from the shore' (488-9). He is 'borne darkly, fearfully, afar' (492), an adverbial coupling that shadows Hemans's possible allusion to the Psalms in 'Fearfully, wondrously, our souls are made' (139: 14 has 'I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wondrously made'). In the final stanza, Hemans does not celebrate 'marvels of the mind' (38) in the spirit of an Enlightenment *philosophe*; she is, rather, impelled to affirm a very Wordsworthian awe before the mind's intimations of infinity. We note, in **'**So let us deem' (39), the

self-aware decision to choose a mode of apprehending reality. This assertion brings to the fore a strain in Romantic poetry of consciously willed assertion in a way that is typical of Hemans. Byron, for example, turns away from an abyss of nihilism in canto 4 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to assert 'Yet let us ponder boldly' (stanza 127). Hemans's originality consists both in such explicitly reflexive acts that show her inward grasp of the dynamics at work in the poetry of male Romantics, and in her 'spiritualizing' vision. Both features converge in her allusion in 'that high nature's sake' (42) to Wordsworth's lines in 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', 'High instincts before which our mortal nature / Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised' (149-50). Hemans's phrase imbues piety and humility with a kind of awe before the sublimity possessed by 'Th' immortal being with our dust entwined' that shows how much she has in common with Wordsworth and Shelley. All three poets, however differently they explain or refuse to explain it, will not countenance a reductive or mechanistic view of the human and claim for it 'immortal' longings and potential, however that immortality is to be conceived and re-conceived.

Wordsworth not only liked Hemans, but also admired her poetry; she appears in a revised version of his 'Extempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg': 'Mourn rather for that holy Spirit, / Sweet as the spring, as ocean deep; / For Her who, ere her summer faded, / Has sunk into a breathless sleep' (37-40; quoted from Wolfson, p. 578). The second line of that musical, subtle tribute repays attention, as it switches from the seemingly hackneyed 'Sweet as the spring' to the arrestingly thought-provoking, 'as ocean deep'. Sweetness and depth ally themselves, for Wordsworth, in her work; even the sweetness of spring turns out to be tinged with pathos and elegy when it emerges in the next lines that she had died 'ere her summer faded'. In his 'Prefatory Note', it is evident that he was put out when, after her death, he realised she had teased him to a friend about his recommending the purchase of '*Scales*': Wordsworth writes gruffly that 'She was totally ignorant of housewifery'. But having got this mild chagrin out of his system he writes, touchingly, 'I felt most kindly disposed towards her, and took her part upon all occasions'. And he continues: 'Let it suffice to add, that there was much sympathy between us, and, if opportunity had been allowed me to see more of her, I should have loved and valued her accordingly' (Wolfson, p. 577). Sarah Hutchinson thought Hemans had been 'spoilt by the adulation of "*the world*"' and hints at the ripples her presence caused: 'Mr. W. *pretends* to like her very much – but I believe it is only because we do not; for she is the very opposite, her good-nature excepted, of anything he ever admired before in theory or practice' (Wolfson, p. 556). But Wordsworth's tribute in 'Extempore Effusions' recognises her depth and her poignancy. And this dual quality emerges in one of her finest achievements, 'Properzia Rossi', a poem that establishes a fascinating dialogue with male Romanticism.

In 'Properzia Rossi' Hemans finds in her 'celebrated female sculptor of Bologna' (from the poem's prefatory note) a means of using the form of dramatic monologue to articulate her feelings about the predicament of the female creator, awarded fame, but longing for love. Susan Wolfson draws attention in her edition of Hemans to Letitia Landon's comment in 'On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings', 'No emotion is more truly, or more often pictured in her song, than that craving for affection which answers not unto the call' (qtd. Wolfson, p. 351). The poem captures in its use of risings and fallings of mood the speaker's pleasure in artistic creation, and yet her sense that she has been disappointed emotionally, a disappointment that might have prevented her from giving birth to 'creations of far nobler thought' (63). Written in iambic pentameters, normally rhyming in couplets, occasionally interspersed with

quatrain rhymes, the verse is full of expressive enjambments and strong caesurae, underscoring the dramatic power of the speaker's outpouring. Byron and Shelley are often called to mind, both through detailed echoes and larger thematic concerns, and yet 'Properzia Rossi' gives a distinctively original inflection to their emphases.

The poem plays a female variation on themes of creativity often addressed by men. It might be construed as feminist in its suggestions of unfair neglect, – Properzia Rossi 'died in consequence of an unrequited attachment' (Wolfson, p. 352) – and even in the epigraph we find evidence of difference from Romantic male poetry. There, mention is made of the want of '*a resting-home, a home for all* / *Its burden of affections*', where Hemans's phrasing plays a variation on Wordsworth's 'burthen of the mystery' (39) in *Tintern Abbey*. From the opening, 'One dream of passion and of beauty more! / And in its bright fulfillment let me pour / My soul away!' (1-3), there is a strain of wryly impassioned irony: here it shows in the recognition that a 'dream of passion and of beauty' can find 'fulfilment' in art (sculpture), but the artist cannot find 'fulfilment' emotionally. Hemans weds this specific form of frustration to others she would have encountered in, say, Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, in which Rousseau speaks – self-accusingly yet self-excusingly – of the want of 'purer sentiment' (202)[10] for 'the spark with which Heaven lit my spirit' (201). Hemans would have been able to read the poem in Shelley's *Posthumous Poems* (1824), edited by Mary Shelley (quotations are taken from this edition), and seems to recall it when Properzia says, 'Let earth retain a trace / Of that which lit my being, tho' its race / Might have been loftier far' (3-5). Hemans must have been intrigued by the thought of being let down by the lack of 'purer sentiment': would that lack be traceable to the self, to others, to society, or to the nature of things? The different possibilities circle one another in Hemans's text, as in Shelley's. Again, when, as in lines 5-6, Hemans rhymes 'dream' and 'gleam', a familiar rhyme in Romantic poetry (as in Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', 56-7), her echo points towards the unstable nature of artistic triumph.

Properzia fantasises that her new work will disturb her passionless 'Roman Knight' (from prefatory note) 'with a tone / Of lost affection' (12-13), lines which may rework the passage in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, IV. 23. 202-7, that Hemans uses as the epigraph to 'The Spirit's Mysteries'. Byron speaks of 'things which bring / Back on the heart the weight which it would fling / Aside for ever' (202-4), such as 'A tone of music' (205). 'Tone' is a complex word in Hemans, conveying some and at times all of the following senses: 'a particular quality, pitch, modulation, or inflexion of the voice expressing or indicating affirmation, interrogation, hesitation, decision, or some feeling or emotion' (*OED* 5a). Properzia, imagining herself seen after death by 'Thou, lov'd so vainly!' (9), desires a 'tone' that resurrects lost affection, but she also rallies her spirits: in line 21, her 'my spirit, wake!' echoes Byron, 'On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year', line 26: 'Awake, my Spirit!'

Throughout the poem, there is a powerful sense of affective surges and slumps: so in 25-7, 'It comes, – the power / Within me born, flows back; my fruitless dower / That could not win me love', the syntax suggests, in miniature, the ebb and flow (or, here, the flow and ebb) of the speaker's currents of feeling. This may issue from the

[10] Modern editions (from which line numbers have been supplied for convenience) read 'nutriment' for 'sentiment'; hence, I have chosen the text Hemans is most likely to have known. It can be consulted in a Woodstock Books facsimile of Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Posthumous Poems 1824*, intro Jonathan Wordsworth (1991). The same reading ('sentiment') appears in the Galignani edition of the *Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats* (1829).

speaker's 'self-consuming' feelings, a compound adjective that sums up the speaker's sense of the cost of unspoken feeling and anticipates John Clare's cri-de-coeur, 'I am the self-consumer of my woes', line 3 of 'I Am' (composed in 1846). Or it may express, as in lines 49-59, a longing fully to express the self's deepest feelings, one that offers a parallel in its desire to 'throw' into the sculpture 'a voice, a sweet, and low, / And thrilling voice of song' (50-1) to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 3. 97, where Byron wishes he could 'throw / Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak, ... into *one* word' (907-8, 910): phrasing echoed, too, in Properzia's longed-for '*one* gush of tears' (57). Or, in lines such as 'Yet all the vision that within me wrought, / I cannot make thee' (61-2), there is a recognition of the gap between 'vision' and final realisation, a realisation that cannot do justice to the original vision. Such a recognition occurs elsewhere in Romantic poetry, notably Shelley.

The remarkable achievement in 'Properzia Rossi', and here the poem is emblematic of Hemans's overall success, is that out of her densely allusive web of echoes she is able to create a poem that has an individual timbre: one instinct with 'poet-dreams' (92) and a creative self-assertiveness that is paradoxically empowered by loss, by the elegiac, by 'this broken-hearted love' (94). When Properzia asks, 'That which I have been can I be no more?' (86), the line, Wordsworthian in cadence, is cunningly crafted to combine loss and hope as it brings into play echoes of 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', both 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more' (9) and 'the primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be' (184-5). In 'Properzia Rossi', Hemans succeeds in modulating the rhythms and phrases of other poets in accordance with her own deftly controlled cadences as she runs varied-length sentences across flamboyantly enjambed couplets. Properzia concludes the poem in a state of ambivalence characteristic of Hemans: the 'fire / Burns faint within her' (120-1), yet she leaves her name (see 121). The speaker's disappointments and frustrations co-exist with the desire to express her feelings in art. In this, she serves as a surrogate for Hemans. Hemans's ability to express yearning for emotional, spiritual and artistic fulfilment, often fused with a steadfast acceptance of inevitable disappointment, allows her to enter her own particular 'kingdom of the lute', to borrow a phrase from Landon's 'Felicia Hemans' (47; quoted from Wolfson, p. 583): a 'kingdom' that is no less 'lonely' and individual for bordering, without poaching, on other Romantic poetic manors and domains.

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Neighbours: Wordsworth and Harriet Martineau

By FELICITY JAMES

I WANT TO BEGIN WITH A RECORD OF A MISERABLE MEETING, in Rydal Mount, when Harriet Martineau went to call on Wordsworth and his wife. It was a disappointing evening:

> My deafness was a great difficulty too, and especially when his teeth were out, as they were in the evenings, when the family were alone. He began a sentence to me, and then turned his head away to finish it to somebody on the other side: so that I had no chance with him unless we were *tête-à-tête*, when we got on very well.[1]

Between the deafness and the toothlessness, there isn't much room for Wordsworthian inspiration. Yet Harriet Martineau's relationship with Wordsworth spanned the whole of her writing life, from her early rapturous reading of his poetry as a child in Norwich, to becoming his near neighbour in 1845, when she moved into 'The Knoll' in Ambleside. The changes in her perception of Wordsworth allow a good insight into his different legacies: the relationship between them shows us the meeting of two different Victorian worlds, sometimes – as in the toothless conversation – one of mutual incomprehension. Throughout the Winter School, we have been thinking about women intersecting with, imitating and quarrelling with Wordsworth, and Harriet Martineau is a prime example of a woman writer who defined herself in relation to – and against – Wordsworth.

Similarly, Martineau both rebels against and exploits the literary associations of the Lake District, but in later life firmly and proudly places herself as an Ambleside inhabitant. It's worth remembering that if we had been visitors here in the mid-nineteenth century, Harriet Martineau's house would have been an important sight to take in, and Barbara Todd's preservation of 'The Knoll' has helped keep the legend alive. 'How many travellers from all lands have visited this dwelling among the Westmoreland mountains as a shrine!' exclaims Maria Weston Chapman in the volume of memorials which accompanied Martineau's posthumously published *Autobiography*.[2] Martineau herself, not without some little pride, deprecates the hordes of tourists who swarmed around her house in the late 1840s and 1850s:

> Every summer they come and stare in at our windows while we are at dinner, hide behind shrubs or the corner of the house, plant themselves in the yards behind or the field before; are staring up at one's window when one gets up in the morning, gather handfuls of flowers in the garden, stop or follow us in the road, and report us to the newspapers. (*Autobiography*, 512)

It's hard now to imagine anyone concealing themselves behind a shrub to catch a glimpse of the author of the *Illustrations of Political Economy*, so my talk this

[1] Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography* (1877), ed. Linda H. Peterson (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2007), 492. Hereafter cited in text as *Autobiography*.

[2] *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography and Memorials of Harriet Martineau*, ed. Maria Weston Chapman, 2 vols. (Boston, 1877), II: 377.

afternoon will provide a broad biographical introduction, following in the footsteps of Barbara Todd's *Harriet Martineau at Ambleside* and R. K. Webb's earlier *Harriet Martineau*: *A Radical Victorian*, in recovering and commemorating this largely forgotten Victorian celebrity, and exploring how she situates herself in relation to Wordsworth.[3]

I

There were three main phases of Martineau's attitude towards Wordsworth. First came adulation, then as she catapulted to fame with her *Illustrations of Political Economy* in the 1830s, she became critical. Finally, on her move to Ambleside, she enters a different stage of her life, as neighbour – and in some ways, rival – of Wordsworth in his later years.

As a child, she was a passionate admirer of Wordsworth. Born in 1802, she was the sixth child of a successful Unitarian manufacturer of bombazine and camlet, Thomas Martineau. That Unitarianism – despite her later repudiation – was a defining element of her childhood. The family were part of a network of prosperous, intellectual Unitarians in Norwich who gathered around the Octagon Chapel, where Harriet's father was deacon. Her education, at the hands of ministers such as Lant Carpenter, was in the Dissenting tradition of free-thinking, rigorous enquiry, self-reliance, and rationality.[4]

Yet Martineau didn't entirely fit the mould of a young Unitarian. Rational Dissent eschewed belief in hell and original sin, but throughout her childhood Harriet was tormented by guilty fears and anxieties: self-flagellating, endlessly punishing herself and dreaming of martyrdom. Her early torments are reminiscent of Wordsworthian abysses of childhood imagination and fear: colours cast by the glass chandelier made her 'hide my face in a chair, and scream with terror'; she is frightened by trees, by the 'terrible entanglement' of the long grass; magic lantern shows bring on 'bowel-complaint'. She responds vividly to all sorts of sense impressions: 'The young wild parsley and other weeds in the hedges used to make me sick with their luscious green in the spring'; when she touches a flat velvet button, 'the rapture of the sensation was really monstrous' (*Autobiography*, 40-44). Her memories in her *Autobiography* have a preternatural clarity, as she enters unselfconsciously into her childhood nightmares once again, and, almost fifty years later, still vividly feels the smart of infant grievances.

It was in this state that she began to read Wordsworth, recalling 'a period of a few years, in my youth, when I worshipped Wordsworth. I pinned up his likeness in my room; and I could repeat his poetry by the hour' (*Autobiography*, 493). She was

[3] Barbara Todd, *Harriet Martineau at Ambleside* (Carlisle: Bookcase, 2002) is an indispensable guide for those interested in replacing Martineau in the Lakes, containing a biographical account of Martineau and a reprint of Martineau's 'A Year at Ambleside'; see also R. K. Webb's standard biography, *Harriet Martineau. A Radical Victorian* (London: Heinemann, 1960). This paper functions mainly as an introduction to Martineau and her relationship with Wordsworth; more still needs to be done to establish the deeper connections between them, and the importance of Wordsworthian ideas to nineteenth-century Unitarianism.

[4] On the nature and scope of Unitarian education and its impact on women, see Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995); for a general overview of Unitarianism in England, see Raymond V. Holt, *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England* (1938; London: The Lindsey Press, 1952).

twelve when *The Excursion* appeared, and during her teenage years she read it with intense devotion. 'For twenty-two years', she told Henry Crabb Robinson in 1841,

> I have owed him more than I could ever estimate. When I was a little girl, and everybody was raving about Byron, I used to keep a few chosen ones listening by the hour together to my recitations from the Excursion, and others of his great sayings. I could venture to say that I knew the Excursion as well as he did himself before I was twenty.[5]

And it was to Wordsworth she returned when she was beginning her journalistic career. Her writing was in part prompted by the family's reduced circumstances. Her father died in 1826, and his business, which had badly suffered in the crash of 1825-6, finally failed three years later. Harriet had to contribute to the family income. Her extreme deafness, which she dealt with stoically throughout life, prohibited her from becoming a governess, so her only recourse was to take in sewing and fancy-work, although she yearned to try her hand at journalism. Her mother, especially, was sceptical about her power to provide money for the family through her writing, and pressed more sewing work upon her, making her the more determined to prove that she could succeed financially. In many ways, she was later to write, the family's ruin 'was one of the best things that ever happened to us', breaking open the strict Victorian codes of respectability and femininity, and affording her 'a wholly new freedom':

> I, who had been obliged to write before breakfast, or in some private way, had henceforth liberty to do my own work in my own way; for we had lost our gentility. (*Autobiography*, 126)

Her early journalism was still firmly within the quasi-familial Unitarian network in which she had been brought up. She began publishing in the *Monthly Repository*, whose editor, the fiery London preacher William Johnson Fox, encouraged and supported her work.[6] Early in her association with Fox, she published a long Wordsworthian essay, split into two halves, 'On the Agency of Feelings in the Formation of Habits' and 'On the Agency of Habits in the Regeneration of Feelings'.[7] Both deal with a concept Wordsworth himself had considered in his fragmentary 'Essay on Morals' of 1798, 'in a [?strict] sense all our actions are the result of our habits'.[8] Echoing Wordsworth, Martineau is informed by a deep interest in the state of childhood, and its relation to adult perception, the ways in which, as our 'intellects become enlightened, [...] feelings grow cold'. Age lessens 'the depth and strength of [...] sensibility': 'the breezes of spring, though soft and sweet, no longer fill us with the intoxicating delight which formerly allied us with the carolling birds and sporting lambs […] feelings, innocent and virtuous in their nature and tendency, have passed away' (*MR*, III: 102-3). As Shelagh Hunter has pointed out, the essay is 'a prose

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[5] *The Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle (1808-1866)*, ed. Edith J. Morley, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), I: 421.

[6] See Francis Edward Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 234-46.

[7] *Monthly Repository*: III, 102-6, and III: 159-62 (1829); hereafter cited in text as *MR*.

[8] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. W. J. B. Owen, Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I: 103.

imitation or appropriation of the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality"'.[9] But the ambiguities of the 'Ode' are smoothed away, and its power of recovery firmed up into a Victorian celebration of will and self-disciplined effort. The change of feelings as we approach adulthood, Martineau assures us, 'is only temporary, easily explained, and (like most other processes of our moral being) satisfactorily justified' (*MR*, III: 102). Good feelings may, under proper instruction, lead to 'good principles and habits' and these will sustain us through the loss of those feelings. Wordsworth's discussion of the connection between habits and morality had made his distrust of laying down any principles to be followed: such 'bald & naked reasonings are impotent over our habits'.[10] Martineau, however, does clearly exhort the reader to follow a clearly defined set of rules: religious services, for instance, should be conducted 'regularly, calmly, and cheerfully', avoiding 'flaming raptures, or [...] thrilling fears' (*MR*, III: 105). This is Wordsworth pressed into the service of Rational Dissent, as Martineau explores how to use – and to excuse – feeling inside a structure of early nineteenth century Unitarianism.

The second half of the essay, 'On the Agency of Habits in the Regeneration of Feeling', confirms the supreme importance of strictly observed habits and principles. Doing our duty, keeping to our principles, will perhaps overpower 'our deadness of feeling': repeated prayer, for instance, is likened to

> A stream which, from the fountain of the heart,
> Issuing, however feebly, nowhere flows
> Without access of unexpected strength. (*MR*, III: 159)

Martineau takes her quotation from Book Four of the *Excursion*, when the Wanderer responds to the 'fixed despondency' of the Solitary, and the tale of his sorrows and travels, by telling him about the 'law of conscience – conscience reverenced and obeyed'.[11]

If, as Hunter shows, the 'Intimations Ode' is an important force behind Martineau's first essay, the second piece is clearly informed by that sustained and ardent reading of the *Excursion* in her teenage years. She concludes the essay with examples of different poets – one, a clear reference to Byron, 'rouses our passions, awakens our sympathies, opens to us the hidden recesses of the soul', but lives 'in the frequent violations of moral laws', and therefore his powers will soon fade away (*MR*, III: 161). On the other hand, continuing her childhood loyalty, she evokes an image of another poet – Wordsworth, although he is not named – who 'has trained up his thoughts in unceasing devotion to God, and the diligent service of his race', and who has 'carefully associated his emotions with reason and principle', never exciting them unless in the 'purpose of improvement or usefulness' (*MR*, III: 161-2). His powers, by contrast, are 'ever-growing', and she then quotes:

> It were a wantonness, and would demand
> Severe reproof, if we were men whose hearts
> Could hold vain dalliance with the misery
> Even of the dead; contented thence to draw
> A momentary pleasure, never marked
> By reason, barren of all future good. (MR, III: 162)

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[9] Shelagh Hunter, *Harriet Martineau: The Poetics of Moralism* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 114.
[10] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. Owen and Smyser, I: 103.
[11] *The Excursion*, IV: 218-21.

This is another quotation from the Wanderer, this time from Book One of the *Excursion*. It is a crucially important passage for Martineau to choose, and it tells us a good deal about how she read Wordsworth.

The passage comes just as the Wanderer begins to tell the tale of Margaret and the ruined cottage. The poet has just 'begged of the old Man that, for my sake, / He would resume his story' (*The Excursion,* I: 663-4); but the Wanderer delays. He wants to make clear that his narrative is told not for entertainment's sake – that would be 'wantonness' – but towards purposes of virtue and 'future good'. The Wanderer defends himself on two counts: firstly, that his story will be a mournful one. In 'mournful thoughts' the Wanderer maintains, there is a 'power to virtue friendly': 'were't not so, / I am a dreamer among men, indeed / An idle dreamer!' (*The Excursion,* I: 674-5). And secondly, that there will be nothing exciting about this tale, nothing extraordinary. It is a 'common tale, / An ordinary sorrow of man's life' (*The Excursion,* I: 675-6). The warning is a curious way to begin the narration, signifying a certain anxiety about the way in which tales might be related and interpreted. Martineau seems to sense Wordsworth's need to justify himself – and uses it in defence of her own attraction towards the poetry of feeling, her teenage admiration of Wordsworth's tales. Her quotation of the Wanderer's reproof of stories which afford

> A momentary pleasure, never marked
> By reason, barren of all future good[12]

could serve as an epigraph for her own work. Her own writing constantly returns to the way in which imaginative creation and story-telling can be justified within a scheme of moral usefulness and 'future good'.

II

This would find its most powerful expression in the works which made her – almost instantly – famous: her *Illustrations of Political Economy*. A monthly series of twenty four didactic tales, published from February 1832, these were, as their most recent editor Deborah Logan has it, 'a short-lived but immensely influential literary hybrid […] an entirely new genre whose innovativeness was peculiarly suited to society's needs in 1832'.[13] They are short narratives which dramatise current theories of trade, society and economy and conclude with a 'Summary of Principles Illustrated in this Tale', drawing on the work of James Mill, David Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus. Subjects included enclosure and strike action, and, perhaps most controversially, Malthusian principles of population, illustrated through the plight of a fishing community in 'Ella of Garveloch' and 'Weal and Woe in Garveloch'. These stories startled contemporary readers with their discussion of 'preventive checks' to population, including abstinence, and the 'honour of a single life': 'We have not the power of increasing food as fast as our numbers may increase; but we have the power of limiting our numbers to agree with the supply of food'.[14] Thus Ronald, a single man in good circumstances, will not marry Katie, the widow he loves, because of his

[12] 'The Wanderer', *The Excursion*, eds. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), ll: 661-62.
[13] *Illustrations of Political Economy: Selected Tales*, ed. Deborah Anna Logan (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), 29.
[14] *Illustrations*, ed. Logan, 111.

unwillingness to produce more mouths to feed in times of herring shortages – a moral and economic solution the tale unhesitatingly approves.

This unsentimental emphasis alarmed reviewers. Attacking Martineau for her shockingly 'unfeminine and mischievous doctrines', the *Quarterly Review* exhorted her to 'burn all the little books she has yet written'.[15] It was far too late for that, for after immense difficulty in initially finding a publisher for the *Illustrations*, they achieved astonishing success. Everyone, it seemed, was reading them, from the Houses of Parliament to Buckingham Palace. Princess Victoria was 'delighted' with the series, which Martineau was glad of, telling Lord Durham

> that it was worth something for her to know what the inside of a workhouse, for instance, was like; but that I did hope she did not read for the story only. In her position it really would be a very good thing that she should understand *the summaries* and trace them in the stories.[16]

That someone might read 'for the story only' was a recurrent anxiety about Martineau's writing. The combination of fiction and political economy excited many reviewers, who praised Martineau's treatment of character and description – 'the hand and eye of a true artist'; 'Miss Martineau is the real painter of the poor: she has all the truth of Crabbe, with more hope and more reason'; 'she can put forth […] an intense and passionate power, and the next moment whisper an overmastering spell to the gentlest feelings of the heart'.[17] However, some were alarmed by this artistry, suspecting that the fictional aspect might overpower the principles. Martineau defends herself on this point in her *Autobiography*; the inspiration for the *Illustrations*, she says, came from the realisation that the principles of political economy could be conveyed 'not by being smothered up in a story, but by being exhibited in their natural workings in selected passages of social life' (*Autobiography*, 124). In some ways, this brings us back to her reading of Wordsworth. Like the passage from the *Excursion* justifying the narrative which is 'an ordinary sorrow of man's life', Martineau is anxious to have her tales thought of as 'social life', not idle fictionalisation. She goes to some lengths to show how carefully she drew up her 'Summary of Principles' of political economy, embodying 'each leading principle in a character: and the mutual operation of these embodied principles supplied the action to the story' (*Autobiography*, 159). She carefully restrained herself 'from glancing even in thought towards the scene and nature of my story till it should be suggested by my collective didactic materials' (*Autobiography*, 159).

But this promotion of a didactic system also shows us how far she was growing away from Wordsworth; she was simultaneously moving away from Unitarianism, towards a free-thinking atheism. As she found her own literary identity, she was losing faith in her former ideals. Her growing disappointment with Wordsworth stemmed from what she came to feel as an 'absence of sound, accurate, weighty thought, and of genuine poetic inspiration' in his work (*Autobiography*, 493). She was growing frustrated with the link between thought and feeling which originally interested her, and now believed that Wordsworth's philosophy was too closely based on the personal and the introspective. While she did acknowledge his power in some ways, acknowledging him as 'a benefactor, to poetry and to society', and praising his

[15] *The Quarterly Review*, XLIX (1833), 151 [George Poulett Scrope and John Wilson Croker].
[16] *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography and Memorials of Harriet Martineau*, ed. Maria Weston Chapman, 2 vols. (Boston, 1877), II: 208.
[17] *Illustrations*, ed. Logan, 415-19.

'rational' and 'beautiful' way of speaking, she suggested that now his lessons had been absorbed, 'the temporary exaggeration of his merits as a poet' might be realised (*Autobiography*, 493-4).

One of the clearest examples of the growing difference between Martineau and Wordsworth is in their approach to the controversy surrounding the Poor Laws in the mid-1830s. Both opposed the Poor Law Amendment Act of August 1834 – which sought to abolish outdoor relief and administer it solely in the workhouse – but from radically different sides. For Wordsworth, in his 1835 Postscript to *Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems*, it was a case of the 'prudence of the head' supplanting 'the wisdom of the heart'. Charity should be administered freely:

> Justly might I be accused of wasting time in an uncalled-for attempt to excite the feelings of the reader, if systems of political economy, widely spread, did not impugn the principle, and if the safeguards against such extremities were left unimpaired.[18]

It is not Martineau's systems which he attacks directly here, but those on which her *Illustrations* were based, particularly Malthus and Bentham. His model of charity – albeit a complex and at times uneasy one – is best exemplified by 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', which argues that the aged beggar should remain 'in the eye of Nature', and not sent into the 'pent-up' din of the workhouse, 'HOUSE, misnamed of INDUSTRY'. This is not because of care for the old man himself, but because of his social utility, the importance of the charitable instinct he keeps alive in the community:

> Still let him prompt the unlettered villagers
> To tender offices and pensive thoughts.[19]

Martineau too believed that the state should not interfere in caring for the poor – but, on the other hand, neither did she believe in private charity. Her view of charity is based on underlying natural laws, some of which are explained in her tale 'Cousin Marshall', which offers a very different model of charity from 'The Old Cumberland Beggar'. Here, poor Cousin Marshall, who struggles hard to scrimp and save, is contrasted with her feckless neighbours, who talk about the 'pleasant life people might lead in a workhouse if they chose'.[20] The price of such 'workhouse frolics' is paid by upstanding people like Marshall, or another character in the story, the respectable farmer Dale, driven to ruin by excessive rate-paying. Both private almsgiving and public support are shown merely to increase the number of paupers: 'every blanket given away brings two naked people, and every bushel of coal a family that wants to be warmed', and every workhouse breeds more vice.[21] Rather than being bound together through charity as in Wordsworth's model, the community implodes under the strain of swarming paupers. It is worth noting that Martineau herself was by no means a harsh or uncharitable woman, and she was committed to practical, charitable work throughout her life. In Ambleside, for instance, she did a great deal to improve the situation of the poor, campaigning for more sanitary living conditions,

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[18] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. Owen and Smyser, 3: 244.
[19] 'The Old Cumberland Beggar: A Description', *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, eds. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), ll. 162-63.
[20] *Illustrations*, ed. Logan, 227.
[21] *Ibid.*, 271.

lecturing to the working people, and establishing a Building Society, 'The Windermere Permanent Land, Building, and Investment Association' in 1849, which was a great success.

However, there is a distinct difference between Martineau's and the Wordsworths' *imaginative* portrayal of the poor. This emerges still more strongly in Martineau's free adaptation of Dorothy Wordsworth's 'A Narrative Concerning George and Sarah Green'. Dorothy drafted this account of the death of the Greens, husband and wife, to be sent out in manuscript to friends who might subscribe to the children's support. The Greens had walked to a sale, only to perish in the snow on the way back across the mountains, falling down a precipice beside Mill Beck, in Langdale. They had left 'a Daughter at home, eleven years of age, with the care of five other Children younger than herself, the youngest an Infant at the breast'.[22] Dorothy's account is a moving one, direct and plain, inflected with a clear-sighted sympathy which carefully steers away from sentimentality. At points she excuses her own narrative detail – 'I am almost afraid that you may have thought my account of the characters of the Children but a Romance, a dream of fanciful feeling proceding in great measure from pity' – but persists in emphasising the tenderness of the family, their dignity and worthiness: 'The love of their few fields and their ancient home was a salutary passion, and no doubt something of this must have spread itself to the Children'.[23] There is, at times, a sense of the way in which the community, too, bears a sense of responsibility – even a shadow of guilt about the Greens' desperate plight before the parents' death. Yet, Dorothy adds, despite their circumstances, 'they were never heard to murmur or complain'.[24] What is clear is the almost painful dignity of the Greens, their fierce independence, and Dorothy's eagerness to do homage to this in her own spare, dignified prose. Her penultimate paragraph quotes from her brother's work:

> I may say with the Pedlar in the 'Recluse'
> 'I feel
> The story linger in my heart, my memory
> Clings to this poor Woman and her Family'.[25]

It is slightly misquoted from Book One of *The Excursion*, the story of Margaret which had begun with the 'Ruined Cottage', and which also had affected Martineau. Like the ending of Wordsworth's story, there is a sense of grief being slowly resolved, of real suffering transmuted and gradually healed as the community takes on and cares for the children.

Martineau's retelling shows how the story, too, had lingered in her heart: but she translates it into a didactic form, with a clear moral. Once she had moved to Ambleside, she must have been familiar with the details of the children's care. I think it not unlikely that she had read the manuscript, interested as she was in all aspects of local charity, and she would also have known the story from De Quincey's *Recollections of Grasmere*. She first tells it in her 1850 series, 'A Year at Ambleside', with some judgemental touches. The children as they vainly wait for their parents to return are described as unworried:

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[22] Dorothy Wordsworth 'George & Sarah Green: A Narrative', ed. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 44.
[23] *Ibid*., 74-5.
[24] *Ibid.*, 49.
[25] *Ibid.*, 86.

> Those who live secluded, in a position of danger or inconvenience from climate, become patient to the point of apathy.[26]

The foolhardiness of those who 'attend the sales, and yield to the temptation of a dance, in all weathers, and under heavy risks' is also evoked. We are told about the 'sad follies and errors which ensue from the merry-makings at the sale or in the barn', and the 'blank ignorance and apathy' of those who dwell 'high up, in the most secluded of the mountain hollows' is dwelt on at length, their slow gestures and speech 'savage and almost alarming'.[27] Compare Dorothy's comment that 'such a situation' as the Greens, rooted to their 'few fields' 'is favourable to innocent and virtuous habits and feelings'.[28]

Martineau's account was then transformed into a didactic tale, 'The Highest House in Wathendale', published in *Household Words* on July 19, 1851. Here Janet Fell marries a young carpenter, Raven, blindly trusting to the future and failing to take account of his alcoholic tendencies. Soon, the heavily mortgaged farm is in decline; Raven has become a dithering drunken invalid, on one occasion dropping his baby son and causing him to become a dumb idiot. Like the Greens, Martineau's husband and wife set off to go to a sale across the mountains, Janet accompanying Raven in order to restrain him from spending the money on drink, Raven 'thinking in spite of himself, of the glasses of spirits which are, unhappily, handed round very often indeed at these country sales'.[29] As with the Greens, the snow overtakes them on the fells. They die in a very similar manner – but their death is shown to be as a direct result of Raven's drunkenness. His 'tipsy brain' overcome by the cold, he falls down in 'sleep or a stupor', and his wife, attempting to find her way back, stumbles over a precipice. The tale is not meant to be a direct account of the Green narrative, of course, but it vividly shows Martineau's different approach to the dwellers on the fells. Her story gives us what Dorothy's narrative does not – a clearly explicable point, as her characters are destroyed through their own weaknesses. This corresponds to Martineau's repeated criticism of Wordsworth as not understanding the poor:

> I need not say that Wordsworth's reports of his neighbours were fancy-pieces, – not intended so, but steeped in subjective colouring. […] Their whole life & manner are prosaic to the last degree.[30]

She adds that she herself will try to relate something about the 'Workies': 'I sh[d] very much like to throw myself into the scenery, external & internal, of worky-life'. The implication might be that she herself is a clearer-eyed writer than Wordsworth, able to overcome his fatal subjectivity, and to recognise the prosaic nature of the poor.

III

In closing, I want briefly to turn to the ways in which she literally followed in Wordsworth's footsteps, after her move to Ambleside in 1844 – a time of content and stability for Martineau. The 1830s had been a time of intense productivity, sudden

[26] 'A Year at Ambleside', in Todd, *Harriet Martineau at Ambleside*, 115.
[27] *Ibid.*, 116.
[28] 'George & Sarah Green', ed. De Selincourt, 75.
[29] *Ibid*., 394.
[30] Martineau to Henry Reeve, 14 March 1859, *The Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau*, eds. Deborah Anna Logan, Valerie Sanders, 5 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), IV: 162.

fame, and sustained hard work for Martineau, including a tour of America, and a successful novel. However, in 1839, she abruptly became ill with acute abdominal pain, which was diagnosed as a prolapsed uterus and an ovarian tumour. She settled in Tynemouth and began the life of an invalid, confined to bed for five years, before being cured by the popular remedy of the period, mesmerism, or 'animal magnetism'. Her fervent lifelong support of mesmerism afterwards was to win her not a few enemies, and Wordsworth describes her as conversing obsessively about it. Still, the change was incredible. From 'lying, sick and suffering for life' she was, within the year, 'walking in a snow storm […] looking for lodgings in which to undergo my transformation into a Laker!' (*Autobiography*, 471).

The move to the Lakes was, then, a brave new step – and the renewal of an active life she thought she had left behind for good. These parts of her *Autobiography* are easily the happiest and most rewarding, as she loses some of her self-consciousness and seems fulfilled and content. In 1844, she moved into lodgings at the head of Windermere, and quickly decided to build her own house. She found a suitable 'nook' almost immediately, 'then came the amusement of planning my house, which I did all myself', to her own great satisfaction. The plans still exist in the University of Birmingham Library, and show her careful layout of the house – with the study occupying the best spot in the house. Its building went off smoothly; she stipulated to the contractor that the workmen must be paid weekly, and the house went up so fast that the Wordsworths thought she must have mesmerised them.

Her move to Ambleside also reflected, of course, her long reading of Wordsworth.[31] The Wordsworths took a benevolent interest in her purchase of the nook, commending it as a wise move – not because of its prettiness and charm, but because 'the value of the property will be doubled in ten years' (*Autobiography*, 487). Wordsworth planted a stone pine in her garden when the house was finished, washing his hands in the watering pot, and wishing her many happy years in her house – before advising her always to charge guests for their meals. Her attitude toward the Wordsworths themselves in later life is part patronising, part protective. She implies in her *Autobiography* that she was almost pestered by them to come to visit:

> …I heard that the evenings were very sad. Neither of them could see to read by candle-light; and he was not a man of cheerful temperament, nor of much practical sympathy. Mrs. Wordsworth often asked me to 'drop in' in the winter evenings: but I really could not do this. We lived about a mile and a half apart; I had only young girls for servants, and no carriage; and I really could not have done my work but by the aid of my evening reading. (*Autobiography*, 492)

The impression is not entirely borne out by Mary Wordsworth's comment to Thomas Hutchinson in 1851, who registered her 'annoyance' at Miss Martineau's return to the district, and her stated intention to call on the Wordsworths:

> This announcement has turned me out of doors every day, when not raining, after two oC., to avoid her. She is a pest…'[32]

[31] Todd, *Harriet Martineau at Ambleside*, 4: 169-70.
[32] Mary Wordsworth to Thomas Hutchinson, 11 October 1851, *The Letters of Mary Wordsworth, 1800-1855*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Burton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 334.

Yet, despite the deprecating tone Martineau adopts toward Wordsworth in the *Autobiography*, there is a pride in her rooting herself alongside him, and in being acknowledged as his neighbour – both physically and in literary terms. Moreover, that early reading of *The Excursion* continued to exert a powerful influence; it was deeply rooted in her sense of self. As she wrote to Emerson in 1845:

> My life is now (in this season) one of wild roving, after my years of helpless sickness. I ride like a Borderer, –walk like a pedlar,–climb like a Mountaineer, –sometimes on excursions with kind & merry neighbours, –sometimes all alone for the day on the mountain.[33]

'Walk like a pedlar': she casts herself here as a wanderer, guiding and accompanying others on their excursions, an embodiment of the Wordsworthian spirit she had first encountered as a child in Norwich, and whose words she had quoted in her earliest journalism.

Moreover, she lays direct claim to his landscape: like De Quincey, she writes herself into the Wordsworthian environment. She published several works about the Lakes, containing some of her best writing: these include 'A Year at Ambleside', published in *Sartain's Union Magazine* through 1850, in the service of the abolitionist cause, and reprinted by Barbara Todd in 2002; several articles, such as 'Lights of the English Lake District', her reminiscences of the Lakers, and a very successful *Complete Guide to the English Lakes*, published in 1855, modelled on Wordsworth's own 1810 *Guide to the Lakes*. Both Martineau's and Wordsworth's *Guides* appeared in several editions, lavishly illustrated, through the 1850s and 1860s, so that they were direct rivals in the marketplace.

Martineau's guide pays homage to Wordsworth, not only in its format, but also in frequent quotations from her favourite work, *The Excursion*, and by her stated desire to lead the tourist into places where 'the truth of some of Wordsworth's touches [in *The Excursion*] may be recognised'.[34] This nicely shows up her attitude to Wordsworth: even as she produces her own rival volume, she is still protective of her former hero, and anxious to show herself as his true reader. She even urges a visit to Rydal Mount, where her earlier strictures on house-invading tourists seem to be broken down slightly, as she suggests that the traveller may 'possibly obtain entrance' to admire Wordsworth's periwinkles 'and tall foxgloves, purple and white, – (the white being the poet's favourite)'.[35] She also directs the reader to another literary sight of the Lake District: 'the house on the rising ground behind the chapel is the Knoll, the residence of Mrs. H. Martineau'.[36] Her *Guide*, then, seeks to create a landscape – regional and literary – where she and Wordsworth may co-exist. It is time, now, to revisit that nineteenth-century landscape, and to set Wordsworth and Martineau once more in dialogue.

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[33] Martineau to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 2 July 1845, *Collected Letters*, eds. Logan and Sanders, 5 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), II: 19.
[34] *Ibid.*, 56.
[35] *A Complete Guide to the English Lakes: by Harriet Martineau* (London: 1855), 50.
[36] *Ibid*., 52; see also Alexis Easley, 'The Woman of Letters at Home: Harriet Martineau and the Lake District', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34:1 (2006), 291-310.

Wordsworth, *The White Doe of Rylstone*: a reading with reference to Scott

By CLAIRE LAMONT

FRANCIS JEFFREY STARTED HIS REVIEW OF *The White Doe of Rylstone* with a typically acerbic remark: 'This, we think, has the merit of being the very worst poem we ever saw imprinted in a quarto volume […]'.[1] The anonymous reviewer for the *Gentleman's Magazine* started his: 'In this Poem Mr. Wordsworth has displayed a richness of fancy and a tenderness of feeling which place him in a high rank among the living Poets of his Country'.[2] From the beginning the poem has divided readers, and it has seldom been a favourite. What follows is a reading of the poem which uses references to Walter Scott's works to shed light on its particular qualities.

The White Doe of Rylstone; *or The Fate of the Nortons* was published in 1815; but its origins go back to 1807. In July 1807 Wordsworth and Dorothy went on a tour in Wharfedale in Yorkshire and visited Bolton Priory. They were much struck with the landscape and on their return Wordsworth read a history of the area, *The History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven*, by Thomas Whitaker, published in 1805. There Wordsworth found the legend of the White Doe which was the main source for his poem. After the Nortons had lost the lands of Rylstone for their adherence to Catholicism in Queen Elizabeth's reign,

> a white doe, say the aged people of the neighbourhood, long continued to make a weekly pilgrimage from [Rylstone] over the fells to Bolton, and was constantly found in the abbey church-yard during divine service; after the close of which she returned home as regularly as the rest of the congregation.[3]

The monastery of Bolton had been suppressed by Henry VIII in 1539, although, as Wordsworth's poem makes clear, the nave of the building remained in use as a Protestant parish church, as it still does. Whitaker's story of the White Doe is an intriguing tradition; but it doesn't contain any explanation of the phenomenon. When Wordsworth introduces it in the first canto of his poem, he records some explanations offered by members of the congregation at the date of his own narrative which is about 1590. The canto ends by dismissing these speculations and the reader realises that the rest of the poem will give the poet's answer to the conundrum of the White Doe.

In supplying that answer Wordsworth linked the tradition of the White Doe with the story of the Nortons, a local Catholic family. Whitaker would also have told him about the Nortons; but he acknowledges another source, the ballad called 'The Rising in the North' in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), which he reproduces in a note to the poem. The ballad tells the story of the rising of 1569 against the restoration of Protestantism after the Catholic years of Queen Mary. The rising was unsuccessful and savagely put down. *The White Doe of Rylstone* is in seven cantos: cantos 2-6 tell the story of the Norton family and its participation in the

[1] *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Robert Woof (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 539.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 568.
[3] Thomas Whitaker, *The History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven* (London, 1805), p. 383.

disastrous rising, and the last canto brings together the only two survivors of the devastation – Emily Norton and the White Doe.

Wordsworth started to write the poem in the Autumn of 1807 and by the spring of 1808 had written enough to approach Longman in London about publication, and a manuscript was submitted. In the course of negotiations several of his friends read it, and their discouraging comments caused him to withdraw it from the publisher in May 1808.[4] It was subject to some revision before it was published in 1815.

The unsympathetic response of Wordsworth's literary circle to his poem caused pain at the time but has had interesting consequences since. It set off Wordsworth's habit of explaining the poem. A good example is his letter to Coleridge of 19 April 1808, prompted by Charles and Mary Lamb's failure to appreciate it. The letter contains a long and energetic explanation which culminates with this passage:

> It suffices that everything tends to account for the weekly pilgrimage of the Doe, which is made interesting by its connection with a human being, a Woman, who is intended to be honoured and loved for what she *endures*, and the manner in which she endures it; accomplishing a conquest over her own sorrows (which is the true subject of the Poem) by means, partly, of the native strength of her character, and partly by the persons and things with whom and which she is connected; and finally after having exhibited the 'fortitude of patience and heroic martyrdom', ascending to pure ethereal spirituality [….][5]

As to Wordsworth's revisions to his text only a certain amount can be known, as no complete copy of the manuscript sent to Longman in 1808 survives. There are, however, some early pages and drafts which have been reproduced in the Cornell volume of the work, and the editor, Kristine Dugas, estimates that we have manuscript evidence for the text of about half of the poem in its 1808 state.[6]

Why should Walter Scott be brought into a story which seems to arise solely from Wordsworth's own experience and among his own family and literary circle? The answer in 1807 is easily given: Scott had in 1805 published a historical verse romance called *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* which was immensely popular. Wordsworth had the tiresomeness of readers judging *The White Doe* by the expectations aroused by Scott, and therefore doubting the possibility of its success. Wordsworth and Scott were contemporaries; they met in Scotland in 1803 and remained good friends until Scott's death in 1832. Scott was an appreciative reader of Wordsworth: on the appearance of *The White Doe* in 1815 he wrote to Southey, 'By the way I think it is the most beautiful thing he has written'.[7]

There is some justification for linking *The White Doe* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Both are based on history and legend and set in the sixteenth century. Both works make use of a monastery; both give eloquent descriptions of the old religion; both are in couplets with predominantly four-stress lines. Both were first published in a generous quarto format, and had extensive historical notes. All true; but the poems are nonetheless very different. Although ominous hints of 'lastness' are pervasive in

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[4] William Wordsworth, *The White Doe of Rylstone*; or *The Fate of the Nortons*, ed Kristine Dugas (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), pp. 29-30. All quotations from the poem are taken from this edition.

[5] Wordsworth to Coleridge, 19 April 1808, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, *The Middle Years*, Part I (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1969), p. 222.

[6] Dugas, pp. ix, 31-56.

[7] Scott to Southey, 20 June 1815, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson, 12 vols. (London: Constable, 1932-37), 4.70.

the *Lay*, its ending is dominated by gratifying moments: a marriage, cessation of warfare, a penitential mass in Melrose Abbey, and some beautiful inset lyrics. By contrast *The White Doe* appeared to its early readers as austere and relentless in its pain.

There is another circumstance linking *The White Doe* and Scott. In a passage in his book which Wordsworth does not quote, Whitaker writes:

> Had the milk-white doe performed her mysterious pilgrimage from Ettrick Forest to the precincts of Dryburgh or Melrose, the elegant and ingenious editor of the Border Minstrelsy would have wrought it into a beautiful story.[8]

Wordsworth must have seen this passage in which Whitaker holds out the story of the Doe for Scott; there is no evidence that Scott saw it. In taking the subject Wordsworth seems to have been driven by a clear sense of his own purpose in handling it.

Those things were all true in 1807 when Wordsworth started *The White Doe*; but it was not published until 1815 and some things had changed in that near decade. Those were auspicious years for Scott – he had his troubles later – and they were not particularly auspicious years for Wordsworth. In addition to further poems, Scott had published in 1814 his first novel, *Waverley*. *The White Doe* deals with the desolation caused by civil war, and behind the conclusion of *Waverley* lies the battle of Culloden. There are reasons here to suggest why a comparison with Scott might occasionally be useful.

Wordsworth's narrative starts with Richard Norton and eight of his nine sons preparing to join the northern Earls, Percy and Neville, in a rising in support of Catholicism against the Elizabethan religious settlement. There are, however, two other members of the Norton family, Francis, the eldest son who refuses to join his father, and Emily, the only daughter. When we first meet Emily she has embroidered a banner for the campaign at her father's behest:

> For She it was, – 'twas She who wrought
> Meekly, with foreboding thought,
> In vermeil colours and in gold
> An unblessed work; which, standing by,
> Her Father did with joy behold, –
> Exulting in the imagery [….] (2.347-52)

The banner is 'unblessed' because its embroidery shows

> The Sacred Cross; and figured there
> The five dear wounds our Lord did bear [….] (2.357-58)

Sixteenth-century Protestants did not forbid all religious representation; what they disliked was the Catholic tendency to create visual images which excited veneration, of which such images of Christ's Passion would clearly be an example. Francis attempts to deter his father from war, urging

> A just and gracious queen have we,
> A pure religion, and the claim

[8] Whitaker, p. 383.

Of peace on our humanity. (2.387-9)

These arguments are dismissed by his father, who leads his eight loyal sons and 'all his warlike tenantry' (2.418) to join Percy and Neville.

A set of contrasts becomes established in the poem: Catholicism is 'ancient piety', 'old and holy' (3.660), while Protestantism is 'pure', expressing itself in 'simplicity' (4.1042). The Catholics are passionate, showing 'free and open hate / Of novelties in Church and State' (3.712-13). The Protestant characters eschew action in favour of idealistic gesture.

Norton and his sons turn out to be truer representatives of the Catholic cause than its supposed leaders, who start to waver under threat of an army sent from London. The Earls decide not to fight; but Norton remains staunch, with the result that when the Protestant army arrives he and his eight sons are taken prisoner and put to death.

A reader of Scott will be tempted to suggest that Norton and his sons are like a Highland chieftain with his clansmen. Curiously there is some backing for this in the text. Canto 3 refers to Norton as 'The Norton' (3.641), a Scots usage, and there are several instances of the term 'Chieftain' for the Earls (3.790). The obvious Scott text for comparison is not any of his poems, but his novel, *Waverley*. There Scott tells in the name of a Highland clan of the eighteenth century what Wordsworth tells in the name of a Yorkshire family of the sixteenth. In support of the old legitimacies in church and state these northerners take up arms, are let down by the indecision of their leaders, and suffer total destruction at the hands of vindictive conquerors. Scott tells for a community what Wordsworth tells for a family. Both writers recognise courage and loyalty in situations where the cause is debatable.

The character of Francis comes from the ballad of 'The Rising of the North', in which we hear nothing of his motivation. He regards his father as too old to join the rising; and his father regards him as a coward. He is not an ordinary coward since he replies,

'father, I will wend with you,
Unarm'd and naked will I bee'.[9]

Wordsworth supplies motivation: Francis is a Protestant, as it turns out is his sister. Francis is like a character from the 1790s. His 'pure' religion seems to resonate with the idealistic view of the early stages of the French Revolution. He is a pacifist, hoping to settle disagreements by stern and lofty reproof rather than by violent action. When he sees a soldier prepare to mock the banner

[…] with a look of calm command
Inspiring universal awe,
He took it from the Soldier's hand;
And all the People that were round
Confirmed the deed in peace profound. (5.1347-51)

Francis has republican virtues, including the belief that austerity and moral self-belief will win out because others will be overawed and instantly convinced by it. Above all he is modern: he is not a team player but endorses individual decision-making. With all these modern virtues, as we will see, he is hardly a feminist.

[9] Dugas, p. 155.

Alone with this sister at Rylstone, Francis, under the influence of a prophecy of ruin, tells Emily of his plan to follow his father and brothers, unarmed, in the hope that he might 'See, hear, obstruct, or mitigate' the consequences of their decision to go to war (2.518). Before leaving he delivers a series of injunctions on the mental state she should cultivate in her solitude:

> 'Hope nothing, if I thus may speak
> To thee a woman, and thence weak;
> Hope nothing, I repeat; for we
> Are doomed to perish utterly [….]' (2.534-37)

As the speech goes on the mental prohibitions get sterner:

> 'Farewell all wishes, all debate,
> All prayers for this cause, or for that!
> Weep, if that aid thee; but depend
> Upon no help of outward friend
> […]
> And even this Creature!' which words saying
> He pointed to a lovely Doe,
> A few steps distant, feeding, straying;
> Fair Creature, and more white than snow!
> 'Even she will to her peaceful woods
> Return [….]' (2.543-46, 560-65)

Francis's injunctions to Emily are those of stoicism, telling her to nourish no hopes or wishes, and to rely on no friend, not even the Doe. Finally he reminds her of the 'purer faith' they share, acknowledging that:

> '[…] hand in hand we have been led
> And thou, (O happy thought this day!)
> Not seldom foremost in the way –' (2.575-77)

If the reader has some sympathy for Norton do we sympathise also with these two adherents of 'a purer faith'? This was a problem in the poem's earliest version, to judge from Coleridge's letter to Wordsworth of 21 May 1808:

> as the outward Interest of the Poem is in favour of the old man's religious feelings, and the filial Heroism of his band of Sons, it seemed to require something in order to place the two Protestant Malcontents of the Family in a light, that made them *beautiful*, as well as virtuous [….][10]

It is arresting to find Coleridge calling Francis and Emily 'Malcontents', and may point to revisions to the text before publication which are largely untraceable.

Both Emily and Francis have a crisis of obedience over the banner: Emily over the sewing of it and Francis over his imprisoned father's request that he take the banner and lay it on the altar in Bolton Priory. The presence of the banner in the story suggests that one theme of the poem is the move from the material to the immaterial

[10] Woof, P. 519.

in religious and spiritual matters. According to that view Catholicism is 'material' in that it uses images and tactile objects to locate spiritual ideas; Protestantism moves towards the immaterial, wishing the mind to apprehend the 'pure' without the tarnish of the material. The banner is, according to that interpretation, something retrograde. Francis accepts his father's last request, allowing love to triumph over the immaterial values of Protestantism. In so doing he brings about his own death and the devastation of the family home.

We may have some difficulty in recognising Francis's heroism. His speech is against him: the modern reader may find him both bullying and self-righteous. The Catholic side in the poem has the great speeches giving eloquent evocations of the old religion. But Norton is from a heroic culture, where speech is an analogue of action, and where boasting is a ritual to hold the group together, rather than an expression of personal will. Modern people, valuing their individual choice of philosophy, have no comparable rhetoric. Wordsworth is looking for a modern form of heroism for Francis which he had some difficulty working out. The description of Francis's death in the first edition text reads:

> The Banner from his grasp was taken,
> And borne exultingly away;
> And the Body was left on the ground where it lay. (6.1513-15)

Wordsworth added to this passage in 1836, and altered it further in 1845. In the final version the banner is seized from the dying man,

> But not before the warm life-blood
> Had tinged more deeply, as it flowed,
> The wounds the broidered Banner showed [….][11]

This reading gives Francis a Christ-like function, albeit within symbolism his faith had rejected.

Wordsworth's evident wish in *The White Doe* to make Francis a hero differs from Scott. In *Waverley* Scott gives heroism to his Highlanders with their noble deaths; the hero of the novel, Edward Waverley, withdraws into ordinary modern life, where one helps others by generosity and friendship, rather than by heroic action. For Wordsworth we in the modern world need to recognise an unmilitary heroism; for Scott we may have to give up the concept altogether in favour of a rueful domesticity.

The White Doe ends with the triumph of its female characters, Emily and the Doe. There is, however, mention of another woman – the mother who has died many years earlier. Norton's wife had been Protestant and had brought up her eldest son and her daughter in that faith. She is such a shadowy figure that the reader can hardly pass judgment on her; but had she been a Scott character it would have been clear that she offended against the woman's role as maintainer of home and tradition. She has taken a step into modernity which is making life impossible for the children involved. The fact that Francis and Emily are Protestant is explicitly mentioned on three occasions in the poem, and the mother comes into two of them. In the first reference, in canto 2, the change of faith seems a brother and sister affair, in which Francis admits that Emily was sometimes the leader. The mother is not mentioned. In canto 3, however, Norton sadly admits that his daughter's religious allegiance was owing in part to her

[11] Dugas, p. 132n.

mother (3.887-92). This is awkward, as it alters the straightforward brother-sister commitment of canto 2, and begs all sorts of questions about this religiously divided marriage and family. It is interesting to note that there is no mention of the mother in canto 3 in the 1808 version of the poem – it seems to have been added later.[12] The last instance is in canto 4 when Emily recalls that as a child she was taught 'The faith reformed and purified' by her mother (4.1042). It would be interesting to know whether this too was a later addition; but unfortunately the relevant passage of the 1808 version does not survive. The possibility remains that the mother was part of Wordsworth's response to Coleridge's accusation that Francis and Emily were 'Protestant Malcontents'. It gives an excuse for their going against their father that they have maternal blessing for their new allegiance. It gives the poem the familial theme that a split family cannot survive, and that loyal children will be destroyed in trying to live within its contradictions. That parallels its public theme showing that adherents of an old religion cannot survive the powerful onset of a dominant modernity, any more than proponents of that modernity can retain old loyalties.

In her final trial Emily is alone. After Francis leaves she tries to act according to his doctrine of stoic detachment and does not find it coming naturally to her. One of her ideas is 'to follow to the war, / And clasp her Father's knees […]' (4.1061-2), until she remembers her brother's injunction. She struggles to respond dispassionately to the Old Man's friendly hopes and advice. By the end of canto 6 the prophecy has been fulfilled: her father and brothers are dead. There is a gap in time before canto 7 starts, in which Emily has wandered 'long and far' (7.1630). She now returns to the despoiled estate and it is clear that she has followed her brother's advice with some success:

> Her soul doth in itself stand fast,
> Sustained by memory of the past
> And strength of Reason; held above
> The infirmities of mortal love;
> Undaunted, lofty, calm, and stable,
> And awfully impenetrable. (7.1642-47)

One would expect Francis's advice to his sister to be Protestant, or at least Christian. But stoicism is not ultimately compatible with Christianity, let alone human experience. Stoicism and Christianity share an admiration of fortitude; but thereafter they part. The great spokesman for this view is Samuel Johnson who repeatedly in his *Rambler* papers points out the impossibility of passionate human beings fulfilling the stoic injunction of detachment, and furthermore its incompatibility with Christianity which is a religion of the involvement of the spiritual with the world. In *Rambler* 6 Johnson says of stoicism

> […] such extravagance of philosophy, can want neither authority nor argument for its confutation; it is overthrown by the experience of every hour, and the powers of nature rise up against it.[13]

Emily's success in fulfilling her Francis's injunctions has locked her in an awful impenetrability, in denial of her natural human responses. When she and her brother

[12] Dugas, p. 321.
[13] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, eds. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1969), 1.30.

first discovered the reformed religion she sometimes led the way; she will lead again as she grows into a different capacity to endure her suffering from that of stoicism. This is where the White Doe comes in.

Emily is always portrayed out of doors; she is not a domestic woman and the White Doe is a playmate from the happy days of her childhood. One failure of Francis's advice to Emily is his prophecy that when disaster comes the Doe will desert her. Instead the Doe had made the first move, although the 'thought-bewildered' Emily had ignored her (4.1014-20). In the final canto, however, after she has learned to discipline her thoughts, she responds differently to the Doe. She is sitting under a 'self-surviving leafless Oak' (7.1649)

> When, with a noise like distant thunder,
> A troop of Deer came sweeping by [….] (7.1658-59)

The White Doe recognises her, approaches delicately, and lays her head on Emily's knee.

> The pleading look the Lady viewed,
> And, by her gushing thoughts subdued,
> She melted into tears –
> A flood of tears, that flowed apace
> Upon the happy Creature's face. (7.1680-84)

From then on Emily shares her life with the Doe. The narrator sums up what has happened:

> […] here her Brother's words have failed, –
> Here hath a milder doom prevailed;
> That she, of him and all bereft,
> Hath yet this faithful Partner left, –
> This single Creature that disproves
> His words, remains for her, and loves. (7.1804-09)

Emily has gained something from her brother's philosophy; but ultimately cannot heal her mind through stoicism. What does the poem hold out for someone like Emily who has lost everything which has given life shape and meaning? Do not deny hope, which is after all a Christian virtue. Take consolation in nature, in memory, and in the rituals of memory like visiting places with associations. Take control of your own mind; but not to the extent that you refuse comfort. All these things are part of Emily's healing; but the stress is on the relationship with the Doe – the gift of a creature to love and be loved by. The situation is summed up by the Beatitude, 'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted' (Matthew 5.4.). As a result of it the 'stern and rigorous melancholy' that stoicism gave her mellows into 'a soft spring-day of holy, / Mild, delicious melancholy' (7.1616, 1776-77).

When Emily dies she is buried beside her mother at Rylstone. The White Doe makes a weekly visit to a grave in Bolton Priory, which we now know is the grave of Francis. This has confused and disappointed readers who expect the Doe to visit Emily's grave. It appears that the poem wants the White Doe's visits to the grave to memorialise two things, the heroic death of the brother and the heroic conquest of sorrow of the mourning sister.

The character of Emily is Wordsworth's invention: there is no sister in the ballad of 'The Rising of the North'. Why does Wordsworth want a woman for his most sustained examination of bereavement and desolation? When considering women and suffering the traditional explanation is that women cannot act, and so have to confront suffering without the dilution that action might bring. Literary works about the suffering woman usually associate it with either a love relationship or a mother-child relationship. Wordsworth is unusual in having no love interest in *The White Doe*; instead the poem is about a brother-sister relationship. Traditionally women in literature give outlet to suffering in extreme emotions, like revenge, madness or suicide; Emily is remarkable for withstanding her grief by the exercise of mental control. Flora Mac-Ivor in *Waverley* is another heroine who laments the death of a brother rather than a lover; but she is one of two contrasting heroines. While the conclusion of the novel concentrates on the marriage of the other, Flora's dignified surmounting of her grief is lost in the silence of a convent. In a Catholic world Emily could have retreated into a convent. Instead she does what Scott too thought a Protestant equivalent: she adopts a retired life and is charitable to the poor.

Emily is one of Wordsworth's suffering and enduring women; but she differs from many of the others in being a young lady. She does not have to endure in poverty what she can scarcely comprehend. Francis and Emily seem to have taken their origin not from any traditional type, but more likely from Wordsworth himself. Francis's ultimate inability to live within the reformed religion reflects Wordsworth's problems as the French Revolution moved away from its early ideals and in coming to terms with the bereavement Wordsworth had faced recently in the death by drowning of his brother John in 1805. That may be one reason why Emily is presented as suffering pure loss, with no question raised as to any contribution of hers to the outcome. The text is determined to see her as 'innocent'. Scott's Flora Mac-Ivor grieves over actions of her own which she feared had contributed to her brother's death. Emily's innocence is another defeat for the modern: innocence, after all, belongs in the old world.

The White Doe's qualities come across to us through a wealth of adjectives. It is white, like a lily, like snow, milk-white. It is also bright, radiant, serene, gentle, soft-paced, silent, meek, uncomplaining. A list of adverbs would convey a similar picture of the Doe's mixture of tentative and confident movement. In his letter to Coleridge, previously cited, Wordsworth describes the Doe as

> spotless, beautiful, innocent and loving, in that temper of earthly love to which alone [Emily] can conform, without violation to the majesty of her losses, or degradation from those heights of heavenly serenity to which she has been raised.

As the poem makes clear, the Doe has been 'Raised far above the law of kind' (7.1897), just as Emily has been raised to 'heights of heavenly serenity' through communion with it.

In what contexts might we consider this mystical creature? First the Doe is a replacement for the Christian symbol of the banner. *The White Doe* is a religious poem and its conclusion has to operate in the world of the 'pure' and immaterial religion of early Protestantism. That too seems almost impossible to live with; it allows no traditional Christian symbols, and the gap cries out to be filled. The White Doe is a symbol of love and loyalty, drawing on the memory of the past to heal the present. It is in one sense a piece of symbol-making for iconoclasts.

The White Doe comes out of nature, and draws on traditions of special relationships between man and animals. The last two lines give us another way of looking at its function. The poem ends among the ruins of the Priory where it started. The ruins address the Doe

> 'Thou, thou art not a Child of Time,
> But Daughter of the Eternal Prime!'

Francis Jeffrey in his review commented on this, 'we have no doubt [it] is a very great compliment, though we have not the good luck to understand what it means'.[14] 'Prime' is the beginning of spring, *primavera* in the Romance languages, and the reference alludes to the belief that in the Golden Age it was eternal spring: '*ver erat aeternum*' as Ovid puts it in the *Metamorphoses*.[15] The Doe comes from the eternally spring-like origin of the world.

The White Doe comes to us radiant and serene, unaware of the traditions which it inherits. But whether seen in the context of Christianity, nature, or classical mythology, she is a new symbol of something important to Wordsworth, the bringing to earth of spiritual truths, or, as Christianity would say, their incarnation. The White Doe makes her journey each week as if attending church – in Bolton Priory, that building in which a Protestant church is set among the ruins of a Catholic one. And having delicately made her way round the ruins, the Doe chooses to sit where she memorialises a brother who died and a sister who mourned, because of the rupture which the architectural setting makes manifest.

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[14] Woof, p. 548.
[15] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.107.

Portrait Poems – Isabella Lickbarrow

By CONSTANCE PARRISH

IN THE *WORDSWORTH TRUST CATALOGUE* FOR THE EXHIBITION on Romantic Women Writers, it is noticeable that the only writer in this for whom there is no portrait is the poet Isabella Lickbarrow. It was a contemporary comment quoted in this book, escribing her as unlettered which aroused my interest in her, for I knew that it could not be true to describe her as unlettered, even though at the time I had only read one or two of her poems. At the 2008 Wordsworth Winter School, I was asked to comment upon three of her shorter poems and to read them. They are each very different and show aspects of her character which it is hoped will paint the missing portrait. They show her warmth and compassion, her political awareness, and her sense of humour. Lickbarrow had a Wordsworthian sense of lakes and hills and, in addition, these poems paint a picture of nineteenth century life in this part of England.

Lickbarrow was born in Kendal in 1784 and died in Underbarrow two miles outside Kendal in 1847. It seems that she never moved out of the country and wrote about many local places, such as Windemere, Levens, Ullswater, and many more. She was writing poetry at the same time as Wordsworth and examination of the list of subscribers to her book, *Poeticial Effusions*, shows that Wordsworth, along with Sarah Hutchinson, and his friends Southey, De Quincey and Basil Montagu, among others, thought it worthwhile to buy the book, published in 1814. This was a collection of her poems previously only published in the local newspaper. Lickbarrow had a strong Quaker background and Quakers believed in the importance of education for girls as well as boys. We are told that instruction was given in English, Latin and Greek in addition to writing and arithmetic.

Isabella was orphaned early in life and this young woman, with no husband or parents to protect and provide for her, led a life dogged by poverty, though it seems that she and her sisters did at one time keep a school. Later, like Mary Lamb whose contemporary she was, Isabella and her sisters resorted to needlework in an effort to support themselves. In the Preface to her book she explained that the publication was intended to provide family comforts for herself and her younger sisters. It seems that their poverty was so abject that it brought on the depression which caused Margaret and Rachel Lickbarrow to be admitted to Lancaster Lunatic Asylum, where the admission papers described them as paupers. Rachel had twice attempted suicide. However, Lickbarrow wrote when she could, as Mary Wedd wrote in her review in the *Charles Lamb Bulletin*:

> There is something almost heroic in the devotion to her poetic calling of a woman living in such destructive circumstances of drudgery and penury, stealing from the hours of exhausted sleep the time to write.[1]

Lickbarrow, herself, goes so far as to set out the requirements for a poet in her poem *On the difficulty of attaining poetic excellence*. She says a poet

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[1] Mary Wedd, rev. of *Isabelle Lickbarrow*: *Collected Poems in a Biographical Study* by Constance Parrish, *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, n.s. 130 (Apr. 2005): 57.

Must boast a vig'rous active mind,
By culture aided and refin'd,

. . .

A heart whose feelings overflow
With quickest sense of joy or woe;

Her own poem, *On Esthwaite Water*, conveys the sheer peace and tranquillity of the countryside as it was in Wordsworth's day. Initially it has a calm stillness then deals with mood as well as landscape. Because of Wordsworth's schooldays in Hawkshead, this lovely small lake nearby is much visited. Walking down the east side of Esthwaite from Far Sawrey towards Hawkshead, there is a strange optical illusion where all the Lake District hills disappear and there is just one great mountain remaining, like a child's drawing – 'lofty Tilberthwaite' – which we know as Wetherlam. Lickbarrow describes this so vividly that she must have walked that road, possibly en route to the Quaker Meeting House at Colthouse.

As we know, Wordsworth loved Esthwaite. He wrote the poem *The Vale of Esthwaite* in which he refers to 'the glassy lake'. In his earliest poems he wrote *A Ballad* in which he says:

Oft has she seen sweet Esthwaite's lake
Reflect the morning sheen
When lo, the sullen clouds arise
And dim the smiling scene!

Wordsworth also refers to it in *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems* in *Expostulation and Reply*. Lickbarrow could not have read *The Prelude* where Wordsworth makes his love of Esthwaite so clear. Even today Esthwaite Water remains an oasis of peace. So let us see what Lickbarrow does say in *On Esthwaite Water*:

O'ER Esthwaite's lake, serene and still,
  At sunset's silent peaceful hours,
Scarce mov'd the zephyr's softest breath
  Or sigh'd along its reedy shore.

The lovely landscape on its sides,
  With ev'ning's soft'ning hues imprest,
Shar'd in the gen'ral calm, and gave
  Sweet visions of repose and rest.

Inverted on the waveless flood,
  A spotless mirror smooth and clear,
Each fair surrounding object shone
  In softer beauty imag'd there.

Brown hills, and woods of various shades,
  Orchards and sloping meadows green,
Sweet rural seats, and shelter'd farms,

Were in the bright reflector seen.

Ev'n lofty Tilberthwaite from far
His giant shadow boldly threw,
His rugged, dark, high-tow'ring head
On Esthwaite's tranquil breast to view.

Struck with the beauty of the scene,
I cry'd, Oh! May my yielding breast
Retain but images of peace,
Like those, sweet lake, on thine imprest.

Ne'er may it feel a ruder gales
Than that which o'er thy surface spread
When sportive zephyrs briskly play,
And whisper through thy bord'ring reeds;

When dancing in the solar beam,
Thy silv'ry waves the margin seek,
With gently undulating flow,
And there in the softest murmurs break.

Vain wish! O'er Esthwaite's tranquil lake,
A stronger gale full frequent blows,
The soothing prospect disappears,
The lovely visions of repose.

The next poem considered was *On the Slave-Trade* which shows Lickbarrow's keen awareness of political affairs. We have seen her Whig reaction to the Tory Earl of Lonsdale when she returned his gift to her of £10.10.0 (The equivalent of almost £500 today) and we know that in other poems she wrote about the effect of the Napoleonic wars on the families of fighting men. Now, in a change of moods, she deals with the issue of the Slave Trade. In the course of my research I read the *Minutes of Quaker Meetings and other Societies* in Kendal, and was surprised to find how much they were concerned in this small Westmorland town, with the 'Abolition of the Slave Trade both in Britain and the Colonies'. Although this poem appeared in 1814 it was not included in the volume *Poetical Effusions* though it was published in the *Westmorland Advertiser* on 28th July of that year. Of course the passage of the Slave Trade Act took place in Britain in 1807, but the campaign for its abolition in the Colonies went on until 1833. One of the greatest protagonists was Thomas Clarkson, who became Wordsworth's friend after he took a house near Ullswater. In this poem Lickbarrow's tone is practical; she wants something done; she is urging her readers to action. The poem reflects Britain's power in international affairs at the time, and although, earlier, Helen Maria Williams and other women poets had pleaded the cause for the abolition of the Slave Trade, this then, thirty-year-old poverty stricken woman living quietly in Cumbria, reflected strong feeling for the abolition of this cruel traffic in humanity, and there is too, a flash of patriotism, now a lost cause, in this poem as in others she wrote:

‘On the Slave Trade’
Published in the *Westmorland Advertiser* 23rd. July 1814

Spirit of pure benevolence, descend
To earth, to counsel senators and kings,
To teach mankind in kindness to delight,
And sweet compassion in their breasts implant,
That war and its attendant train of ills,
May never more with misery fill the earth –
Teach those by heaven, endow’d with power or wealth
That not for them and for their good alone,
Were they so far above their fellows plac’d –
Oh! Teach them what a privilege is theirs
The glorious privilege to make others blest –
Oh! tell them what exalted bliss attends
The man of active warm benevolence,
Whose bosom glows, with love of human kind.
But chief blest spirit now thy influence try,
To move the powers of Europe in that cause
Through which thy champion toil’d through many a year –
The cause of Africa’s much injured sons
Ne’er may thy heav’n-inspired flame decay –
Till seal’d their charter for the rights of man,
Till law protects them from the spoiler’s hand
And years of slavery, a lingering death!
And thou my native land, whose honour’d name
Whose welfare to my heart will still be dear,
Unwearied by thy patience and thy zeal,
And firm thy voice against that barb’rous trade,
The curse of Africa, Europe’s foul disgrace,
That the great Power who doth delight in mercy
May approve – and if again to sweep the earth,
War’s dreadful whirlwind in its fury rise,
He may preserve thee in the evil day.

Lickbarrow strikes a very different note in her poem, *On the fate of newpapers*. This poem shows her sense of humour. The subject is not surprising because she owed the fact that her poetry was published at all, to the local newspaper. *The Westmorland Advertiser* began publishing under Isaac Steele in 1811. It was a weekly broadsheet of only four pages. From the beginning it reserved a small space on the back page for poetry just as nowadays we have the crossword puzzle. In the early months he used Lickbarrow’s poems on this page. The next proprietors, M. & R. Branthwaite, continued to use her poetry and thought enough of her work to sponsor the publication of her book *Poetical Effusions*.

As it happens, I was led to the discovery of details of her life in Kendal by seeing in a newspaper of her time, a report of Dr. Dalton’s Will, then realising that he must be John Dalton the distinguished Quaker scientist, and thence to Quaker records. As I looked back in these old newspapers for hitherto unpublished new material, it was possible to see how Lickbarrow became

interested in current events because, alongside her poetry, appeared reports of proceedings in Parliament and also war reports. The arrival of the newspaper each week was obviously a great event and it was probably passed round among friends, and as Lickbarrow tells us, put to many uses, as we know, for example, in papering the walls of a room in Dove Cottage. In this poem Lickbarrow paints a vivid picture of life in a 19th-century home by tracing the journey of a copy of the *Advertiser* through the house. I quote:

ON THE FATE OF NEWSPAPERS

What changes time's swift motion brings!
What sad reverse of human things!
What once was valu'd, highly priz'd,
Is in a few short hours despis'd,
I'll but solicit your attention,
While I a single instance mention,
The 'Advertiser' you must know,
Fresh from the Mint not long ago,
We welcom'd with abundant pleasure,
Impatient for the mighty treasure,
In what an alter'd state forlorn,
'Tis now in scatter'd fragments torn,
Part wrap'd around the kettle's handle,
Part twisted up to light the candle,
Part given to the devouring fire:
Ah! See line after line expire;
It surely would, beyond a joke,
The patience of a saint provoke,
To think that after all their pains,
The rhymes which rack'd the poet's brains,
And all the antiquarian's learning,
Display'd so justly in discerning
The ancient Saxon derivation
Of half the places in a nation,
And the Philosopher's vast skill,
In measuring each stupendous hill,
From Sca-fell down to Benson-knot,
And even hills of lesser note;
To think that what such wits have penn'd,
Should come to this disgraceful end.
Why 'tis enough to make them vow,
With aspect stern and frowning brow,
They'll such a useless trade resign,
And never write another line.
But stop, good sirs, a nobler fate
May your productions yet await;
A thought just now my head has enter'd,
In which alone my hopes are center'd.
Perhaps preferr'd the pipe to light,
For some dull heavy witless wight,

They'll with tobacco's fumes, infuse
The inspiration of the muse.
And furnish many an empty brain –
If so, we'll write and sing again.

Perhaps these three poems will help to create the missing portrait of this Kendal woman poet of quiet dignity, with a kind heart, a deep love of nature and not least, a sense of humour. Jonathon Wordsworth described Lickbarrow as 'a poet of genuine individuality – a poet well worth resurrecting'. Perhaps he was right.

Ambleside

‘A pile of better thoughts’: Margaret, Silent Suffering and Silent Blessing

By K. E. SMITH

IN THE SPRING OF 1797 AT RACEDOWN WORDSWORTH at last completed his tragedy of ethical confusion and subverted virtue, *The Borderers*, in which the tempter Oswald tells the naïve Marmaduke that:

> Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark
> And shares the nature of infinity. (1543-1544)

Almost immediately Wordsworth moved on from the convolutions of this, his only play, to begin the first version of *The Ruined Cottage*, a poem which, if it is equally a tale of suffering, is avowedly ‘A tale of silent suffering, hardly clothed / In bodily form’ (233-234)[1] and which contains elements of poise, calm and contemplation quite foreign to the febrile world of the play. In retrospect, the poem would in fact be a breakthrough for the poet and for English poetry more generally, though not in any obviously thematic sense. Indeed, the very fact that we can trace almost all its basic elements, both through Wordsworth’s predecessors and through his own earlier poetry enhances our sense that its novelty lies rather in its blending of materials and its fresh emotional colouring. After all, the most basic matter of the poem, that of a woman exposed to poverty and to the power of wild nature, can be found at least as far back as ‘the wretched matron’ of Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1770). Then the more specifically recognizable features of the younger, deserted mother figure surface more strongly in Langhorne’s *The Country Justice* of 1775 and a decade later the strand of derangement through desertion can be found in the Crazy Kate of Cowper’s *The Task*. Much closer to *The Ruined Cottage* itself, we have Southey’s war widow in *Joan of Arc*[2] and his eponymous ‘Hannah’, both of 1797. Well before that, though, Wordsworth himself had shown his own preoccupation with solitary, abandoned females, adding his own admixture of greater social realism and greater emotional interiority to his female beggar of *An Evening Walk* and his Female Vagrant of 1793. (To complete this Wordsworthian gallery with post-*Ruined Cottage* poems, we could of course add not only three comparable examples in *Lyrical Ballads*, but also Emily in *The White Doe of Rylstone* of 1808 and Ellen in *The Excursion* of 1814.)

The treatment of this wandering, isolated female figure in Wordsworth’s earlier poetry, then, already shows some advance on the picturesque creature of sensibility common amongst his contemporaries. The beggar of *An Evening Walk* is seen as interacting with her surroundings in an emotionally convincing way rather than as set picturesquely against them. And the Female Vagrant of *Salisbury Plain* is presented in a context of war, displacement and economic hardship that is much denser and more experiential than the conventions of

[1] All line references for *The Ruined Cottage* are to the 1799 version of the poem (see Appendix to the current article, The Development of *The Ruined Cottage* and *The Pedlar* Material, for details).
[2] Claimed as an influence on the first-written lines of *The Ruined Cottage*, ll. 446-92 of the 1799 version. See *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, 3rd. ed. (Malden, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell, 2006), p. 432, n39.

'Crazy Kate' victimhood would allow. Yet *The Ruined Cottage* and its central figure of the deserted mother, Margaret, still offer something new in his work, both in terms of sober realism and of emotional depth, that differentiates them sharply from the poetry of his previous decade. How did Wordsworth come at this new depth of sympathy, far from the lurid, Gothic lights of a number of his earlier works? Two very different fragments of blank verse poetry from 1797[3] suggest the ways his imagination developed.

'Incipient Madness' does take off from a set of Gothic properties, with its dreary moor, ruined cottage and horse clanking its irons, and the obsession of its narrator with 'A broken pane which glitter'd in the moon / And seemed akin to life'. But its conclusion, dwelling on the beauty of a succession of natural life-forms and then on the lonely narrator's identification with the decaying cottage seems to bring us closer to the 'visionary dreariness' of *The Ruined Cottage* itself:

> I alone
> Remained: the winds of heaven remained – with them
> My heart claimed fellowship and with the beams
> Of dawn and of the setting sun that seemed
> To live and linger on the mouldering walls. (45-49)

Quite contrasting are the lines entitled by Mark Reed 'The Baker's Cart'. Here, we have a cumulative, unmelodramatic portrayal of inescapable suffering, doubtless based on close observation of the acute rural poverty at Racedown – an observation of poverty not unconnected with the theft of vegetables from the Wordsworths' garden and then of the fence-boards erected to protect the garden.[4] 'Five little ones' come out of a wretched hovel as the baker's cart arrives and return when it has passed without stopping. But the core of the poem is their mother's personalized characterization of the baker's cart and the involved-yet-detached Pedlar-like reflections on what this tells us, not only of her desperate situation but also of the attrition on her mental state:

> She saw what way my eyes
> Were turn'd, and in a low and fearful voice
> She said, 'That wagon does not care for us'.
> The words were simple, but her look and voice
> Made up their meaning, and bespoke a mind
> Which being long neglected and denied
> The common food of hope was now become
> Sick and extravagant — (14-21)

The woman shows signs of derangement in her anthropomorphisation of the cart even as, in those very same words, she articulates a central truth about her unnatural treatment by society at large. As Nicholas Roe puts it, she is 'irrationally attributing her own desolation to the wain's desertion of routine…',

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[3] For a discussion of possible earlier datings for these fragments see John Alban Finch, 'The Ruined Cottage Restored', in *Bicentenary Studies in Memory of John Alban Finch*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1970), pp. 29-49, pp. 32-4.

[4] Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth*: *Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 476.

while identifying the natural law of loving kindness which has been broken.[5] It is this combination of profoundly-registered experience and unbalanced interpretation of that experience which brings us into the world of *The Ruined Cottage*, a poem which in different versions would preoccupy Wordsworth for the next seventeen years – by some accounts almost the whole span of his greatness as a poet.

What distinguishes this poem is its combination of two elements, though their proportions and relationship will alter greatly through the years of its development. Evidently, there is the bare tale of silent suffering itself, focused on Margaret, and then the complex narrative interrogating just how we should narrate and respond to that suffering, focused on the characters of the poet-narrator and the Pedlar. Yet this complex narrative itself is, as we shall see, part of a larger set of complex patternings which overlay the 'base-narrative', all working to contextualize the raw suffering at the poem's heart. Again, it does not detract from Wordsworth's originality but enhances it, to note that this interrogation of the aesthetics of our response to suffering in literature was very much a live issue in the eighteenth century.[6] Typically, theorists could select from three theories: the Lucretian, that we enjoy reading about suffering because we reflect that it is not we who are suffering; the stoic, that through reading we safely school ourselves to acceptance of the suffering that must come to all; and the best-known Aristotelian one, that through the experience of suffering in art we are undergoing a catharsis that purges us of the emotions of pity and terror. In Wordsworth's case the very fact of having two narrators induces a complex play across these theories and the emotional reactions to which they point. Indeed it does not seem too much to claim that he builds in a triangular dynamic of responses to the tragedy: narrator, Pedlar, reader. If we are to locate novelty in *The Ruined Cottage* it may well be neither in its basic material – as we have seen, very much the stuff of sensibility from Goldsmith to Southey – nor in the focus on the meaning of suffering *per se*. Rather it will lie in a relationship between two very Wordsworthian poles: on the one hand, an obsessive attention to the actuality of human survival and obliteration and, on the other, an open-ended, shifting contemplation of the meanings of those base elements.

Here I am going to focus on one version of the poem, the 1799 version (reprinted by Duncan Wu in his *Romanticism* anthology)[7], a poem of 538 lines which might be regarded as the ultimate development of those versions of the poem in which Margaret – as opposed to the Pedlar – still dominates. (For the complex relationship of this version to its predecessors and successors, see the Appendix to the current article). This 1799 version has all the sombre power of the version of 1797 printed by Jonathan Wordsworth, along with a judicious admixture of the Pedlar's reflections though omitting the extended biographical sections written in 1798. More, the interaction of these reflections with those of the poet-figure forms part of a complex, interwoven narrative texture which also includes the infrequent but powerful speeches of Margaret herself, the persistent, ever-changing repetition of the house-garden theme and the Pedlar's four

[5] Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge*: *The Radical Years* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), p. 137.

[6] For my knowledge both of this debate and of its broader implications, I gratefully acknowledge the much more extended discussion in James H. Averill, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1980), pp. 121-24.

[7] *Romanticism*, pp. 422-35.

seasonal visits to her. Let us examine the contribution of these elements one by one.

What in the end are we to make of the basic story, a story which, like a number of Wordsworth's key narratives, is very soon told in terms of incident? The tale is that of the young, married cottagers, Robert and Margaret, and their children. First, their livelihood is undermined by economic depression; then their marriage is broken apart by Robert's going for a soldier, both to gain some money for his family and keep his self-respect. Finally, the deserted woman, along with her younger child, succumbs, through a combination of isolation and economic hardship, to a self-neglectful depression and physical decline. The narrative compels us to face a suffering, unsoftened by any obvious self-discovery or catharsis. This is suffering that drags out for the sufferer and whose process is unremittingly dramatized for the reader. Did Margaret's baby die partly because of her intense self-preoccupation? Yes, but the reader is surely not directed towards such a distinct moral judgement, since the whole internal structure of Margaret's world has collapsed in her isolation, and neither care of herself nor of others seems possible for her. So we are not really offered the complex questioning that would attend a tragic heroine whose precise responsibility for her fate was a key issue for the reader.

The first lines to be written were in fact the narratologically 'late', lines 446-492 beginning 'Five tedious years / She lingered in unquiet widowhood', a sequence which already suggests fated resignation as the ground-bass of Margaret's story and which gradually attracts to itself a narrative twenty times its own length. The lines themselves divide into two main sections. The first section focuses on the hope deferred of Margaret's widowhood, portraying a person consumed from within by unsatisfied longing for what cannot be:

> Five tedious years
> She lingered in unquiet widowhood,
> A wife and widow. Needs must it have been
> A sore heart-wasting … On this old bench
> For hours she sat, and evermore her eye
> Was busy in the distance, shaping things
> Which made her heart beat quick. (446-449: 454-457)

Here the Pedlar's account makes telling use of the primal image of the heartbeat – elsewhere in Wordsworth a symbol of primal human vitality ('Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart')[8] or of emotional reconnection ('Whence that low voice? – A whisper from the heart')[9] – as an emblem of fevered wastage. The second section loads onto this psychological suffering the concomitant decay, first of Margaret's physical environment and then of her body as 'when she slept, the nightly damps / Did chill her breast' (483-484). Finally, spirit, body and setting are reconnected in an image of calm desolation:

[8] *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, l. 28.
[9] The opening line of *River Duddon* sonnet XXI.

Yet still
She loved this wretched spot, nor would for worlds
Have parted hence; and still that length of road,
And this rude bench, one torturing hope endeared,
Fast rooted at her heart. And here, my friend,
In sickness she remained; and here she died,
Last human tenant of these ruined walls. (486-492)

The last line might be seen, like *Michael'*s 'And never lifted up a single stone' as a touchstone which combines simplicity and packed significance. Its very plainness makes its complex impact all the greater. The collocation 'human tenant' combines the direct with the suggestive – 'human' as an adjective distinguishing Margaret only to put her (and us) on a par with the invading sheep and speargrass which have succeeded her, and 'tenant' as a noun seeming to firmly place the human experience as a merely temporary interlude in some vastly greater process. We then conclude with 'these ruined walls', the embodiment of the interface between humanity and nature, between survival and obliteration, an image in which the obsessive concentration on decayed remnants of 'Incipient Madness' has been absorbed into a kind of unshakeable calm.

First, then, to fill out the starkness of this ground-bass theme there are the speeches Margaret makes. Three times she is able to speak for herself and thus to contact the reader beyond the silence of the grave. The first speech is a tellingly terse single statement, as Margaret summarizes the deterioration of her unemployed husband, Robert, and the frisson of pain that passed through her at the hysterical play of father with children as 'Every smile … made my heart bleed' (183/185). Her next speech, at the Pedlar's first, spring revisit, is more circumstantial, recounting as it does Robert's seemingly inevitable response to his depression – going for a soldier so as at least to leave his wife and children a purse of gold coins. What might strike us here, as in the first speech, is the emphasis on Margaret's empathy, her ability even in her own suffering to focus on the pain of her loved ones:

Poor man, he had not heart
To take a farewell of me, and he feared
That I should follow with my babes, and sink
Beneath the misery of a soldier's life. (270-273)

In her third speech, this empathetic power emerges again, only now chillingly transformed into a kind of wondering impersonality as her own being, too, becomes strangely alien:

About the fields I wander, knowing this
Only, that what I seek I cannot find.
And so I waste my time: for I am changed,
And to myself, said she, have done much wrong,
And to this helpless infant. (350-354)

The next level of elaboration is that binding of Margaret to place and to nature which occurs through the house-garden theme. Both in terms of its frequency – it occurs no fewer than six times – and in terms of its unobtrusive

integration in the narrative, this is the central image-cluster of the whole poem. It binds the poem together, both thematically and temporally. Thematically it contains from the start the images of cultivation and wildness. This interaction of the garden and the wild is key, but the temporal sequence, with its own peculiar ordering, is less obvious than it might appear to be. It is first seen as wild, then as wild once having been cultivated, as cultivated, as cultivated tending towards wildness, as decayed and weedy and finally as wild again. In other words, the implicit story of the garden image is not so much that of decay succeeding cultivation but of a triple sequence – of wildness giving way to cultivation giving way to wildness. It is a subtle difference but arguably a significant one, for the impact of this threefold sequence is rather less that of 'change and decay' than a simple twofold one would be and more like a fragment of a greater cycle.

Arguably, this cyclic overtone prevents Margaret's situation of being 'bound' to her garden and cottage from being the purely negative one that might be derived from Geoffrey H. Hartman's location of 'an alien nature' in the poem.[10] If her imagination (and then that of the Pedlar in re-imagining her story) is bound to these ruined walls and overgrown flower-beds, then that binding is more than simply tragic. It also gives a sense of her fate as placed into the order of a world where contingency and necessity meet, a world which must be that which it is and no other. Not far from the centre of this version of the poem is the most complex rendering of this image-cluster in which negative and positive are intertwined. The Pedlar sees the beauty of cultivated plants and their gradual escape from control:

> Her cottage in its outward look appeared
> As cheerful as before, in any show
> Of neatness little changed – but that I thought
> The honeysuckle crowded round the door
> And from the wall hung down in heavier wreaths,
> And knots of worthless stonecrop started out
> Along the window's edge, and grew like weeds
> Against the lower panes. I turned aside
> And strolled into her garden. It was changed.
> The unprofitable bindweed spread his bells
> From side to side, and with unwieldy wreaths
> Had dragged the rose from its sustaining wall
> And bent it down to earth. The border tufts,
> Daisy and thrift, and lowly camomile,
> And thyme, had struggled out into the paths,
> Which they were used to deck. (305-320)

On the level of imagery, the escape of the garden flowers from control is saddening because it is the physical manifestation of Margaret's loss of control over her life. Yet on the level of rhythm and movement across the lines there is a wholeness and integrity, an interaction of natural process and meditative contemplation which offers a countervailing poise and calm acceptance. The verse is cancelling out all those fretful feelings of moral complexity and triviality,

[10] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1971), p. 140.

those nightmare intrusions of gothic horror on the texture of everyday living, which had marked the worlds of the Salisbury Plain poems and *The Borderers*.

Beyond this hypnotic intertwining of loss with calm, we move on to a further temporal nature-patterning, that of the seasons. There are views of Margaret in early spring, towards the wane of summer, in late winter just before spring, and in autumn. The most obvious thing we can say about this sequence is that it suggests a gradual progress from growth to decay and this very easily ties in with the deteriorating state of Margaret herself. But we soon realize that this apparently natural patterning is also the human, cultural patterning of the Pedlar's circuit. The poem is bound closely into the reality of the human economic world: the Pedlar's recurrence is not exactly a seasonal one: rather its regular, but, by the standards of nature, eccentric, eight-monthly sequence of visits clearly represents the much more contingent length, based on human capacity, economic viability and the varied but finite geographic possibilities, of the Pedlar's round:

> While thus it fared with them
> To whom this cottage till that hapless year
> Had been a blessed home, it was my chance
> To travel in a country far remote;
> And glad I was when, halting by yon gate
> That leads from the green lane, again I saw
> These lofty elm-trees. (237-243)

This brings us directly to the Pedlar and to his role in relation to Margaret, the Wordsworth-narrator figure and the reader. His tone is at once heartfelt and objective, that of one who, in the formulation of the separate *Pedlar* poem, 'could afford to suffer / With those whom he saw suffer' (284-285). It is not that he is impassive since his response to Margaret's account of her desertion by Robert is of shocked helplessness: 'A strange surprise and fear came to my heart' (298). His involvement and comforting role are real enough, yet they are imbued with the distance that comes not only from his temperament but from his marginal profession – he, after all, can only survive in this harsh economic world by keeping on the road from place to place. This is a point rather missed by those like De Quincey, who fancy that the Pedlar's gift to Margaret of a guinea (which one would surmise to be two or three weeks of his total income) might have been worth a good deal of philosophizing.[11] Apart from the more general question as to whether a guinea would have been of particular help in Margaret's condition, surely the power of the following passage stems from its tracing of a conversation between social equals, and not of a charitable intercourse between social classes such as De Quincey seems to desiderate:

> This tale did Margaret tell with many tears,
> And when she ended I had little power
> To give her comfort, and was glad to take
> Such words of hope from her own mouth as served
> To cheer us both. But long we had not talked
> Ere we built up a pile of better thoughts,

[11] For a discussion of the views of De Quincey and others, see John Rieder, *Wordsworth's Counterrevolutionary Turn*: *Community, Virtue and Vision in the 1790s* (Cranbury, NJ, London and Mississauga, Ontario: Associated University Presses, 1997), p. 172.

> And with a brighter eye she looked around
> As if she had been shedding tears of joy.
> We parted. It was then the early spring;
> I left her busy with her garden tools,
> And well remember, o'er that fence she looked,
> And while I paced along the footway path,
> Called out and sent a blessing after me,
> With tender cheerfulness, and with a voice
> That seemed the very sound of happy thoughts. (274-288)

The mediating role of the Pedlar's attached/detached, involved yet distancing, stance is brought together at the end of the first half of the poem and the beginning of the second, in what the poem's Cornell editor James Butler calls the 'moral transition between Parts One and Two',[12] though it is rather more than that. The Pedlar's main speech here differentiates between an appropriate and an inappropriate interest in such tales of silent suffering. The story must be involving: the Pedlar's narrative has had the power to make the poet-narrator think 'of that poor woman as of one / Whom I had known and loved' (206-207). Yet the Pedlar's telling of the tale so as to make Margaret seem present to us needs to be supplemented by a serious moral concern that we should not 'hold vain dalliance with the misery / Even of the dead' (223-224). If both Pedlar and poet-narrator are to be moved by the story, it should not be by 'moving accidents' (232) but precisely by that 'silent suffering' in itself (233).

We have now been morally prepared for the Pedlar's own reconciling conclusion on the whole story, in which the 'secret spirit of humanity' (503) is absorbed into the oblivious beauty of nature. The speargrass, to whose presence in the garden we were first alerted some four hundred lines before, becomes the embodiment of a spirit of calm and peace:

> She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.
> I well remember that those very plumes,
> Those weeds, and the high speargrass on that wall,
> By mist and silent raindrops silvered o'er,
> As once I passed did to my mind convey
> So still an image of tranquillity,
> So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
> Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
> That what we feel of sorrow and despair
> From ruin and from change, and all the grief
> That passing shows of being leave behind,
> Appeared an idle dream that could not live
> Where meditation was. I turned away,
> And walked along my road in happiness. (512-525)

Much ink has been spilt on the reconciling image of the speargrass 'silvered o'er' and even more on the Pedlar's final happiness. Certainly this conclusion is hard to fit in with the active, combative meliorism of the radical Wordsworth of a few

[12] William Wordsworth, '*The Ruined Cottage*' *and* '*The Pedlar*' [*The Cornell Wordsworth*], ed. James Butler (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1979), p. 14.

years before, and it has been explicitly criticized by commentators such as Alan Liu[13] on precisely those grounds. Even critics who are prepared to accept wholly the poem's tragic *donnée* can see the poem as evading the story Wordsworth has actually told us.[14] Yet it perhaps needs to be borne in mind that the price paid by the Pedlar in order to arrive at his accepting or harmonized visions has been to tell the story in full and with no varnishing of Margaret's decline. As much as the narrative of the Ancient Mariner, this is a tale whose telling is in itself a performative ritual, a process which has to be gone through in the proper manner.

Certainly Wordsworth himself seemed condemned to retell the tale compulsively until he laid it to rest seventeen years later in the larger narrative of *The Excursion* (itself, he intended, to be further embedded within *The Recluse*). Yet it has been less widely noted that, like the Mariner with his water-snakes and Coleridge himself in *Dejection*, the Wordsworthian narrator of *The Ruined Cottage* achieves a moment of blessing, which arises not out of calm detachment but out of an unexpectedly personal grief:

> I turned aside in weakness, nor had power
> To thank him for the tale which he had told.
> I stood, and leaning o'er the garden gate
> Reviewed that woman's sufferings; and it seemed
> To comfort me while with a brother's love
> I blessed her in the impotence of grief. (495-500)

It is important to register that, though we usually read the poem's final sequence as the Pedlar providing the narrator with peaceful consolation, it is logically and dramatically the narrator's blessing which has cleared the way for the Pedlar's meditative happiness.[15] Arguably, the latter could not have been 'permitted' had not empathetic identification and raw grief first intertwined to yield a blessing which itself could not have been willed or consciously generated. As often with Wordsworth's tragic narrations, it is important not to take one half of his tone and stance, that of calm inevitabilism, without the other, which is that of an empathetic leap, a claim not only that 'Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person'[16] but that we need to undergo, through the power of his poetry, as much of the suffering of his protagonist, as is realistically possible. The resulting acceptance will arguably not be that of catharsis but that of a narration differentially absorbed into our separate, distinctive life-experiences. This was what was undergone by each of us, so far as we, or other human beings, who ever share the experience of narrated strangers. As David B. Pirie reminds us, Wordsworth's poetry does not posit an idealized notion of complete empathy, but rather builds into itself the truth that 'Fortunately, perhaps, full identification is

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[13] Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), p. 320 ff.

[14] For a useful summary of such views and a defence of the poem's ending as cathartic in Aristotelian terms, see Averill, pp. 55-61.

[15] For a rather different, though also positive, reading of this passage see Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth: An Inner Life* (Malden, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 115-16. Here the 'impotence of grief' is seen as manifesting the poet's recovery from the 'delayed mourning' first expressed in *The Vale of Esthwaite* (1787).

[16] See Linda's speech in Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 44.

impossible'.[17] There is only the moving on from this partial sharing into the banal wonder of our own lives. Like Margaret, we are bound by the material confines of our own bodily existence, even as we escape her pain for life's comforts:

> Together casting then a farewell look
> Upon those silent walls, we left the shade,
> And ere the stars were visible attained
> A rustic inn, our evening resting-place. (535-538)

Yet it is precisely from this limited awareness, from the awkwardly inadequate sympathy of our own finite being, that we can uniquely 'bless' a life known to us only through an overheard 'tale of silent suffering'.

APPENDIX: THE DEVELOPMENT OF *THE RUINED COTTAGE* AND *THE PEDLAR* MATERIAL

March-June 1797 Racedown

After completing his play *The Borderers*, Wordsworth writes the original *Ruined Cottage* – no longer extant, but fragments remain in MS. A and the Racedown Notebook. The length of this material is uncertain, though it falls within the range of 200-370 lines. This was the version read to Coleridge on his visit to Wordsworth and Dorothy at Racedown in early June 1797. It appears to have focused intensively on the joint tragedy of Robert and Margaret. The Pedlar was already the narrator but was at this stage a stranger to the 'poet-narrator'.

January-February 1798 Alfoxden

MS. B. An intensive second bout of work on *The Ruined Cottage* expands it first to 528 lines by the addition of a scene-setting introduction, an overview of the Pedlar's own background and the Pedlar's mid-poem lines moralizing the narrative. It is also possible that the Pedlar's Part Two visits to Margaret were expanded from two to four. A yet further expansion is seen, when at the end of MS. B, Wordsworth writes a longer 'backstory' of the Pedlar's development and adds a reconciling conclusion, taking the whole material to around 900 lines.

February 1799 Goslar — July [?] 1802 Grasmere

Wordsworth decides to omit all the Pedlar background material, but to expand the Pedlar's reflections on his visits and to include the more reconciling conclusion to create a poem of 538 lines. This is the version of *The Ruined Cottage* chosen for study here. The Pedlar 'overflow' material, though it has already had passages relevant to Wordsworth's own development removed in 1799 and 1801 for use in

[17] David B. Pirie, *William Wordsworth: The Poetry of Grandeur and of Tenderness* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 62.

The Prelude, is now reworked as a separate poem intended for publication through 1801-1802. The material used in *The Prelude* is replaced by more 'Pedlar character' material – the pedlar becoming the specifically Scottish James Drummond in the final (1802) separate *Pedlar* of *c*. 280 lines.

December-January 1803/1804 Grasmere – 1814 Rydal Mount

Wordsworth recombines *The Ruined Cottage* and *The Pedlar* to create a poem of 883 lines. This reunified poem, henceforth also referred to by both WW and DW as *The Pedlar*, is now seen as an element of Wordsworth's projected epic, *The Recluse*. The material, reworked over a number of years, would reappear as Book 1 of *The Excursion* ('The Wanderer') in 1814. Here the characters of the narrator and the Pedlar (now the eponymous Wanderer) will be supplemented in later books of the poem by two new *dramatis personae*, the Solitary and the Pastor.

University of Bradford

Society Notes and News from Members

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Nearly 50 members and guests assembled on 4 December at the historic first floor rooms at 50 Albemarle Street, the offices of the publisher John Murray, for the Children's Literature seminar organised by the Society. Entitled *Mrs Leicester and Ulysses* this event marked the bicentenary of publication of these two of the Lambs' books for children. After a brief welcome and introduction to the building from the present John Murray (the seventh in a direct line), we heard from Felicity James on the significance of the children's books as exemplified by *The Adventures of Ulysses* and then from Mary Wedd on *Mrs Leicester's School*. After tea the panel of speakers was chaired by Matthew Grenby (University of Newcastle), and consisted of Pamela Clemit (University of Durham) on 'Godwin's Juvenile Library', Malini Roy (University of Oxford) on 'Godwin's children's literature' and Susan Manly (University of St Andrews) on 'Schools for Treason and *Mrs Leicester's School*'. The event was thoroughly enjoyed by all, and it was great privilege to be allowed once more to use Murray's wonderfully evocative rooms. It is hoped that many of the talks will be reproduced in a future issue of the *Bulletin.*

Members will have noticed that the DVD '*Lamb's Tale*' was sent out in duplicate with the previous issue of the *Bulletin*. This was deliberate. The idea was (and still is) that members should keep one copy and pass one on to a friend who might be interested. We have received letters of appreciation from several members who enjoyed the film. An eagle-eyed member spotted the Society's portrait of John Lamb Senior making a brief appearance in the film on the wall of Lamb's Cottage. One professor in Japan described the DVD as 'fantastic'. Another correspondent wrote, 'Becoming Moxon while one watched made it all seem very personal, while still suggesting Lamb's modesty and his liking for privacy that Dick Watson spoke about in his Birthday Toast. The mixture of humour, sadness and acceptance was altogether most moving'.

For different reasons, the Society has also lately received letters of thanks from recipients of academic bursaries that we funded. During 2009 we continued our Ruddick Bursaries via the English Department at the University of Manchester. We also supported the Wordsworth Summer Conference at Grasmere by awarding Charles Lamb Society Bursaries to enable students to attend who would otherwise have been unable to afford the fees. I have space to record just a few of the comments received. 'It was, intellectually, a vigorous and richly rewarding week, which began on Monday with no fewer than nine lectures and papers! As an undergraduate I felt immensely lucky to take part and to benefit from the collective wisdom of eminent scholars from around the globe…. Climbing the fells with those whose books I have read, I was extremely grateful to all for the advice that was on offer regarding my difficult yet imminent decision' [on her next step in academia]. 'Over the course of five days, we were privileged to hear so many papers and lectures being delivered, providing an opportunity to become immersed in this fascinating period of history; a chance not always possible during the intense Oxford terms! The standard of material presented was uniformly outstanding, and the tone of the conference was one of rigorous intellectual debate in the beautiful surroundings of Grasmere. I am very grateful to the Charles Lamb Society for providing me with means to attend'.

If you have not already done so, please book soon for the annual Birthday Luncheon on 7 February, which will once again be held at 14 Princes Gate, the former London home of J.P. Morgan and the Kennedy family. Tickets for this popular event are available from Cecilia Powell at 28 Grove Lane, London, SE5 8ST. The cost is £32, to include pre-lunch drinks, an excellent three-course meal, coffee, a lecture by Professor Paul Betz (from the University of Georgetown), tea and biscuits. Cheques should be made payable to The Charles Lamb Society and be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope!

NEW SUBSCRIPTION RATES

For the first time since 1995 and after much consideration, the Council has decided to increase subscription rates with effect from 1 January 2009.

It is hoped that members will understand that the cost of producing and mailing the *Bulletin* have risen significantly in recent years. It has been possible to keep subscription rates unchanged for 14 years, which must be something of a record! The time has come for more realistic rates to be introduced, and the Council hopes that it may be possible to maintain them for some time. The new rates are set out below:

UK single individual	£18
double subscription (one *Bulletin* at same address)	24
library and corporate	24
Overseas single individual	US $35
double subscription (one *Bulletin* at same address)	48
library and corporate	48

Nick Powell
Hon. Treasurer