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Contents: Wordsworth Winter School Issue

Editorial

ALL THOSE present at the Wordsworth Winter School earlier this year will have been delighted, as ever, by the high standard of the academic presentations, so it is with particular pleasure that we publish three of them in this number of the *Bulletin*. The theme was *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), which gave those attending the pleasure of listening to Mary Wedd on the Lucy poems, Gordon Thomas on *The Brothers*, and Seamus Perry on *The Ancient Mariner*. Richard W. Clancey's lecture on *Michael* will be appearing in the *Bulletin* for April 1996. Although my brief note on Lamb's reading of *Lyrical Ballads* played no part in Winter School proceedings, it seemed appropriate to include it here, for the Elian context it provides.

The dates of next year's Wordsworth Winter School are 4-9 February 1996, the theme of which will be *Home at Grasmere* and *The Two-Part Prelude*. One of the oddities about these works is that even though they were composed in 1800 and 1799 respectively, they remained unpublished in their earliest complete forms until 1977 and 1979. As a result, they are only now being recognised for what they are - two of Wordsworth's greatest works. All of which will no doubt provide the lecturers with just as much of a challenge as did the *Lyrical Ballads* - and, in any case, who would want to miss the Lakes in February? For further details contact Sylvia Wordsworth, Dove Cottage, Grasmere, Cumbria LA22 9SH.

The Lucy Poems

By MARY R. WEDD

ONE YEAR A GROUP OF STUDENTS came to me for Wordsworth with polite but unequivocal reluctance. 'We like *difficult* poetry', they said. I applauded their taste but suggested they stay with me for a few sessions to see if we could discover whether Byron's 'simple Wordsworth' had hidden depths. I admit that I had it in mind to stun them later with bits of *The Prelude* but first we together accepted the challenge of finding out if, as Danby says, '"simplicity" is difficult'.[1] No group of poems illustrates this better than the Lucy poems. At a superficial reading they may seem almost absurdly simple but in reality they encapsulate the great riddle of human life and death and our relationship with time and eternity.

A poem that appealed to me at school when I was about twelve was Browning's *Grammarian's Funeral.* It tells of a scholar living in the time of the Renaissance who spent his whole life, exclusive of everything else, in the pursuit of learning, particularly in obscure points of classical grammar. Age diminished him but still he persevered until at last he died and all his accumulated knowledge with him. His disciples revered him as a great man but, as they carried him to his grave, the question would obtrude itself: was his life wasted? As Wordsworth says of poems admired in youth, 'full oft the objects of our love / Were false and in their splendour overwrought',[2] and nowadays I find this one long-winded and no longer such a favourite. But Browning does, like a terrier, take this problem by the scruff of the neck and worry it until he thinks perhaps he has found an answer. '*God's* task to make the heavenly period / Perfect the earthen?' It seems to us now that Browning sometimes dots every 'i' and crosses every 't' *ad nauseam.* Yet in his own time he was regarded as a difficult poet. When questioned about a particular passage, he is reputed to have answered, 'When I wrote that, God and Robert Browning knew what it meant. Now only God knows.' Wordsworth himself, hearing of the Brownings' marriage, wished them happy, 'not doubting that they will speak more intelligibly to each other than, notwithstanding their abilities, they have yet done to the Public.'[3] So the concept of difficulty is a shifting one.

Wordsworth wrestles with the same enigma as Browning but his method is very different. He works by understatement. In the Matthew Poems he deals with a man who dies in old age, in the fullness of time, like the Grammarian, but a much more rounded and lovable character. 'Thou happy soul! and can it be / That these two words of glittering gold / Are all that must remain of thee?' But he also touches on the death of Matthew's young daughter and all that wasted potential: 'she would have been / A very nightingale'. The first was hard enough to encompass but how much more difficult to come to terms with the death that is premature. This is at the centre of the Lucy poems. My students would enquire why Nature, having perfected the prototype according to her blueprint, then proceeded to kill Lucy off. It is a good question and Wordsworth, at least at this period, does not give Browning's answer. The poems *can* be read just as poignant elegies for the inexplicable human lot, yet

[1] John F. Danby, *The Simple Wordsworth* (London 1960), p. 28.

[2] *Thirteen-Book Prelude* v 593-4; quotations from *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York, 1979).

[3] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* ed. E. de Selincourt, *The Later Years: 1821-1853* rev. Alan G. Hill (4 vols., Oxford, 1978-88), iv. 806.

within the seemingly pellucid vehicle are subtleties, ambiguities and layers of meaning often unguessed at.

Early in April 1799, Coleridge wrote to Poole, 'Some months ago Wordsworth transmitted to me a most sublime Epitaph / whether it had any reality, I cannot say. - Most probably, in some gloomier moment he had fancied the moment in which his Sister might die.'[4] You will remember that, though the Wordsworths and Coleridge went to Germany together in September 1798, by 3 October they went their separate ways, though keeping in touch by post. Coleridge's conjecture about Dorothy is a plausible one, though to argue from it an illicit incestuous relationship, as some Freudians do, seems unnecessary. We do not know if Wordsworth had any specific woman in mind in these poems. Mary Moorman mentions the death of Margaret Hutchinson in 1796 from consumption as having deeply affected her circle. Some lines originally in 'She dwelt among the untrodden ways', afterwards omitted, do suggest tuberculosis:

> . . . slow distemper checked her bloom,
> And on the Heath she died.

and

> Long time before her head lay low
> Dead to the world was she[5] . . .

But at most this provides, not a full identification, but only the experience of early death, with which Wordsworth had been familiar from childhood with the loss of his parents and some of his playmates. Early death was very common then and Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey were all to lose offspring in early childhood. The words 'her head lay low' were to be echoed in the *Prelude* account of Wordsworth's teacher, William Taylor, on his deathbed at the age of 32.[6] He might even himself, he thought, 'have made common cause / With some who perished' in the French Revolution and died in his twenties.[7] In a sense, perhaps, Lucy is a kind of *alter ego*. 'Was it for this . . . ?' In any case, the identity of Lucy is not important, since the poems transcend any individual instance.

The 'sublime Epitaph' Coleridge refers to in this letter is 'A slumber did my spirit seal' and I should like to look at it first. It has become the custom to call a certain group of poems the 'Lucy Poems', and to place them in an accepted sequence. With the exception of 'I travelled among unknown men', written in 1801, they were all written in Germany and have a community of theme. Though he recognized their inter-relationship, Wordsworth did not name them so, nor were they all grouped together, whether in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) or in the *Collected Poems*, so I shall take the liberty of arranging them in the order that suits me. Karl Kroeber reports that 'virtually everyone who has written on Wordsworth has commented on these poems'[8] - a very lowering reflection! I do not guarantee to have read them all but I do acknowledge invaluable help from some fine critics. Any mistakes or eccentricities today are, however, mine.

[4] *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. E. L. Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71), i. 479.

[5] *The Letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth* ed. E. de Selincourt, *The Early Years: 1787-1805* rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967) (hereafter *EY*), p. 237.

[6] *Thirteen-Book Prelude* x 501.

[7] *Thirteen-Book Prelude* x 194-5.

[8] *The English Romantic Poets* ed. Frank Jordan (New York, 1985), p. 310.

Perhaps, before I go any further, I should also mention the wonderful legacy left to Wordsworth and Coleridge by folk songs and ballads, such as *Sir Patrick Spens* or *Waly waly*, which for them were represented by Percy's *Reliques* and for us by Cecil Sharp's collections. Some of these still have the power to raise the hairs on one's neck, particularly when sung to their appropriate tunes, which proved such a treasure-trove for English composers. As well as joy and celebration, they are able to convey tragedy and shock by the most apparently simple methods and I am sure Wordsworth and Coleridge learnt much from them. Of course, in a way, this hardly needs saying, but, behind the Lucy poems I can hear the timeless tones of ordinary people expressing in 'the language of men' their experience of human life. Much ink has been expended on whether *Lyrical Ballads* were either lyrics or ballads and what the term actually means. Years ago Robert Mayo caused a sensation by drawing attention to the magazine poetry of the time and asserting that 'the more one reads the minor poetry of the magazines from 1788 to 1798, the more it is impossible to escape the impression that the concept of "lyrical ballad" does not represent a significant innovation in 1798, nor as a term is it particularly appropriate to the contents of this volume of poems'.[9] All this seems to me to be missing the main point.

> Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made
> The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence . . .

says Coleridge at the opening of *Dejection*. Can you doubt the impression such voices from the past made on the two poets or the debt they owed to them? I am sure Wordsworth expects us to feel 'the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction' when we read the Lucy poems. Elsewhere in *Lyrical Ballads* one can see that Wordsworth has been reading the pseudo-ballads of Bürger, notably for my taste in the delightful burlesque in *The Idiot Boy*, but in these Lucy poems it is surely the authentic sound of the *old* English and Scottish folk songs and ballads, such as are to be found in Percy's book, which comes through. It is not a case of innovation versus tradition. As Mary Jacobus says, 'Indebtedness to the past coexists with the independence of a pioneer'.[10]

> A slumber did my spirit seal;
> I had no human fears:
> She seemed a thing that could not feel
> The touch of earthly years.
>
> No motion has she now, no force;
> She neither hears nor sees;
> Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
> With rocks, and stones, and trees.[11]

A strict ballad verse-form, only two stanzas, a complete lack of poetic ornamentation or elaboration, what could appear more artless? One certainly does not find 'wit' in the Augustan sense here. Yet, what is it that strikes one most at first reading? Surely the terrible

[9] 'The Contemporaneity of the *Lyrical Ballads*', *PMLA* 69 (1954) 486-522, quoted from *Wordsworth: 'Lyrical Ballads'; A Casebook* ed. Alun R. Jones and William Tydeman (London, 1972), p. 101.

[10] *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Oxford, 1976), p. 1.

[11] Texts of Wordsworth's poems are from *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford, 1940-9).

irony between the first and the second stanzas, particularly in the words 'a thing that could not feel', and irony is not the weapon of the simple-minded.

We have the evidence of Wordsworth's note to the Intimations Ode, 'Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being' and he quotes

> A simple child
> That lightly draws its breath,
> And feels its life in every limb,
> What should it know of death![12]

a poem to which he also refers in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, stressing in childhood 'our utter inability to admit that notion'. The last lines of *There was a boy* also reveal the puzzlement that a child of his own age should be dead. The failure to believe that one will ever die lasts well into adulthood, as Hazlitt points out.[13] So this inability to conceive of the mortality which is the inevitable consummation of human life pervades the first stanza here. As in a kind of sleep the young man has blotted out belief in death and this 'slumber' has 'sealed' his spirit off from the process of time. He has 'no human fears' because he does not think of Lucy as human and hence mortal. I have often thought, as I'm sure we all have, how strange it is that an insentient thing like a piece of jewellery - say - can last indefinitely, outliving a succession of wearers, even over thousands of years. This is how Lucy is seen in the first stanza, as being immune from the human condition.

> She seemed a thing that could not feel
> The touch of earthly years.

Time could not wear her away with its merciless attrition. She was immortal. But that is only as it *seemed*. Notice the change of tense in the two stanzas.

In the second stanza she *is* immortal indeed but not in the way the poet had envisaged. She cannot feel 'the touch of earthly years' because she cannot feel at all. She really has now become 'a thing'.

> No motion has she now, no force;
> She neither hears nor sees . . .

Sbe is in the position of Binyon's young dead soldiers: 'Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn',[14] but neither shall they live out their lives to individual fulfilment. Lucy has escaped the ravages of time but at what a cost!

> Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
> With rocks, and stones, and trees.

In this poem, where the language is pared down to a deliberate lack of apparent complication yet, as Frances Austin says, 'frequently carries greater density or weight of meaning', the three-syllable word 'diurnal' stands out.[15] It is placed partly for its musical, almost

[12] See *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford, 1940-9) (hereafter *PW*), iv. 463.

[13] In his essay, 'On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth'.

[14] *Poems for the Fallen.*

[15] *The Language of Wordsworth and Coleridge* (London, 1989) (hereafter Austin), p. 50.

onomatopoeic effect, helping to emphasize the circular movement of the earth in contrast to the static finality of 'rocks, and stones, and trees'. *Lucy* may have no 'motion, no force' but the earth has. It continues to turn and the scientific astronomical term 'diurnal' also serves to stress the heartlessness of a mechanical system of Newtonian law that continues to function regardless of human suffering. We have probably, all of us, after some devastating blow in our lives, wondered to see everything going on around us just as before. There is a terrible immutability about that last line with its series of monosyllables.

Thus, the first impression the reader has is one of grief-stricken shock and desolation, and that is a valid response. Yet in every group of readers there will be one or two who say, 'But hold on. It's not entirely sad, is it?' In becoming part of the earth, she *has* a kind of permanence. Speaking of Wordsworth's use of language here Frances Austin says, 'The negative element is very strong, especially in the two shorter poems of the group . . .' But she goes on to show how, just as 'the positive grammatical expression of the final lines . . . conveys a partially negative meaning', so too 'Negation . . . whether grammatical or semantic, can paradoxically imply the opposite'.[16] Perhaps, it is implied, the drop of water has gone back into the sea which is its home. But in that case, the lover might ask, what had been gained by differentiating the drop from the ocean in the first place? What was the point of individuating human beings at all? The Grammarian's dedication, Lucy's natural perfection, what were they for? That question hovers behind any consolation that may be sought in thinking of Lucy as finding immortality by immersion in 'the great whole'.

Wordsworth tells us in *The Prelude* how he 'gave a moral life' to even the most seemingly inanimate of objects, 'Even the loose stones that cover the highway', as part of 'the one presence, and the life / Of the great whole . . .'[17] John Beer relates this Lucy poem to 'Tintern Abbey' and says, 'In such a context Lucy "roll'd round in earth's diurnal course", has become one with the "motion", the "spirit" that impels

> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.'[18]

He goes on, 'Now, it might be argued, she really has no need of motion or of force, for she is one with the total motion of the universe.' John Beer suggests that Coleridge's use of the word 'sublime' may indicate 'that he was reading the poem in a manner more visionary than our first analysis would allow'.[19] Perhaps the poet's state of trance in the first stanza prefigures 'the ecstasy' enjoyed by the whole universe into which Lucy has now been 'initiated'.[20]

F. W. Bateson sees the last two lines as 'a climax' of 'pantheistic magnificence'.[21] I think that is an over-simplification as it seems to underestimate the equally devastating sense of loss. The truth is that both interpretations are right and that they coexist. John Beer recognizes this. He says, 'A "universe of life" might well exist: indeed there was strong evidence from his own experiences in nature to suggest the existence of a primal level of consciousness within human beings which opened out to infinity - and which might in some sense be immortal. But the only fact of which we could finally be sure was that of our own

[16] Austin 61-3.
[17] *Thirteen-Book Prelude* iii 124-31.
[18] *Wordsworth in Time* (London, 1979), p. 84.
[19] Ibid. 83.
[20] Ibid. 84.
[21] *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (London, 1950), p. 33.

necessary death and that of anyone whom we might love.'[22] To have experienced 'the visionary gleam', a glimpse of eternity, is to long to keep it and to find an explanation of human life in which it is paramount, but we have to live in time. Just as Blake's Innocence is balanced by Experience, so in Wordsworth the contraries assert themselves.

Does this give us a clue to the answer to my students' question, why did Wordsworth make Nature kill off Lucy the minute she had perfected her? Surely it is no coincidence that while in Goslar Wordsworth was also writing, about his own youth, how 'spirits', later 'Nature', 'would form / A favored being . . .'[23] He describes the process and asks what it was for, 'Was it for this?' Perhaps, felt though unstated, is the tentative doubt whether it would not be better to cease while the 'visionary gleam' is still undimmed. 'Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn.'

We shall come back to this question but first let us look at the poem in which the thought of death, so difficult to believe in in youth, comes to the young man as a kind of aberration. This is the one of which, in copying it out for Coleridge, Dorothy wrote, 'The next poem is a favourite of mine'.[24] I shall read it in its final form except that I shall include the last stanza, later omitted, which was in Dorothy's letter.

Strange fits of passion have I known:
And I will dare to tell,
But in the Lover's ear alone,
What once to me befell.

When she I loved looked every day
Fresh as a rose in June,
I to her cottage bent my way,
Beneath an evening moon.

Upon the moon I fixed my eye,
All over the wide lea;
With quickening pace my horse drew nigh
Those paths so dear to me.

And now we reached the orchard plot;
And, as we climbed the hill,
The sinking moon to Lucy's cot
Came near, and nearer still.

In one of those sweet dreams I slept,
Kind Nature's gentlest boon!
And all the while my eyes I kept
On the descending moon.

My horse moved on; hoof after hoof
He raised, and never stopped:
When down behind the cottage roof,
At once, the bright moon dropped.

[22] *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* (London, 1978), p. 94.
[23] *Two-Part Prelude* i 69-70.
[24] *EY* 237.

What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
Into a Lover's head!
'O mercy!' to myself I cried,
'If Lucy should be dead!'

I told her this: her laughter light
Is ringing in my ears:
And when I think upon that night
My eyes are dim with tears.

What is it that gives this poem such a sense of subtlety and depth? I think it is because its effect on the reader is gained largely by imagery which reaches us almost subliminally. The language indeed is simple but it 'carries greater density or weight of meaning', because levels of truth are suggested rather than overtly stated.

'It's quite absurd,' the young man says, 'I have these sudden feelings of dread, so ridiculous that I wouldn't dare to confess them to anyone but another lover who shares my state'. Then he goes on to describe an experience which, until the end, *he* interprets in one way but the reader's subconscious senses in another. Again what Lamb called 'that dangerous figure - irony' is much in play.

When she I loved looked every day
Fresh as a rose in June . . .

It stands to reason that the inductive logic which argues that because the sun rose yesterday and to-day it will do so tomorrow, also might lead one to expect Lucy to continue in her present beauty indefinitely. Alas, though, something has been left out of account where human beings are concerned, the effects of time. The seeming permanence of 'every day' contrasts with the 'rose in June' whose destiny is to fade so quickly and die. In the same way, the 'evening moon', on whose loveliness the traveller fixed his eye without any trepidation, is about to set. Its progress downward is monitored in succeeding stanzas. As he sees that

The sinking moon to Lucy's cot
Came near, and nearer still

he does not feel it as any threat - but the reader is beginning to.

Just as, before, 'A slumber did my spirit seal', so here

In one of those sweet dreams I slept,
Kind Nature's gentlest boon!

It is a 'boon' in the sense that an anaesthetic is in a painful operation. Unconscious, he travels on in happy anticipation, even enjoying the hurrying motion of the horse, putting one hoof in front of another, like a clock ticking the present away and advancing into the future the narrator longs for; but, the reader feels, ominously beyond that. Like Time, the horse 'never stopped', and the moon, having run her permitted course, is also bound by time, as

down behind the cottage roof,
At once, the bright moon dropped.

The menace of that line of monosyllables is heart-stopping. In the reader's mind increasingly and now in the young man's, Lucy has been identified with the rose and the moon not only for her beauty but also for her transience.

The lover still thinks he is being 'fond and wayward'. What a nonsense to imagine that that lovely young woman could be dead! Lucy thinks it a nonsense too.

> I told her this: her laughter light
> Is ringing in my ears.

But it was not nonsense.

> And when I think upon that night
> My eyes are dim with tears.

There is a reversal in the experience, whereby what had seemed wisdom is proved foolishness and what had seemed foolishness is really wise. Perhaps Wordsworth was right to cut the last verse, continuing his policy of implying but not stating, but its existence confirms for us that what the narrator had been ashamed of as 'a momentary weakness' was, as Geoffrey Durrant puts it, 'in fact a moment of intolerable truth'.[25]

The next poem, entitled 'Song' in *Lyrical Ballads*, was singled out for praise by Lamb,[26] when he first received the second volume.

> She dwelt among the untrodden ways
> Beside the springs of Dove,
> A Maid whom there were none to praise
> And very few to love.
>
> A violet by a mossy stone
> Half hidden from the eye!
> - Fair as a star, when only one
> Is shining in the sky.
>
> She lived unknown, and few could know
> When Lucy ceased to be;
> But she is in her grave, and oh,
> The difference to me!

When I first read F. W. Bateson on Wordsworth many years ago I was impatient at his discussion of this poem. 'How can *ways* be *untrodden*?' he asks.[27] Any walker will feel he knows what Wordsworth means, having experienced paths eroded into scree-slopes or churned up by horses, but also tracks across hills or fields which are still distinguishable but quite unworn. The latter are what I interpreted perfectly happily as 'untrodden ways', though obviously they *are* trodden by a few. Bateson applies the same logical criterion again in pointing out that 'If there were a very few who loved Lucy there cannot have been, literally, *none to praise* her. And if she had really *lived unknown* how could there be even a few who knew when she ceased to be?'[28] In my youthful arrogance I thought this silly pettyfogging. I still disagree with Bateson's conclusions but I can now acknowledge that he was right that one should not ignore the detailed structure of words and syntax, particularly in Wordsworth. If one makes such 'silent corrections' as mine about the 'untrodden ways', Bateson says, we

[25] *Wordsworth and the Great System* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 146.
[26] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marrs (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1975-8), i. 265.
[27] *Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation* (London, 1954), p. 31.
[28] Ibid. 31-2.

arrive at a distinction between the public world which rewards with praise and punishes with being unknown and a private world which prefers love to adulation and accepts isolation and obscurity as natural. This he calls 'a crude and almost vulgar statement of Rousseauist escapism' and the effect of the 'verbal contradictions' is 'to blur the rigid outlines of the antithesis by an implicit criticism of all linguistic distinctions'. This is surely almost worthy of the deconstructionists who were then still years in the future! I think, on the contrary, that Wordsworth *did* intend exactly that antithesis and that the 'verbal contradictions' serve to emphasize and modify it so that it is not crude or vulgar. It is far from escapist to live and work on the land in a remote spot, as I know from first-hand experience, and maybe there is something to be said for a disregard for the world's glittering prizes if it helps to avoid the corruption that goes with them. Lucy could be *loved* without being *praised*, in these terms, and could live unknown to the great world yet be to one person a pearl beyond price. These concepts are, as we used to say in the days of learning grammar, 'understood' though not spelt out.

So 'She dwelt among the untrodden ways': the world did not beat a path to her door. Quite otherwise. She lived 'Beside the springs of Dove'. Whether the Derbyshire, Yorkshire, or, more probably, the Cumbrian Dove, the springs of the river are tucked away in an inaccessible place. But, despite their hidden and unnoticed nature, springs represent the origins of life, having an importance unrecognized until one thinks of the impossibility of survival without water. Like the source of the river, the flower which represents Lucy is inconspicuous. A violet is a shy, retiring plant but, if you happen to find a white one, it has a wonderful scent, a prize in any hedgerow treasure-hunt. This one, though, does not grow by hedge or bank but by a mossy stone, symbol of permanence perhaps, contrasting with the ephemeral flower, sheltering it, yet by its mossy likeness to a tombstone menacing too.

Looking up from the little flower, which grows out of and is almost part of the earth, one sees in the heavens a single star, probably Venus, the planet which, as Durrant points out, 'is usually seen shining when only one is visible'.[29] It is called the Evening Star and so, in one sense, contrasts its grandeur with the humble violet, but in another reminds us of the inevitable end to the day. In Wordsworth's poetry the stars are often associated with the idea of a secure system of law in the universe, sometimes associated with science and Newton - 'His triangles - they were the stars of heaven' - or with Duty and God's law - 'Thou dost preserve the Stars from wrong; / And the most ancient Heavens through Thee are fresh and strong'.[30] Above all, the stars and heavens in Wordsworth commonly suggest spiritual aspiration.

John Beer expresses this beautifully: 'at one pole the flower, focus of human affection and tenderness for the particular, at the other the single star, focus of human imagination and of wondering perception. Lucy possessed the qualities of both poles: her growth in the flesh had possessed the organic harmony of a flower's growth, while her own inward radiance had given her the quality of a star'.[31] So, though 'She lived unknown' to the great world, she was, as John Beer says, 'more than a private face in a private place . . . she was, while she lived, a guarantor of the "universe of life". And by the same token her mortality is the more significant, since it brings together two irreconcilable ideas - Lucy's beauty and the ineluctable fact of her death, all the more unthinkable if it should take place in her youth.'

[29] *William Wordsworth* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 71.
[30] *Excursion* i 272; *Ode to Duty* 55-6.
[31] *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* (Basingstoke, 1978), pp. 95-6.

Those uncompromising laws, which on the one hand provide a sense of security, on the other include the inevitability of death. 'Thou knowst tis common'. It is indeed a commonplace enough occurrence and, if it is not that of a famous man celebrated with all the panoply of a public funeral, but only of an obscure girl that few had even heard of, surely no great matter. Not so. To one who loved her the loss could not be measured.

> She lived unknown, and few could know
> When Lucy ceased to be . . .

'Ceased to be' seems at first a strange, cold euphemism. She had existed. Now she doesn't. What of it? That would be the public attitude. But to the individual it is another thing. 'Ceased to be' expresses much more vividly the dreadful lack felt by the one left behind than the bald statement that she had died.

> But she is in her grave, and, oh,
> The difference to me!

All the grief at a great gulf of absence is expressed in that simple exclamation. Some readers find it absurd, and Hartley Coleridge's parody doesn't help, but I doubt if they are readers who have suffered a devastating bereavement. The very word 'difference', with its rhythm, its three syllables and its connotations, leading up to 'to me', gives dignity to that last line. We have Lamb's evidence and Keats, who, one would suppose, was a reliable witness, spoke of its 'most perfect pathos'.[32]

The idea of Lucy's combination and reconciliation of opposites is carried forward and elaborated in the next poem.

> Three years she grew in sun and shower,
> Then Nature said, 'A lovelier flower
> On earth was never sown;
> This child I to myself will take;
> She shall be mine, and I will make
> A lady of my own.
>
> 'Myself will to my darling be
> Both law and impulse: and with me
> The Girl, in rock and plain,
> In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
> Shall feel an overseeing power
> To kindle or restrain.
>
> 'She shall be sportive as the fawn
> That wild with glee across the lawn
> Or up the mountain springs;
> And her's shall be the breathing balm,
> And her's the silence and the calm
> Of mute insensate things.
>
> 'The floating clouds their state shall lend
> To her; for her the willow bend;

[32] *The Keats Circle* ed. Hyder E. Rollins (2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1948), ii. 276.

Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

'The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

'And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell;
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell.'

Thus Nature spake - The work was done -
How soon my Lucy's race was run!
She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm and quiet scene;
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.

For this more gradual and more detailed poem Wordsworth has chosen a longer stanza, whose rhyme-scheme and varied length of line both contribute to the sense of leisure and allow of the awful finality of the last, short line.

When Lucy was three years old Nature recognized her as 'a favored being' and determined to make her her own. She is again compared to a flower, beautiful but ephemeral, but by a process of co-operation between herself and Nature she is to become both ideal and real. Nature will form her but Lucy will be an active participant, who can respond creatively to antithetical aspects of life. 'The army of unalterable law', as George Meredith calls it,[33] is balanced by the spontaneous creativity of the individual - 'Both law and impulse'. She does not function only 'beside still waters' but also in the 'steep and rugged pathway' - by 'rock and plain'. The violet and the star reappear as 'earth and heaven'. 'Glade and bower' do not follow this pattern of opposites but both suggest the protective bosom of Nature, in which Lucy will 'feel an overseeing power' returning her to the duality of excited activity and necessary control - 'To kindle or restrain'. These opposites are illustrated in the next stanza. One minute she is 'wild with glee' springing up the mountain and the next she is in meditative communion with 'mute insensate things', 'Even the loose stones that cover the highway'. In the next stanza the 'floating clouds' and the bending willow wonderfully evoke a peaceful summer's day, which is balanced by 'the motions of the storm', which she can also be moulded by and assimilate 'By silent sympathy'. She plays her part in the process: 'Nor shall she fail to see' and 'she shall lean her ear / In many a secret place'. Again the eternal order of 'The stars of midnight' is set against the dance of the rivulets, ever changing and

[33] *Lucifer in Starlight.*

'wayward'. Lucy will be full of life and growth as she comes to adulthood. Notice how beautifully the sound echoes the sense in these lines.

> Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
> And beauty born of murmuring sound
> Shall pass into her face.

Nature provided Lucy with the physical as well as spiritual attributes to go on to a fruitful maturity.

> And vital feelings of delight
> Shall rear her form to stately height,
> Her virgin bosom swell . . .

But then comes the shock, the irony of the last antithesis, between life and death.

> Thus Nature spake - The work was done -
> How soon my Lucy's race was run!

Even Time had not been allowed to play its full destructive part, so sudden was the end.

The viewpoint changes here from that of Nature to that of the individual human being to whom Lucy was dear.

> She died, and left to me
> This heath, this calm and quiet scene;
> The memory of what has been,
> And never more will be.

All that the speaker has now is memory, associated with the particular place, and awareness of a great gap. Yes, the graph of life and growth is of its nature to turn downwards eventually towards decline and death. But my students' question is a fair one. Why did Wordsworth make Nature kill Lucy off at the apex of her perfection? One feels the pointlessness of the whole exercise. Wilfred Owen called it 'Futility'.

> Was it for this the clay grew tall?
> - O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
> To break earth's sleep at all?

What is the good of 'work done' and a 'race run' if all it leads to is a premature death? John Beer hints at an answer when he says, 'To have grown up in this way is to have run one of life's races; the other (of which Lucy knew nothing) consists of learning to live with the sense of loss and death, and so to achieve "the seeing eye" and the "philosophic mind".'[34]

In these poems Wordsworth himself, though he was wrestling with it, had not yet fully faced the need to run that second race. Just before leaving for Germany he had written 'Tintern Abbey' with its affirmation of the power of Nature and his own vision, alternating with moments of nagging doubt. At Goslar, writing parts of the *Two-Part Prelude*, remembering the communion with the natural world that he had experienced in childhood and youth, no doubt Wordsworth felt a great longing to remain young enough to retain that vision which had the power to take him momentarily out of time and put him in touch with eternity.

[34] *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* 98.

'I see by glimpses now, when age comes on / May scarcely see at all.'[35] But Blake understood that one cannot cling to the stage of Innocence. He shows in the book of *Tiriel* what happens to those who do. They become nauseating Peter Pans, what Northrop Frye calls 'hideous imbeciles, senile children'.[36] He says of Har and Heva, 'In this grim parody of the state of innocence there is a weird chill of horror that even the account of the Struldbrugs in Swift does not excel'. No, 'Without Contraries is no progression', it is necessary to go through Experience or one ceases to grow. Wordsworth came to grips with this later in the great *Immortality Ode*, which I hope we may one day study at a future Winter School. In the meantime, he does not know what to do with Lucy whom Nature has brought to youthful perfection - so he kills her off before she can be spoilt. Alongside the riddle of premature death as seen by the one left behind, there is the kindred question of human beings' relation to the natural law, the ravages of time and how to preserve glimpses of eternity.

Writing of the *Immortality Ode*, Lionel Trilling says, 'Wordsworth is talking about something common to us all, the development of the sense of reality. To have once had the visionary gleam of the perfect union of the self and the universe is essential to and definitive of our human nature, and it is in that sense connected with the making of poetry. But the visionary gleam is not in itself the poetry-making power, and its diminution is right and inevitable'.[37]

Perhaps at the stage Wordsworth had reached in Germany he was not yet ready for this message and his Lucy was forced to die before she had to pass through Experience to reach 'the faith that looks through death, / In years that bring the philosophic mind'. Perhaps the poet himself was not yet sufficiently reconciled to the loss of the visionary experiences he describes in *The Prelude* to go on to the next stage. To quote Lionel Trilling again, 'we fulfil ourselves by choosing what is painful and difficult and necessary, and we develop by moving toward death'.[38] Wordsworth was to describe something of this after the death of his brother John in the poem on Peele Castle when he said, 'A deep distress hath humanised my soul', but in 1799 that was still some years away.

Let us briefly touch on the fifth Lucy poem, which was not in *Lyrical Ballads*, not having been written till 1801, but which is always grouped with the others. Wordsworth did try to get it included in *Lyrical Ballads* 1802 edition, to be put in after 'A slumber did my spirit seal'.[39] In 1801 it had been sent to Mary Hutchinson as 'a short poem to be read after "She dwelt among . . ."',[40] so he obviously thought of it as associated with these poems. In these days, when we are supposed to regard ourselves as Europeans and most people do not think they have had a holiday unless they have been abroad, often being woefully ignorant of the British Isles, and when increasing areas of the countryside are covered with tarmac, it is as well to remember what this little island (island no longer now, with its Channel Tunnel) has meant to generations of British people. 'This precious stone set in the silver sea, / Which serves it in the office of a wall / Or as a moat defensive to a house' has over the centuries resisted invasions from Spain, France, Holland and Germany, to name but a few. Wordsworth, back from spending the coldest winter of the century isolated at Goslar, rejoiced in the return to his own country.

[35] *Thirteen-Book Prelude* xi 337-8.
[36] *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton, NJ, 1947), p. 243.
[37] *The Liberal Imagination* (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 153-4.
[38] Ibid. 154.
[39] *PW* ii. 472.
[40] *EY* 333.

I travelled among unknown men,
In lands beyond the sea;
Nor, England; did I know till then
What love I bore to thee.

'Tis past, that melancholy dream!
Nor will I quit thy shore
A second time; for still I seem
To love thee more and more.

Among thy mountains did I feel
The joy of my desire;
And she I cherished turned her wheel
Beside an English fire.

Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed,
The bowers where Lucy played;
And thine too is the last green field
That Lucy's eyes surveyed.

Of course Wordsworth did go abroad again and some of his deepest experiences happened in other countries, as reported in *The Prelude*, but this poem emphasizes the sense of security and warm relationship that an area known and loved since childhood can give to the native. Lucy again lives close to the natural world, the turn of her wheel conveying the cycle of her life from infancy when she 'played' in its 'bowers' to her last look at the loved English landscape before she died. The narrator derives comfort from the continuity and familiarity of the background he had shared with her. Yes, indeed, we want to exchange love and companionship with human beings of all nationalities, but that is not incompatible with cherishing our own culture, history and countryside. We all need roots. In fact, it is only by first loving our own immediate circle that that love can be extended outwards. As T. S. Eliot says,

> Thus love of a country
> Begins as attachment to our own field of action
> And comes to find that action of little importance
> Though never indifferent.[41]

The security provided by one's own country and one's own home, whether urban or rural, and in whatever part of the world, is essential to a balanced personality and one cannot understand that feeling for a particular place which is at the root of Wordsworth's poetry unless to some degree one shares it. It was from the British countryside that Wordsworth absorbed his passionate love of Nature and took the imagery that makes these poems. Margaret Drabble even says, 'England, to the poet, *is* Lucy; to him at least the two things meant the same. In missing one, he misses the other; in discovering the depth of his love for one, he discovers the depth of his love for the other'.[42]

When Wordsworth felt that his own country was wrong, in the war with France, he expressed it most touchingly. It was, he said,

[41] *Little Gidding*.
[42] *Wordsworth* (London, 1966), p. 66.

> A conflict of sensations without name,
> Of which he only who may love the sight
> Of a village steeple as I do can judge . . .[43]

This is certainly an uncomplicated poem which gains its strength from the deep feeling informing it. But the Lucy poems as a group? 'We like *difficult* poetry', said my students. Are the Lucy poems easy? Well, I can only say that I do not remember anyone leaving the group. How *could* Jeffrey have supposed that this sort of simplicity was 'a positive and *bona fide* rejection of art altogether'?[44] I think the native of Rydal that Canon Rawnsley questioned was nearer the truth, in spite of himself, when he said that Wordsworth's poetry was of the kind 'as taks a deal o' mastery to mak' oot what's said,' and was 'real hard stuff, and bided a deal of makkin'.'[45] Restraint and understatement do not require less but more skill to gain their effects than elaboration and surely carry a punch that can perhaps be obtained in no other way. David Ferry speaks of 'A slumber did my spirit seal' as 'at the powerful centre of the poet's art'.[46]

In Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), where he proposes 'to adopt the very language of men' and to abstain from the devalued currency of poetic diction, he also makes plain the sophisticated artistry that he will use and I think *has* used to perfection in the Lucy poems:

> Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction, all these imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling which will always be found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions.[47]

Sevenoaks

[43] *Thirteen-Book Prelude* x 265-7.
[44] Review of *Thalaba* in *Edinburgh Review* 1 (1802) 63-83.
[45] *Reminiscences of Wordsworth Among the Peasantry of Westmoreland* (Glasgow, 1968), p. 33.
[46] *The Limits of Mortality* (Westport, 1978), p. 76.
[47] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974), i. 150.

Strange Alteration Wrought on Every Side: *The Brothers*

By GORDON K. THOMAS

WHEN GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH, he pronounced each step of the process good: the light, good; the dry land, good; the grass and herbs and trees, good; the heavenly bodies, good; the sea creatures and the fowls of the air, good; every beast of the earth, good. And when God made man and woman in his own image, and gave them power and dominion and sustenance, gave them their piece of the earth, their little estate, 'behold, it was very good' (Genesis 1.31).

Similarly, Wordsworth is the poet, the good poet, of the Nature of the earth, of the light and of the land and sea, of the plants and the beasts. But he is not just good but *very* good when he is the creator of human life. There is where he achieves most fully his inspired effort to 'enlarge our feelings of reverence for our species, and our knowledge of human nature'.[1] It is hard to think of a better example of such achievements than *The Brothers*.

In October and November 1799, Wordsworth led Coleridge on a walking tour of the Lake District. Joseph Cottle, the Bristol bookseller, joined them for part of this lengthy excursion, as did Wordsworth's brother John. But it was the two poets who made the full and very thorough tour. They climbed Helvellyn. They even visited such places, rarely touched by 'even the hardiest travel writers of the day',[2] as the deep and distant valley of Ennerdale. Characteristically, Wordsworth reported their travels in a letter to Dorothy, noting mostly bad weather but some 'very magnificent' sites they visited and 'some grand mountain scenery'.[3] It was Coleridge's first time in the Lake District, and the traveler's journal, characteristic of *him*, which he kept is full of rapturous comments on what he saw - 'O, God, what a scene!' - and wry comments on other tourists the poets occasionally encountered.[4] In his journal entry for 12 November 1799, Coleridge writes of a young man named James Bowman, whose story they had just heard in Ennerdale - a young man, says Coleridge, who 'broke his neck by falling off a crag. He is supposed to have lain down and slept - walked in his sleep, and so came to this crag and fell off. (This was at Proud Knot on the mountain called Pillar up Ennerdale.) His pike staff struck midway and stayed there till it rotted away'.[5] Such are Coleridge's words describing the story the two poets had heard. And one of the things I want to observe with you as we go along today is how Wordsworth built on this very fragile foundation of a tale a great dramatic poem in which the main interest is not in natural objects, though they are present in the poem, nor in events or plot, those elements which Coleridge chose to emphasize in his brief telling; no, Wordsworth's main interest in the poem, and, as I have already said, his greatest achievement, is the creation of character, of human personality, of human life!

[1] *The Letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth* ed. E. de Selincourt, *The Early Years: 1787-1805* rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967) (hereafter *EY*), p. 315.

[2] Hunter Davies, *William Wordsworth* (London, 1980) (hereafter Davies), p. 105.

[3] *EY* 272.

[4] Davies 108.

[5] *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford, 1940-9) (hereafter *PW*), ii. 467.

Just what conversations on this subject the two poets may have had, and just when Wordsworth decided to turn this anecdote into a poem is not certain, but near the end of the following month, Wordsworth was writing to Coleridge, who was by then back in London, to report, 'I have begun the pastoral of *Bowman*',[6] that is, the poem based on the tale of the sleepwalking death of James Bowman which they had heard at Ennerdale. It was not, by the way, to remain a tale of the Bowmans for very long, for one of the changes made by Wordsworth on the original anecdote they had heard in Ennerdale was to change the last name of the Bowman brothers to Ewbank, which was actually the name of their maternal grandfather, who also figures in the poem. I suspect the poet chose the name Ewbank for its suggestions of sheep and shepherding, in preference to the hunting connotations, which would have been pointless here, of the name Bowman - only the first of several hints I mean to look at here at how very carefully Wordsworth weighed every word in the poem for its sound, its connotations, and its meanings. Mary Moorman described *The Brothers* as 'a simple tale, told in very restrained language, yet [possessing] dramatic pathos of a high order'.[7] Quite right, but 'restrained language' does not result in a high order of dramatic pathos unless it is very precise and *accurate* language, as it is everywhere in *The Brothers*. Some of the poem he wrote in the woods along the shore of Grasmere Lake, those woods which he and Dorothy afterwards always called, and which are still often called, Brothers Wood, in honor of that composition. Dorothy records in her journal entry for 1 August 1800 that she made a clean copy of *The Brothers* that day,[8] and it was immediately sent off to the publishers. In a note to the 1800 edition, and many subsequent editions as well, Wordsworth said that *The Brothers* 'was intended to be the concluding poem of a series of pastorals',[9] but it was never printed that way. But what is certain is that Wordsworth and most of those close to him knew that in this poem he had accomplished something truly great, and something new. The first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, the poet had emphasized in his Advertisement in 1798, and he now re-emphasized, had been an *experiment.*[10] And he had sounded genuinely surprised that that first edition had, in fact, 'pleased a greater number [of readers], than I ventured to hope I should please'.[11] But now with this second edition, and with yet more experiments and more of the kind of novelty represented by *The Brothers*, Dorothy was doubtless expressing not only her own opinion but the expectations of her brother as well when she wrote that 'the second [edition of *Lyrical Ballads*] is much more likely to please the generality of readers'.[12] A significant change here over much of the spirit of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* is that observed by Mary Moorman: 'There is in *The Brothers*', she writes, 'no concern with the derangement produced by grief as in *The Thorn* and *The Mad Mother*; we have moved away from the moonlight world of *The Idiot Boy* and *Peter Bell* into the light of common day.'[13] It was a 'normality', she says, which characterized the poetry of 1800, for Wordsworth was daily traveling in a direction opposite from the 'sickly and stupid German Tragedies' which he

[6] *EY* 277.

[7] Cited in *Lyrical Ballads* ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London, 1963) (hereafter Brett and Jones), p. 299.

[8] *The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* ed. Mary Moorman (London, 1973), p. 32.

[9] *PW* ii. 467.

[10] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974) (hereafter *Prose Works*), i. 116, 118.

[11] *Prose Works* i. 118.

[12] *EY* 298.

[13] Cited Brett and Jones 299-300.

explicitly denounced in 1800.[14] And it is certain that many of Wordsworth's poems of the 1800 edition, including *The Brothers*, have remained among his most popular and most loved works, perhaps especially because they deal so directly and accurately with real human life and feelings and language.

I'd like to pause for a moment on Wordsworth's insistently calling *The Brothers* a 'pastoral' poem. The poet meant exactly what he said, but he also knew that in using the term *pastoral* he was claiming a place for 'The Brothers' in a very old and, by his day, increasing strange and strained tradition. The Greek poet Theocritus, living and writing in the court of Ptolemy in the third century BC, wrote a series of poems, the *Idylls*, recalling his childhood in Sicily and relating the lives and loves of shepherd-folk there to the courtly scenes of Alexandria. Two centuries later, Virgil, in his *Eclogues*, idealized human relationships in beautiful pastoral settings which had nothing to do with the courtly life of Rome. The tradition continued and flourished in the Renaissance, Edmund Spenser representing perhaps its greatest achievement in England. We know how thoroughly Wordsworth admired Spenser,

> that gentle bard
> Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State,
> Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven
> With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace -
> I called him brother, Englishman, and friend[15]

as he writes in *The Prelude* about his early days in Cambridge, where the spirit of Spenser still seemed to hover. And when he first began to consider a career in poetry, says Wordsworth, the example of Spenser was very much on his mind, and he wondered whether he himself might,

> resting at some gentle place
> Within the groves of chivalry . . . pipe
> Among the shepherds. (*Thirteen-Book Prelude* i 181-3)

But in fact, by Wordsworth's day, as I said, the pastoral tradition as I have been describing it, at least in its outward appearances, was very far from being well-suited to Wordsworth's poetic instincts and gifts. It is a tradition of increasingly false conventions, highly stylized and highly artificial. We see it at perhaps its worst, its greatest extreme of artificiality, when Queen Marie Antoinette had constructed for herself and her very wealthy Parisian friends, during Wordsworth's lifetime, at immense expense to the French nation, her little pastoral hamlet on the ground of the Palace of Versailles, where she and her aristocratic chums could play at being shepherds and shepherdesses - without sheep, of course, and without any pastoral responsibilities or labours. This is very far indeed from the real life of real people in humble circumstances which Wordsworth chose for his subject matter. The pastoral tradition would need to be refurbished. Pastoral poetry, as Northrop Frye says, 'is not really about shepherds, but about the complex society [which] the poet and [his] readers inhabit, with the friends of the poet, or people like them, disguised by rural dress and flowery aliases,

[14] Brett and Jones 249.

[15] *Thirteen-Book Prelude* iii 279-83. Quoted from *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, Stephen Gill and M. H. Abrams (New York, 1979).

still exhibiting sophisticated sentiments, manners, and speech'.[16] This kind of masquerading would have very little appeal for Wordsworth. But as William Empson wrote in his study of the tradition entitled *Some Versions of Pastoral*, the pastoral poet makes use of the tradition and conventions and artificialities so as to 'put the complex into the simple'.[17] To 'put the complex into the simple' - it's a telling phrase, and a description with which Wordsworth would certainly have concurred, an aim with which he would certainly have coincided in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800; indeed he uses almost the same language in the 1800 Preface to describe one of his chief aims, that of conveying to the 'Reader's mind' an essential 'sense of difficulty overcome',[18] which I consider another and equivalent telling phrase.

The difficulty in real life, the complexity, that inspired Wordsworth to write what *he* called 'pastorals' - that is, *Michael* and *The Oak and the Broom* and *The Idle Shepherd-Boys* and *The Brothers* - was not the masquerading of Marie Antoinette and her kind, much as he is certain to have despised such foppery. It was, as he wrote the Whig statesman Charles James Fox in that famous letter of January 1801, the 'most calamitous effect' which industrialization and government policy were having at that very time on the English nation, leading to 'a rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society' - that is to say, at least in Cumberland and Westmorland, among shepherds and their families and friends. It was the very real fear that this hardy race faced extinction, their 'bonds of domestic feeling', as the poet continued in the letter to Fox, already 'weakened, and in innumerable instances entirely destroyed'.[19] The key ingredient of this genuine pastoral existence is, to be sure, not sheep but *pasturage*; Wordsworth's pastors, he says, are 'small independent *proprietors* of land . . . called statesmen [i.e., men of estates], men of respectable education who daily labour on their own little properties', and those little tracts of land serve 'as a kind of permanent rallying point for their domestic feelings'.[20]

It is clearly as part of this complexity that the poet speaks in *The Brothers* of the Ewbank brothers, two orphans, as church-going and educated - 'they could write, aye and speak too, as well / As many of their betters' (ll. 279-80)[21] - but also identifies them as 'the last of all their race' (l. 76).

So Wordsworth was concerned here, as he told Fox, about the destruction of a way of life. And indeed, finality echoes throughout the poem in the very choices of words: The 'homely Priest of Ennerdale' (l. 16), full of impatience and disgust, rises 'at last' to confront the supposed tourist Leonard (l. 30); they converse while standing over 'the last of those three graves' (l. 198); the orphans' grandfather, after a lifetime of being 'buffeted with bond, / Interest and mortgages; at last he sank, / And went into his grave before his time;' (ll. 214-16); the Priest says of the missing Leonard, 'When last we heard of him / He was in slavery among the Moors / Upon the Barbary Coast', an experience which, 'no doubt / . . . ended in his death' (ll. 316-17, 319-20); and the question always on Leonard's mind throughout the poem, which he finally brings himself to ask only after more than three-fourths of the poem is gone, at line 356, concerns his brother: 'How did he die at last?' *The Brothers* is a poem

[16] Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker, and George Perkins, *The Harper Handbook to Literature* (New York, 1985), p. 339.

[17] Cited Frye 339.

[18] Brett and Jones 266.

[19] *EY* 314.

[20] *EY* 314-15.

[21] Line references and quotations from *The Brothers* are from the text in *PW*.

about extinction, exactly in tune with the fear of extinction about which Wordsworth wrote to Fox. The words *last, dead, death, die, died,* repeat over and over like an echo among the rocks and cliffs of the vale, a grim refrain of finality, perhaps best summed up in that line describing the state of the two little orphans after their grandfather died: 'Well - all was gone, and they were destitute' (l. 304). And then on top of all this, the whole poem is set in a cemetery! The Priest remarks rather glibly that 'The thought of death sits easy on the man / Who has been born and dies among the mountains' (ll. 182-3), and Wordsworth is at pains in a note appended in 1800 to emphasize 'the tranquility, I might say indifference' with which 'the inhabitants of these mountains' very commonly think and talk upon the subject of death'.[22] All the same, as we learn from Leonard's attitude in the poem, this is a superficial and unconvincing judgment. Whatever does it mean that one who 'dies among the mountains' has easy thoughts of death? After his death he is relaxed about death? The point seems to be that the death of another is commonly not a great matter 'among the mountains'. But the death of a brother, when one hoped and expected to find him alive? There are no easy thoughts nor scenes of easy death in the poem itself.

In short, I want to call *The Brothers*, not in the traditional sense but in a *strict* sense, a *pastoral elegy*, 'to shew that men who do not wear fine cloaths can feel deeply' (*EY* 315) when 'a Shepherd dies / By some untoward death among the rocks' (ll. 154-5). And even more when the shepherding way of life dies among the rocks. To this end Wordsworth, so typically, revolutionizes a false convention and a dying tradition, that of the so-called pastoral poetry, to turn our attention, as he says, away from 'vanity and pride'[23] to a 'class of men [which] is rapidly disappearing,' and to attempt to 'stem this' evil.[24]

It is certainly worth noticing, by the way, just how the poet works out his depiction of these deep feelings. Most modern readers are even more resistant to poetic expressions of deep feelings than were readers of 1800. But Wordsworth, as he tells us in the 1800 Preface, was determined 'to follow' and to enable *us* to follow 'the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature'.[25] He was as disgusted as the most enlightened modern reader could be by the 'degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation' of too many readers of his own day, by their neglect of good literature in favor of 'frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse'.[26] And yet the story on which *The Brothers* is based offers all kinds of opportunities for sickliness and stupidity and extravagance - the 'frantic' plot details of death by sleepwalking, slavery among the Moors, the oppression and finally the extinction of a humble but ancient and genuinely noble family. This is the kind of sensational story that always intrigued Wordsworth, but it was also the kind of sensationalism he almost invariably resisted, downplayed, undercut. Observe how much more sensationalism there is in Coleridge's brief summary of the story they had heard in Ennerdale than in all of Wordsworth's rather lengthy poem. Because Wordsworth was not primarily telling the *story* at all. He tempers these sensational elements with a most artful layering of irony - the Priest with his outspoken disdain for silly tourists in general and that one particular 'moping son of Idleness' (l. 11), who seems to him determined 'to go wild alone' (l. 106), upon whose

[22] *PW* ii. 467-8.
[23] *EY* 314.
[24] *EY* 315.
[25] Brett and Jones 247.
[26] Ibid. 149.

forehead the setting sun will surely, by close of day, 'Write fool' (l. 112) - a stream of misdirected abuse that occupies almost a fourth of the poem. And even when the Priest shifts gears into something resembling decent human sympathy, he repeatedly misses the point, wants to talk about irrelevancies, misunderstands Leonard's responses, and never realizes that it is not others as he claims but only himself who 'wanders from the truth' (l. 177). The incongruity of the character and his role in the story borders constantly on the comic, even though he speaks his incongruities while standing in a graveyard. Yet he is not a man without feeling, only without much understanding, and one who will feel deeply and with considerable embarrassment when he eventually gets Leonard's letter of explanation sometime after the poem ends.

But Leonard feels all. And yet with him the poet seems to me even more skillful. How to reveal and express such feelings as those that come to him as his worst fears are realized and his deepest longings frustrated? Well, not by sickly and stupid German ranting! I am reminded most of all, except for other passages in Wordsworth himself, of that immensely touching scene in *King Lear* in which Cordelia and her mightily abused father are reunited and reconciled:

> *Lear.* Methinks I should know you, and know this man,
> Yet I am doubtful: for I am mainly ignorant
> What place this is, and all the skill I have
> Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
> Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,
> For (as I am a man) I think this lady
> To be my child Cordelia.
> *Cordelia.* And so I am; I am.
> *Lear.* Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray weep not.
> If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
> I know you do not love me, for your sisters
> Have (as I do remember) done me wrong:
> You have some cause, they have not.
> *Cordelia.* No cause, no cause. (IV vii 63-74)

Not to belabour the point, Cordelia's profound sense of mingled grief and triumph, relief and loss, becomes here not the stuff of grand and ranting eloquence but of half-mumbled words of simplicity and repetition - almost as if she could not bear to waste the energy of sorrow on mere language.

Leonard Ewbank shows the same economy of expression, and with similar effect. But observe with me the difficulty for a poet in employing this technique. The only tool the poet has is language, and here he must express the deepest feelings by something very much like an avoidance of language. When we first see Leonard contemplating the graveyard, hoping thus without words, without having to formulate any verbal questions, that 'he thence might learn / If still his Brother lived' (ll. 82-3), Wordsworth presents to us his state of mind, its avoidance of language, almost the avoidance of verbal thought, lest any thought that might come would be too painful a confirmation of the truth which Leonard already half-senses and fears. He has always known that his younger brother James was weaker than he, and many a time he carried James on his back across the storm-swollen stream. Leonard had only left his brother behind while he himself went to sea out of desperation 'for his Brother's sake' (l. 305). When the priest describes what happened to James right after Leonard left, he is only telling what Leonard already feared:

From his youth
James, though not sickly, yet was delicate;
And Leonard being always by his side
Had done so many offices about him,
That, though he was not of a timid nature,
Yet still the spirit of a mountain-boy
In him was somewhat checked; and, when his Brother
Was gone to sea, and he was left alone,
The little colour that he had was soon
Stolen from his cheek; he drooped, and pined and pined (ll. 331-40)

- for a moment seeming to confirm what Leonard has more than half believed all these years, that in going off to make money to save his brother, he had only abandoned him to an early death. No wonder, then, that Leonard comes home and first seeks for news of James in the graveyard. It is in this morbid state that Wordsworth first takes the reader into Leonard's thoughts, using that same Shakespearean-Cordelian technique of very simple and spare language and telling repetition. Look with me at not just the sounds of words but the very arrangement of words in the lines beginning with line 81. Leonard wants to 'learn'

If still his Brother lived, or to the file
Another grave was added. - He had found
Another grave

- daring poetic technique, I call this, plainness and simplicity of language, repetition, just the right spareness, starting two consecutive lines with the same two words, and what words! -

Another grave, near which a full half hour
He had remained, but, as he gazed, there grew
Such a confusion in his memory,
That he began to doubt; and even to hope
That he had seen this heap of turf before, -
That it was not another grave. (ll. 83-90)

Not every writer can get away with these complex but seemingly simplistic repetitions - three times 'another grave' in seven lines! And Wordsworth well knew that not every reader would stand for it. To the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* he added an extensive note, specifically referring to *The Thorn* but clearly applicable to *The Brothers* just as well, and, as he says too, to 'many other Poems in these volumes'. He wants, he says, to make a crucial distinction between repetition and tautology:

> There is a numerous class of readers who imagine that the same words cannot be repeated without tautology: this is a great error: virtual tautology is much oftener produced by using different words when the meaning is exactly the same. Words, a Poet's words more particularly, ought to be weighed in the balance of feeling, and not measured by the space which they occupy upon paper. For the Reader cannot be too often reminded that Poetry is Passion: it is the history or science of feelings; now every man must know that an attempt is rarely made to communicate impassioned feelings without something of an accompanying consciousness of the inadequateness of our own powers, or the deficiencies of language. During such efforts there will be a craving in the mind, and as long as it is unsatisfied the Speaker will cling to the same

> words. . . . The mind luxuriates in the repetition of words which appear successfully to communicate its feelings.[27]

This is one of those infinitely wise comments that makes me wish we had far more from Wordsworth revealing a great deal more of what he obviously knew about the science and the nature of human language and human feeling.

I've already mentioned other repetitions in the poem, those words referring to finality, last things, death. But the most drummingly repeated word in *The Brothers* is the word *grave* (or *graves*), which appears and reappears here more than in any other poem of Wordsworth except the very long pieces of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*. Such repetition is ironic as well as highly appropriate since within the poem itself we see Leonard, who has come home to be part of a social community, full of hopes and expectations 'to lay his bones among us' (l. 325), transformed by the end into a lone wanderer who will, we realize, never have a grave of his own on the earth, for he is surely destined for burial at sea, a solitary on his way to becoming an ancient 'grey-headed Mariner' (l. 435), the transformation based on his discovery summed up in that one very telling line, line 329, that 'his kindred all were in their graves'. Here is the other side of the story from that presented, for example, in *We Are Seven*. There the child is content to play among her family's graves and enjoy a picnic there and feel the kinship of those who are buried. But Leonard is no child, and his vivid memories of his happy childhood now bring no comfort. There are just too many graves!

> Now,
> This vale, where he had been so happy, seemed
> A place in which he could not bear to live. (ll. 424-6)

Well, there are more than 3600 words in *The Brothers*. I have been dwelling at what I hope is not exorbitant length on just half a dozen or so of these words and the patterns of repetition in which the poet weaves them. Do you begin to have a sense, as I do, that similar attention, and profitable, could well be paid to hundreds more of those words? I promise not to indulge myself that far lest I alarm your patience. But I don't want to leave off this placing of key words under the microscope of attention without mentioning just one more. Wordsworth himself writes, in the 1850 *Prelude*, that

> Visionary power
> Attends the motions of the viewless winds,
> Embodied in the mystery of words[28]

- a passage I find filled with magic and with the revelation of divinity itself: 'the mystery of words'! But of all the words in the language, one word took an early hold on Wordsworth and resounds throughout his work as a powerful link, a reverberating image of what I might almost dare to identify as Wordsworthism itself. In his Preface of 1815, the poet cites the word *hang* (with its variants of *hangs*, *hanging*, *hung*) as his very first example of how 'the full strength of the imagination' can be present 'in the use of one word'.[29] He cites Virgil and Shakespeare and Milton as his antecedents here, but the truth is that no poet has ever done so much with *hanging* as Wordsworth himself. Let me remind you of some of those uses, and let me ask you to notice too how often the poet puts the word *hang* or its variant

[27] Brett and Jones 289.
[28] *Fourteen-Book Prelude* v 595-7.
[29] *Prose Works* iii 31.

at the end of a line, hangs it there, or at the very beginning of a line, or to end a phrase, for still more effect:

In *Peter Bell*, the poet, perched in his flying boat, sees and hears 'the woods . . . / Rocking and roaring like a sea' (ll. 11-12) and exclaims,

> How tunefully the forests ring!
> To hear the earth's soft murmuring
> Thus could I hang for ever! (ll. 73-5)

In *The Egyptian Maid*, the lady sails up to 'the Cornish sands' (l. 1) in 'a bright Ship that seemed to hang in air' (l. 4), a description surely owing a good deal to Milton's description, praised by Wordsworth as so poetically gratifying, of 'a fleet' that 'Hangs in the clouds'.[30]

In *The Excursion*, the poet envisions the day when Science and Materialism will cease to be inseparable partners:

> Her dull eye,
> Dull and inanimate, no more shall hang
> Chained to its object in brute slavery. (iv 1254-6)

And in *The Prelude*, the *hanging* images are very numerous and powerful; I cite only a few:

> Oh, when I have hung
> Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
> And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
> But ill sustained, and almost as it seemed,
> Suspended by the blast which blew amain,
> Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that time
> While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
> With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
> Blow through my ears; the sky seemed not a sky
> Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds! (*Thirteen-Book Prelude* i 341-50)

And Wordsworth's fellow-students at Cambridge

> in forlorn and naked chambers cooped
> And crowded, o'er the ponderous books they hung
> Like caterpillars eating out their way
> In silence. (iii 453-6)

And in the midst of the French Revolution, Wordsworth

> Inly . . . revolved
> How much the destiny of man had still
> Hung upon single persons. (x 136-8)

And, in the 1850 version, in the concluding ascent of Mount Snowdon,

> a light upon the turf
> Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up,

[30] *Paradise Lost* ii 636-7; see *Prose Works* iii. 31.

The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud. (*Fourteen-Book Prelude* xiv 38-41)

In the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, the poem which immediately precedes *The Brothers* is the wonderful lines, later published as part of Book 5 of *The Prelude* on the Boy of Winander, that boy whom we know from the earliest manuscripts to have started out, at least, as Wordsworth himself. The memories crowd in from Hawkshead days, that lovely village where

the Church-yard hangs
Upon a slope above the village school (ll. 27-8)

and near where the boy shouted and hooted at the owls and they shouted back until another *hanging* image intervenes:

And, when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mock'd his skill,
Then, sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents, or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, receiv'd
Into the bosom of the steady lake. (ll. 16-25)

Well, I have reviewed some of my favourite *hanging* images in Wordsworth partly because they *are* some of my favourites, and partly to emphasize what a favourite image it is for Wordsworth; he loves to leave crucially symbolic objects, but especially characters, hanging suspended while the imagination works upon the images. And of course he does it in *The Brothers* too, repeatedly. Like a Boy of Winander gone to sea, and also reminiscent to me of Coleridge's Mariner in the tropical waters of the Pacific, Leonard Ewbank somehow manages to stay in the Vale of Ennerdale while sailing on the ocean. He is 'half a Shepherd on the stormy seas' (l. 46).

And when the regular wind
Between the tropics filled the steady sail
And blew with the same breath through days and weeks -

(I'm going to interrupt myself here and call your attention to the blank verse of this poem. Wordsworth speaks in the Preface of the need for readers to pay attention, to see beyond 'blind association', to make our 'blind associations' into alert perceptions, specifically to bring conscious understanding to 'the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction'.[31] When the 'construction' under examination is blank verse, as it is in *The Brothers*, the 'works of . . . metre of the same or similar construction' are, of course, especially the plays of Shakespeare and the epics of Milton.

[31] *Prose Works* i. 150.

I don't mean to take away anything from Wordsworth's immense genius and originality by saying that his blank verse most often owes much of its spirit and sound to Milton. But in *The Brothers*, this highly dramatic piece, this little play, I think the blank verse, while still very much Wordsworth's own and uniquely his, owes something of its spirit to the intensely poetic yet also naturally conversational sounds of the blank verse of Shakespeare's plays. And so, that superb description of the tropical sea wind, a wind *not* seeming to issue from the mouth of God like so many of the winds blowing through Wordsworth's poetry [think of the opening line of *The Prelude*: 'Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze'] but a boring and unchanging and predictable wind, day after day the same, syllable after syllable, as in line 48, which I read a moment ago, where ten one-syllable words, with essentially no rhythmic, that is to say, no iambic, variation, blow across the page with the sounds of a pointless wind that comes from nowhere and goes - nowhere.)

> . . . when the regular wind
> Between the tropics filled the steady sail
> And blew with the same breath through days and weeks,
> Lengthening invisibly its weary line
> Along the cloudless Main

- but Leonard knows how to escape from these tropical doldrums -

> he, in those hours
> Of tiresome indolence, would often hang

(There is that *hanging* image, just the same image as those that appear repeatedly in *The Prelude* and the Boy of Winander.)

> he . . . would often hang
> Over the vessel's side, and gaze and gaze;
> And, while the broad green wave and sparkling foam
> Flashed round him images and hues that wrought
> In union with the employment of his heart,
> He, thus by feverish passion overcome,
> Even with the organs of his bodily eye,
> Below him, in the bosom of the deep,
> Saw mountains; saw the forms of sheep that grazed
> On verdant hills - with dwellings among trees,
> And shepherds clad in the same country grey
> Which he himself had worn. (ll. 49-65)

And there are two more hanging things in *The Brothers*, images which might be trivial elsewhere but which go to the very heart of feeling in this poem. Both of them are put, for dramatic irony, in the mouth of the same priest who has earlier denounced Leonard for *hanging* there alone so long in the graveyard ('that moping son of Idleness / Why can he tarry *yonder*?', ll. 11-12). It would be a happy day, says this priest, if Leonard were ever to come home again, but it's not going to happen.

> And those two bells of ours, which there you see -
> Hanging in the open air - (ll. 313-14)

He doesn't even finish the thought: the bells are silent and will evermore be silent, at least for Leonard. And the priest, of course, is not aware, as we readers are, that everything in this

poem is paired - two bells, two springs, two waterfalls, two brothers - except that the bells are fallen silent, and the

> two springs which bubbled side by side,
> As if they had been made that they might be
> Companions for each other

have been struck by lightning, so that 'one hath disappeared' (ll. 141-5). And the two brothers have already lived separate existences, never to meet again but without even realizing it, for the last dozen years and will never even lie in side-by-side graves. All this realization makes 'those two bells . . . / Hanging in the open air' another symbol of the suspension that runs right through the poem. And finally we are left with that last dismal image of James Ewbank falling headlong off the cliff, where

> in his hands he must have grasp'd . . .
> His shepherd's staff; for on that Pillar of rock
> It had been caught mid-way; and there for years
> It hung; - and mouldered there. (ll. 402-5)

Almost as if James's shepherd's staff had to remain suspended in the air, like a perturbed spirit, until his brother Leonard could learn of his fate. Such is the finality of this poem. If the images of hanging can bring mountains and sheep and shepherds by the power of the imagination to 'the bosom of the deep', in the end hope collapses and imagination flounders where hanging and mouldering become grimly synonymous. I am reminded of the murderer in *The Prelude*, 'hung in iron chains' until he and the gibbet mast and all around him were 'mouldered down' and 'gone' (xi 289-91).

The very essence of the poem *hangs* in such juxtapositions and contrasts. It is one of Wordsworth's favorite techniques, and certainly one of his most effective. And it originates for him in the awareness that it is by exposing us to such contrasts that Nature shapes our human mind. I claim the awareness of this natural technique as the core belief of Wordsworth on how the mind moves and grows. The evidence is everywhere, but I'll cite just four extremely familiar lines from another of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Many a poet and philosopher and lover and dreamer has gone into the woods and there felt a deep and emotional and uplifting spirit of Universal Good. And Wordsworth could do that too. But he was more likely to be aware of not only the Good but the contrasts:

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil *and* of good,
> Than all the sages can.[32]

The kinds of contrasts I am talking about are, in fact, by their very nature *dramatic*, and particularly clear and emphatic in a little dramatic piece with just two contrasting speakers. Stephen Parrish has written a good deal about Wordsworth's success as a *dramatic* poet, and he calls *The Brothers* Wordsworth's 'greatest dramatic success', for 'nowhere is [his] dramatic achievement better illustrated than in *The Brothers*'. Parrish observes how, 'within its limits

[32] *The Tables Turned* 21-4; my emphasis.

the poem is an impressive compound of dramatic irony, pathos, and psychological realism'.[33] But this *dramatic* excellence was observed right from the beginning. The earliest review of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* that we have is that which appeared, anonymously, in the *British Critic* for February 1801, and which was written by John Stoddart, William Hazlitt's brother-in-law. *The Brothers* certainly engaged his attention, and he was not reluctant to make a comparison between Wordsworth as dramatic poet and the great Shakespeare himself. What makes *The Brothers* Shakespearean in its achievement, he writes, is that 'the interest is so dramatically wrought up, the minute touches are so accurately studied, the general effect is so insensibly produced, and appeals so forcibly to the heart, as to rank its author far beyond the reach of common-place praise or censure'.[34] To be sure, not everybody so heartily approved of Wordsworth as dramatist. We have that notorious and incomprehensible passage in *Biographia Literaria* where Coleridge says that Wordsworth ought to stick to writing philosophical poetry and that one of the prominent and characteristic defects of Wordsworth's poetry is 'an undue predilection for the dramatic form'. No poem of Wordsworth's, except for his full-length play *The Borderers*, exhibits 'the dramatic form' so clearly as *The Brothers*. When we remember the repeated insistences of William and Dorothy to the printer about emphasizing the dramatic character of the poem by printing the names of the speakers in this little drama each in a line by itself,[35] we realize how determinedly dramatic the poet was being. But what is Coleridge's objection to Wordsworth's 'undue predilection for the dramatic form', other than the fact that it does not satisfy his insistence on the philosophic? 'It presents a species of ventriloquism', he says, in which the poet pretends that other characters are speaking when in fact the poet himself is merely holding a monologue.[36] But while such criticism might apply to parts of the conversations which make up *The Excursion*, they do not apply at all, not at all, to *The Brothers*. I realize that it is reasonable and often proper to allow great weight to Coleridge's critical pronouncements. But this is a piece of criticism which makes no sense. Where is the dreaded ventriloquism here? The priest certainly does not speak for Wordsworth, and neither does Leonard Ewbank - though it's proper to acknowledge that he may speak in some eerily prophetic way for William's brother John whose almost dying wish, five years after 'The Brothers' was published, was, like Leonard, to 'be enabled to retire from the [sailing] Service and live with his Family'.[37] It's hard to know what kinds of positive and charitable thoughts to think about this kind of a criticism, or about Coleridge's other remark in *Biographia Literaria* where he calls *The Brothers* 'that model of English pastoral, which I never yet read with unclouded eye,' and then proceeds to attack its diction, perversely citing for the attack lines and passages which he well knew had long since been revised.[38]

Whatever Coleridge may have been up to, I want to insist again that Wordsworth's choice of the dramatic form for *The Brothers*, a dramatic dialogue of two such contrasting characters as Leonard and the priest, was precisely suited to his desire to point up for the reader 'the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude and dissimilitude' - that rather awkward but irreplaceable phrase which he uses in the Preface of 1800. What a

[33] 'Dramatic Technique in the *Lyrical Ballads*', *Wordsworth: 'Lyrical Ballads'; A Casebook* ed. Alun R. Jones and William Tydeman (London, 1972), p. 152.

[34] *British Critic* 17 (1801) 128.

[35] *EY* 289-90.

[36] *Biographia Literaria* ed. George Watson (London and New York, 1965), Chap. 22, p. 258.

[37] *EY* 581.

[38] *Biographia Literaria* 217n.

powerful principle this is is shown by the claims Wordsworth makes for its universal application to intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, and moral aspects of life:

> This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction on the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it take their origin: It is the life or our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings.[39]

We see this principle in action everywhere in the *Lyrical Ballads*, and very much the same kind of thing that Wordsworth does with the priest and Leonard in *The Brothers*. A very strange conversation they have. Leonard comes full of questions, and he knows that the priest has all the answers. But they keep missing each other, and Leonard can never even bring himself to speak to the priest to let him know who he is. And finally their whole conversation is encapsulated in the brief lines where, as the two men leave the cemetery, one looks back and addresses the dead, and the other hears nothing.

We can probably argue, though not very profitably, I fear, forever, over whether there is a great artistic truth lurking in Wordsworth's claims in the 1800 Preface that the language of good poetry and the language of good prose are essentially the same thing. Coleridge didn't approve of the claim, and he calls it a part of Wordsworth's 'mistaken theory', among those 'principles of poetry which his arguments are insufficient to support'.[40] Byron had great fun with it, of course, writing snidely of 'the simple Wordsworth',

> Who, both by precept and example, shows
> That prose is verse, and verse is merely prose;
> Convincing all, by demonstration plain,
> Poetic souls delight in prose insane. (*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* 241-4)

But Wordsworth warns us that 'in judging these Poems [we should] decide by [our] own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of others'.[41] So now let me bring you back to *The Brothers*, and to that culminating moment. The language is *essentially* just what Wordsworth said, the language of prose, the language of 'real life'. But this determined ordinariness of the language of some of Wordsworth's best poetry only serves to illustrate his greatest claim for his theory, that the master knows his tools, that in the hands of a great poet, ordinary language becomes extraordinary poetry, that, as he says, for a true poet 'the powers of language are not so limited as [many] may suppose'.[42] Here are the lines I want to leave in your ears and in your minds which for me exemplify all these great and highly original claims, beginning at line 408; the Priest and Leonard are still together, but their conversation, such as it has been, is over:

> Both left the spot in silence;
> And Leonard, when they reached the church-yard gate,
> As the Priest lifted up the latch, turned round, -
> And, looking at the grave, he said, 'My Brother!'
> The Vicar did not hear the words. (ll. 408-12)

[39] Brett and Jones 265.
[40] *Biographia Literaria* 246.
[41] Brett and Jones 270.
[42] Brett and Jones 272.

Well, is this prosy stuff really poetry? For me it is, of the very best kind.

And then come those two lines - 'He went on shipboard, and is now / A Seaman, a grey headed Mariner' (ll. 448-9) - seeming almost perverse in their abruptness. But to me they are not perverse; rather, perfect Wordsworth, for they have everything to do with *choosing* the hopes that spring out of human suffering. Leonard has lived his whole life for his brother, but now in the churchyard he finds that brother, like everyone else he has ever loved, is dead, and even the place he has loved has become 'a place in which he could not bear to live'. So what *can* he do? Well, he can endure; he makes a choice: he does not seek oblivion in opium, nor go off to some bleak hillside for the next twenty years to cry out, 'Oh misery! Oh woe is me! oh misery!' He had not planned to spend the rest of his days at sea, but it is a life, one that can be productive, useful, social, even happy. Leonard is certainly no Ulysses; the notion of such a comparison would horrify Wordsworth. But as Leonard sets out on his life's work once again, I can just barely imagine him saying, quietly, of course, and only to himself, something about his having made a conscious decision about, well, striving, seeking, finding - 'and not to yield!'

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The Ancient Mariner Controversy

By SEAMUS PERRY

(i)

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, Coleridge returns to the poem, more so than to any other, continually making textual changes, often very substantial ones, as if unable to leave the thing alone. This returning and retouching, which goes on for over 30 years, happily creates the kind of controversy textual scholars dream about: Jack Stillinger, for example, has recently calculated that at least 18 different texts of the poem exist, each of which naturally has its proper claim on the Coleridgean student, and the exhibition of all of which naturally requires the protracted labour of textual scholars.[1] But the editorial controversy is not my concern here: that whole issue is a tortuous question of pragmatics, including the pragmatics of recognizing the reader's mortality; and I am almost tempted to say that it would be wrong for a Coleridgean to dwell too much on anything pragmatic, since Coleridge's own life was so shining an example of what you can still get done while making almost no allowances whatsoever to pragmatism of any kind.

Yet for all that, the kind of behaviour on Coleridge's part that gives rise to the editorial controversy is not unconnected with my subject. Such compulsive returning to the poem might suggest that the idea of controversy has a different kind of relevance: a private one, as if the poem embodied a controversy or division within Coleridge himself, one which successive revisions to the text might promise to work out or to clarify. The sporadic compulsiveness of Coleridge's returns to this disastrous story oddly mirror the Mariner's own compulsive need to tell and re-tell his tale: 'at an uncertain hour, / The agony returns: / And till my ghastly tale is told, / This heart within me burns' (ll. 582-5).[2] Coleridge is frequently identified with the Mariner in the memoirs of his circle, and quite quickly came himself to think of the figure he chose to re-christen with affectionate familiarity 'the Old Navigator' as a kind of *alter ego*. So, in a characteristically oblique way, the protracted history of Coleridge's revisions may be rather like the serial, retrospective redefinitions of belief and identity which one can read in the successive stages of Wordsworth's confessional epic, *The Prelude*.

The obliquity, though, is what matters. One can deplore, or enjoy, the Anglican accretions in *The Prelude*, but, even if the resulting work is a confusing collage of old and new, one can have little doubt about the broad direction of the movement in Wordsworth's beliefs. With the changing *Ancient Mariner* on the other hand, as so often with Coleridge, nothing is so sure. Admittedly, the great Empson read the major changes of 1817 as evidence of a massive Trinitarian reaction, Coleridge hastily seeking to cover the tracks of an earlier, heretical self;[3]

[1] Jack Stillinger, 'The Multiple Versions of Coleridge's Poems: How Many *Mariners* Did Coleridge Write?', *Studies in Romanticism* 31 (1992) 127-146, p. 127. Martin Wallen's elaborate and useful *Coleridge's Ancient Mariner: An Experimental Edition of Texts and Revision 1798-1828* (New York, 1993) presents 1798, 1800 and 1817 texts with other variants noted. (Since this paper was read at Grasmere, Professor J. C. C. Mays, editor of the poems for the Bollingen *Coleridge* has told us there are over 100 versions of the poem: the difficulties multiply.)

[2] All quotations from the poem are taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poems* ed. John Beer (1963; repr., London, 1991).

[3] William Empson, Introduction to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Selected Poems* ed. William Empson and David Pirie (1972; repr., Manchester, 1989) (hereafter Empson).

but one wonders whether Empson's own disgust at the Trinitarian God led him to find out too readily an exemplary tale of young genius corrupted by awful orthodoxy. For in truth no-one has more honest scruples about the implications of the traditional Christian beliefs than Coleridge, or more openly entertains heterodoxies; and this includes the later Coleridge, much later even than the 1817 additions to *The Ancient Mariner*: for example, in *Aids to Reflection*, as John Beer has argued, it is the *continuity* of so many of the terms and patterns of thinking which is more striking and stirring than any stark, revolutionary rupture.[4] This makes a certain intuitive sense: how permanently interesting a mind would Coleridge have if his career were quite so broken-backed an affair as all that? To be sure, Coleridge may, like (to choose some very different poets) John Donne or Wystan Auden, portray his own intellectual life-story as a sort of Pauline 'conversion', away from a shabby, sophistic empiricist Unitarianism and towards the enlightened Tory spirituality of an Anglican 'Plato-Plotino-Proclian Idealism'.[5] But the very extremity of such a self-representation may suggest a degree of wishfulness, a wishfulness expressing itself, perhaps, in kinds of self-dramatizating invention.

The Ancient Mariner is one of the places where this kind of driven self-dramatization can be seen at work. I think Coleridge returns to the poem so often because it contains, by a sort of accident, some of the central intellectual divisions of his life, divisions which he is forever attempting, and failing, to resolve into orderliness and reconciliation. What these are, and why they should still be interesting to us, I hope at least to suggest; and one approach to the task is to describe the odd occasion of the poem's genesis, part of Coleridge's brief, doomed, perfectly happy collaboration with Wordsworth in Somerset in the last half of 1797 and the first half of 1798. Like many elements of Coleridge's thinking, the relationship with Wordsworth seems crucial in working out the full implications (rather more crucial, I would argue, than modern accounts of Coleridge usually allow for; but that is an argument for another place).

The poem first came into being, as did almost all Coleridge's important works, by a kind of fruitful accident. The first version of the poem was written between November 1797 and May 1798, and was originally intended as a magazine poem, the fee for which would subsidize an excursion Coleridge was to take with the Wordsworths. The impulse for the project was, it seems, an enthusiasm on Coleridge's part for collaboration with his newly established friend. An earlier attempt at such partnership, to write a poem in three cantos on the death of Abel, had foundered when Wordsworth found himself quite unable to produce anything toward the line tally; the garrulous Coleridge, meanwhile, had scribbled off a complete canto. The scheme was abandoned. A few days later, during an eight-mile walk to Watchet, 'William and Coleridge employ[ed] themselves in laying the plan of a ballad, to be published with some pieces of William's', as Dorothy wrote, the ballad in question being *The Ancient Mariner*.[6] But this attempt at collaboration was no more successful: later in life, Wordsworth remembered contributing 'certain parts' of the plot, and some isolated lines, but recalled that '[a]s we endeavoured to proceed conjointly our respective manners proved so widely different that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate

[4] See the editor's introduction to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* ed. John Beer (Princeton, NJ, 1993) (hereafter *Aids to Reflection*), p. xcv ff.

[5] *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. Kathleen Coburn et al. (4 vols. to date; London and New York, 1957-) (hereafter *Notebooks*), ii. 2784.

[6] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805* ed. E. de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967) (hereafter *EY*), p. 194.

from an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog'.[7] *The Ancient Mariner* 'grew and grew till it became too important for our object, which was limited to our expectation of five pounds, and we began to talk of a Volume'.[8] So, it appears, from the attempt at collaboration on this poem two quite distinct kinds of 'manner' separated out, to be retrospectively rationalized in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* as the two voices of *Lyrical Ballads*: one focussing on 'common subjects' and the other on 'supernatural subjects', the first Wordsworth's, the second Coleridge's. Distinction, to reverse a favourite Coleridgean maxim, was here proving itself to be division, even if it was a fruitful sort of division.

This failure of the poets successfully to collaborate on the poem can be seen not only as the contingent origin of the *Lyrical Ballads* volume, but also as sign of the first stirrings of a deep controversy about poetic theory between the two men. It seems important that it is *Coleridge* who proposes collaboration, as if seeking to enact literally a partnership of powers: for it is exactly the way in which the poem embodies the controversial forces within Coleridge's own thinking which made it so provocative a poem for him. To see what elements are opposed in this internal controversy, spilling out into more public controversy with Wordsworth, we should turn to Coleridge before the Mariner. Both formally and thematically we will be able to see already there the competing elements of his thinking which fall, as it were accidentally, into the open, given narrative occasion of *The Ancient Mariner* and there assume their intrinsic, oppositional, Coleridgean pattern.

(ii)

Even a keen watcher of modern poetry in the 1790s would not have guessed that Coleridge was set to write anything like *The Ancient Mariner*: the last thing one would have expected was a ballad, and least of all one in medieval fancy dress. Insofar as one would have associated him with any particular verse form, it would probably have been the thumping Miltonics of his biggest and most ambitious work, *Religious Musings*; one might have him marked down as a charming, if not terribly substantial, follower of William Lisle Bowles, the writer of some charming 'effusions'; or, if one had a sharp eye, as the poet of an interesting new kind of blank verse meditation which sought to bring together the description of landscape and natural beauty with abstract theological speculation. (Alternatively, of course, if one were a more political animal, one might dismiss him as a provocative left-winger who had stirred up a good deal of trouble and whose name stank.)[9]

From his own point of view, Coleridge's literary ambitions in 1797 had been most immediately directed toward theatrical tragedy. He had been writing a play, *Osorio*, since receiving what seemed like a commission from Sheridan at Drury Lane in February, and read the two-and-a-half acts he had finished to the Wordsworths when he visited Racedown in June; Wordsworth made positive noises and read Coleridge his own tragedy, *The Borderers*, the following morning. He also read Coleridge an early version of *The Ruined Cottage*, but this, interestingly, seems to have made less impact at the time: their minds, clearly, were on other kinds of poetry. Coleridge clearly made a deep impression: 'You had a great loss in

[7] The Fenwick note to *We are Seven*; reproduced in *Lyrical Ballads* ed. Michael Mason (London, 1992) (hereafter Mason), pp. 368-9.

[8] Mason 368.

[9] Coleridge himself appreciated the stink his name might bring with it and warned his publisher not to use it on the title page: *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. E. L. Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71) (hereafter Griggs), i. 412.

not seeing Coleridge', wrote Dorothy to Mary Hutchinson, 'He is a wonderful man';[10] and Coleridge was no less amazed, particularly at the qualities of Wordsworth's play - 'absolutely wonderful' he thought it, and later pulled strings for it to be considered for performance by Covent Garden.[11]

Neither play prospered: when *Osorio* had at last been ground out of an increasingly unenthused Coleridge, it was only to receive a rejection from Drury Lane: Sheridan's apparent commission proved nothing like so firm a commitment as Coleridge had thought. At about the same time *The Borderers* met a similar fate at Covent Garden: the contemporary stage was evidently not a likely forum for the kinds of poetry either man wanted or seemed best able to write. Rejection of the plays also implied, rather more vulgarly but importantly, that the stage was not going to be a source of income: Wordsworth's financial worries feature largely in his letters of the period, and, despite Dorothy's unconvincing protest before *The Borderers* was submitted that '[w]e have not the faintest expectation that it will be accepted', its rejection proved rather a great set-back.[12]

In fact, the shortage of cash exerts a perhaps unexpectedly important influence on the kind of poem *The Ancient Mariner* turned out to be. For it is, generically, however subtle and individual Coleridge's variations on the generic norm are, a supernatural romantic ballad, and in that deliberately set to chime in with an enthusiasm for the gothic and weird: this taste was all the rage in the theatre too, 'Monk' Lewis's play *The Castle Spectre* being a particular current hit. A letter Coleridge writes to Wordsworth from Shrewsbury in late January 1798 suggests that the superb and galling success of *The Castle Spectre* particularly exercised Wordsworth after his own play's failure; Coleridge adopts a more judiciously even-handed tone, even singling out Lewis's 'great & peculiar excellence' at writing ballad songs, though he agrees that Lewis's stock gothic sensationalism is pretty deplorable.[13] But by this time, money was not anything like so pressing for Coleridge, and so Lewis's success would not have been so irritating a contrast with the fortunes of *Osorio* as it evidently was with *The Borderers* for Wordsworth: for by then Coleridge had successfully won the heart of Tom Wedgwood, erratic, drug-taking, manic-depressive and rich, and had accepted a lifetime annuity of £150 from him and his brother.[14] How calculating Coleridge's cultivation of his philanthropist had been is not clear; Wordsworth, who it seems was never much liked by Wedgwood, appears to have felt some irritation about his friend's spectacular good fortune: the disgruntlement, perhaps, of one too stubborn to be much good at that kind of charm offensive.

However that may be, the painful contrast Wordsworth draws between his own bad luck and the popularity of Lewis's meretricious gothicism is interesting. In March, several months after *The Borderers* had been turned down, Wordsworth is still grumbling on to Tobin, about the now heavily symbolic success of *The Castle Spectre*, moodily telling his correspondent 'if I had no other method of employing myself Mr Lewis's success would have thrown me into despair' (the brave tone of rather self-admiring stoicism seems so exclusively Wordsworth's). 'No doubt you have heard of the munificence of the Wedgwoods towards Coleridge', he writes a few lines later, almost as if listing another example of aesthetic

[10] *EY* 188.
[11] Griggs i. 324, 358.
[12] *EY* 194.
[13] Griggs i. 379.
[14] Griggs i. 371.

dismerit rewarded, adding grimly: 'I hope the fruit will be good as the seed is noble'.[15] With £150 a year for life, he may well have thought, Coleridge could afford to be disinterestedly even-handed about Monk Lewis. For Gothic was coming to represent all the Wordsworth's new poetic set itself against: sensational, not meditative; an affair of extraordinary narrative, not internal, probing self-exploration. More generally, as Stephen Gill remarks, from this time on he is predisposed to think of popular success as intrinsically artistically compromised.[16]

Wordsworth's distrust of Gothic effect plays its part in the mixed feelings he comes to bear toward *The Ancient Mariner.* It was, after all, like Wordsworth's ballads (or at least so Wordsworth protested when Southey published his mean-spirited review) written specifically to make money: the serious creative energies were being put elsewhere, into the newly-conceived philosophical epic, *The Recluse.* Although he became more protective towards them in later life - and even came to hold up approval of *The Idiot Boy* as a sign of true literary judgment - at the time the ballads were poems (and *The Ancient Mariner*, particularly, a poem) purposely designed to play off the vulgarities of public taste and get published for money: in a sense, they were imaginatively compromised from the start. Conversely, Coleridge's qualified indulgence towards Lewis's spooky play comes when he is midway through his own exercise in preternatural literature; so there may be reasons other than the diffuse good feeling brought by unexpected wealth to account for his generosity towards Lewis's tenuous merits.

What is emerging in the spring of 1798 is the first sign of what Coleridge will call 'a radical Difference' between the two men as to the nature of poetry, a sense of difference which Coleridge internalizes and makes the subject of his criticism:[17] their different attitudes towards the kind of vulgar gothicism represented by Lewis are symptomatic, but do not really exhaust the matter. Yet, only months before, during that that excited encounter at Racedown in June, it must have seemed that their creative ambitions were extraordinarily in step, and that they were made for collaboration. This was not only indicated by their recent attempts to write drama modelled on Shakespeare: Wordsworth was apparently interested in the possibilities of the epic too, a kind of poetry drawiug its model from Milton; and the writing of an epic had frequently featured in the lists of prospective masterpieces that the young Coleridge set out for himself in his notebooks.

Coleridge's epic has inevitably takeu up its place in the mythology alongside all his other planned - and even publicized - but unexecuted works; but it seems to have appeared a perfectly viable possibility at the time: Lamb, for example, had no illusions about Coleridge's habit of 'taking up splendid schemes . . . only to lay them down again', yet could still seriously counsel his friend 'to write an Epic poem. . . . Nothing but it can satisfy the vast capacity of your true poetic genius'.[18] Moreover, while Wordsworth's epic aspirations do not seem to have been focussed about a particular work until Coleridge presented him with one in the spring of 1798,[19] Coleridge's own epic hopes, on the other hand, appear to have been centred more specifically on a long poem called *The Brook.*[20] This poem was,

[15] *EY* 210-11.

[16] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford, 1989), p. 133.

[17] Griggs ii. 830.

[18] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marrs Jr. (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1975-8), i. 51.

[19] See Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 352-6.

[20] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* ed. Walter Jackson Bate and James Engell (2 vols., Princeton, NJ, 1983), i. 197-8.

apparently, to integrate philosophical reflections and the scenery of the Quantocks in a fusion or juxtaposition of landscape and internal consciousness anticipating that part of Wordsworth's aborted epic which his executors chose to call *The Prelude*: hidden connections like this make you recall Garrod's *bon mot*, that in a sense Coleridge's greatest single work was Wordsworth.[21]

Coleridge's appearance at Racedown in June 1797 was a return visit: Wordsworth had visited Stowey in April, cheering Coleridge out of a gloom about (again) money; and soon after Wordsworth had left to rejoin Dorothy, Coleridge was writing to Cottle about the true nature of epic, in what sounds very like the summary of his recent conversations with Wordsworth. Their discussion seems to have started with the subject of Southey, an attractive target, no doubt, for he was rapidly becoming successful, while Coleridge worried about bread and cheese and Wordsworth lived on a diet which he heroically described as 'the essence of carrots, cabbages, turnips and other esculent vegetables'.[22] Still, there was comfort to be had from the manifest inadequacy of Southey's poetry; and this inadequacy stemmed from 'rely[ing] too much on *story* and *event* in his poems, to the neglect of those *lofty imaginings*, that are peculiar to, and definitive of, the poet. The *story* of Milton might be told in two pages - it is this which distinguishes an *Epic Poem* from a *Romance in metre*.'[23] In contrast to Southey's uninformed stumblings, Coleridge stipulated enormous, indeed self-disablingly large, criteria for the writer of epic to fulfil, telling Cottle that a proper epic would take at least 20 years to research, write and correct - perhaps *not* the most tactful thing to tell one's publisher, waiting for copy. Unsurprisingly, given the extent of the necessary groundwork, *The Brook* remained almost completely unwritten.

No such programmatic preparation marked *The Ancient Mariner*, of course; but the duration of Coleridge's imaginative engagement with the poem otherwise easily attained his stipulated epic dimensions. In other ways, too, it gestures towards the condition of epic: like the *Odyssey*, it is a poem about proving adventures at sea and an eventual return home; like *Paradise Lost*, it is about, or seems to be about, a fall from grace; and like *The Prelude*, it is an epic of consciousness, in which the important events of the poem are not military adventures, nor taken from scripture, but occurences within an individual mind or heart. There is a kind of aspirant epic stature or grandiloquence to many of the descriptions: 'All in a hot and copper sky, / The bloody Sun, at noon . . .' (ll. 111-12); or 'And ice, mast-high, came floating by, / As green as emerald' (ll. 53-4).

But it is an epic *manqué* in Coleridge's own terms, for its form is manifestly indebted to the kind of (small 'r') romantic narrative ballads to be found in Bishop Percy's *Reliques of English Poetry*, a work which lies behind the idiom of *Christabel* too (a '*Romance in metre*'). *The Ancient Mariner* is also an epic *manqué* in that the poet maintains not the impersonal authority of one inspired by a muse or the Holy Ghost, nor the sovereign confidence of one exploring the private territories of his own growth, nor even of one bearing the fruit of ten years' solid research in all human knowledge; but rather the untrustworthy voice of an old man who quite probably does not really understand the significance of what it is that he went through those many years before.

For the poem, while obviously not a piece of drama either, is in an important way strongly dramatized in its structure; and in this way, we can see it inheriting aspects of Coleridge's

[21] H. W. Garrod, *Wordsworth: Lectures and Essays* (Oxford, 1927), p. 30.
[22] *EY* 178.
[23] Griggs i. 320.

current desires to write the drama as well. For it is not, as we perhaps tend to think of it, a poem about a man who goes on a disastrous sea voyage, but a poem about a man hearing about another man's disastrous sea voyage, just as *Heart of Darkness* is not about travelling up the Congo but about sitting on a barge on the Thames hearing a man talk about making a trip up the Congo. (A similar shift of emphasis away from a description of a series of events and towards the reception of those events in the mind of a dramatically 'placed' character can be seen in Wordsworth's reworking of *The Ruined Cottage* during the spring of 1798.) And so, although Coleridge's hopes for the drama were frustrated and he grew quickly bored of writing *Osorio* anyway, his mighty epic never left the ground and he signed it over to Wordsworth in the Spring, one might see elements of both surviving in the formal conception of the poem financial need encouraged him to write.

(iii)

Those are issues of poetic form or *genre*. But what matter was it that found its best expression in this oddly hybrid poetic idiom, in which Coleridge played off the authoritative voice and ambition of symbolic, narrative epic against the 'placed' speech of a dramatized monologue?

Here, too, we must return to the hopes and achievements of the earlier Coleridge. In the letter to Cottle outlining his notion of the ideal epic, Coleridge speaks of another project he has going besides 'my Tragedy': this is 'a book of Morals in answer to Godwin'. This is another example of an unwritten Coleridgean masterpiece: the ambition to scotch Godwin's materialist, atheistical rationalism with an alternative, drawn from Coleridge's religious convictions, which would yet align itself with the forces of liberty, is a recurring project in the early notebooks and letters; and the connection between his own Christian position and the progressive amelioration of suffering naturally puts the theological problem of worldly evil high in his thoughts. Godwin has a sound theory about the existence of evil: it is caused by political injustice; but while accepting the point, Coleridge could not agree that it exhausted the matter, and set out to find a more specifically Christian way of discussing the presence of suffering.

It is, of course, a difficult point for anyone who believes at once in an omnipotent, benevolent deity and in the evidence of their eyes, one of the most famous cruces in Christian theology; but it is especially testing for the young Coleridge, for whom God had an almost material ubiquity throughout the world: the 'One Life'. The upside of this belief was that it provided a good reason for thinking the universe one, answering the deep need for unity which is so familiar a feature of Coleridge's fraught emotional and religious life: ''Tis God / Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole', as he put it in *Religious Musings*, where God is 'Nature's Essence, Mind, and Energy' (ll. 139-40). A further consequence of such an immanent and quasi-physical belief in the vibrating presence of God was a radical reconceptualisation of human consciousness: as Coleridge puts it, with appropriate hesitancy, in *The Destiny of Nations*:

> Others boldlier think
> That as one body seems the aggregate
> Of atoms numberless, each organized;
> So by a strange and dim similitude
> Infinite myriads of self-conscious minds
> Are one all-conscious Spirit, which informs
> With absolute ubiquity of thought . . .
> All his involvéd Monads, that yet seem

With various province and apt agency
Each to pursue its own self-centering end. (ll. 39-49)

It is difficult, and not remarkably elegant, but seems to say: self-conscious minds (that is, you and me) are *in fact* mere fragments of a bigger, 'all-conscious Spirit', God of course, Who composes the tiny component consciousnesses of His Monads (Monads being a rather less aggrandizing title for you and me). We persist in our lives, apparently acting of our free volition, but that's only what 'seem[s]'; the reality is that our will as much as our mental autonomy are subsumed as parts of the divine One Life.

This doctrine has its clear attractions: one's sense of proximity with God is complete, for one is part of God; religious illumination consists then of knowing oneself 'Part and proportion of one wond'rous whole' (*Religious Musings* 137). Moreover, you are no longer ultimately responsible for what you do, for those actions are simply part of the ongoing multiform existence of God, Who is, we trust, well-intentioned and infinitely wise: Coleridge was a weak rather than a bad man, a sinner (as Humphry House remarks)[24] of the unsensationally familiar variety - certainly no Byron - and this doctrine of divine necessity was no doubt temperamentally a vast relief, or, perhaps, temptation.[25]

But surprising kinds of ethical strength break through in Coleridge all the time, like rock breaking through hillside turf, and the downside of these necessitarian beliefs was not lost to him either. The most obvious drawback to such theistic inevitablism is the dark interpretation of one of its appeals: the denial of free will. Coleridge, who, unlike most theorists, actually tried to live out the theories he entertained, found this drawback out in practice. When Southey sprung the news that he was thinking of becoming a Church of England vicar, Coleridge was understandably shocked, but consoled himself with the thought that if that was what the Infinite Spirit had decided to do with the finite Monad known as Robert Southey, it would by definition work out for the best. Southey (deftly or obtusely is hard to say, as often the case with Southey) replied that he was grateful for Coleridge's good wishes; at which Coleridge exasperatedly responded that he hadn't meant to express anything like good wishes, but was obliged to believe, against all logic, that God knew what he was up to.[26] Necessitarianism is, clearly, an unreliable tool of persuasion. Moreover, if you are politically active, as Coleridge had been, righteously, properly enraged by social injustice and anxious for change and reform, to attribute the state of things so unreservedly to the enacted wisdom of God is, logically, quite incongruous.[27] An awful notion: Pitt was a Monad of the Infinite Spirit like Coleridge.

Another drawback, and a more interesting one perhaps, is that the manifest variety and difference of which the world is, to our eyes, composed does not readily tally with a conviction of Unity behind or within it. The position would seem to drift in one of two directions: either the unity is a kind of truth which rises in moments of illumination through the befuddling chaos of ordinary experience; or the divine unity is itself to be thought of as somehow fragmented amongst its monadic representatives. The first of these alternatives presents the variety of the world as a kind of illusion or bad faith, a position unlikely to appeal spontaneously to the young Coleridge, whose early notebooks are at times an implicit

[24] *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures, 1951-52* (London, 1962), pp. 18-19.

[25] See Basil Willey, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1972), p. 39.

[26] Griggs i. 159, 168.

[27] See the editors' introduction to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion* ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (Princeton, NJ, 1971) (hereafter *Lectures 1795*), p. lxiii.

running eulogy to the world's rich, particulate variety, from leaf-shapes to the appearance of urine in a chamber-pot.[28] Placing the emphasis on diversity, on the other hand, obviously undermines the supreme unity of God: as Coleridge asked a Christian friend, if God is and does everything, then where is the unity of His personality?[29] More to the point, if God is composed, in part, of the events of the world, doesn't that imply that He is, in odd minutiae of His composition, wicked? Not only does this theology risk giving Pitt *carte blanche* to carry on with divine approval, but also seems to blacken God's name by making Him, in tiny part, Pitt - which is, I suppose, the same horror seen from God's point of view.

But the appeals of the doctrine are too strong for it to be wholly renounced for some years, and so, unsurprisingly, the subject Coleridge singles out for his epic several times in the early notebooks is the nature or origin of evil: the topic would presumably, therefore, have featured in *The Brook*; the religious counselling offered to true imagination by the divine presence in nature would no doubt have played a prominent part in the structure of the poem, as it does, on a smaller scale, in *This Lime Tree Bower My Prison* or *Frost at Midnight*. Coleridge's mighty precursor in vernacular epic, Milton, had similarly undertaken the massive task of justifying God's apparently erratic behaviour to an humanity puzzled at His decision to let them suffer; so the theme would have seemed especially appropriate for an epic. As several critics have pointed out, this interest also links *The Ancient Mariner* with the projected poem on the murder of Abel and also with the related, contemporary prose fragment, *The Wanderings of Cain*. So, *The Ancient Mariner* absorbs Coleridge's epic interest in evil and associates it with the evocation of utter isolation which forms one of the better bits of *Osorio*:

> And is it then
> An enviable lot to waste away
> With inward wounds, and like the spirit of chaos
> To wander on disquietly thro' the earth,
> Cursing all lovely things? (V ii 295-9)[30]

Isolation could be interpreted as exclusion from the inclusive, divine society of the One Life: so might come together the epic theme of evil and Coleridge's recent practice dramatising burdensome solitariness.

One does not need to probe so deeply to grasp that a conviction and fear of isolation was a prominent part of Coleridge's psychology:[31] the desire to be consumed in the vast, Monad-absorbing unity of God would itself be one response to such a conviction; the desire to write in partnership with 'the Giant Wordsworth' another.[32] Immersed in this rich and testing mixture of abstract speculation and personal compulsion, Coleridge stumbled on the Mariner, taking up the happy contingency of plot suggested by Wordsworth, and freed from the burdens of his epic aspirations by the deliberate assumption of that least weighty genre, the magazine romantic ballad, one written, moreover, as a kind of medieval pastiche; and into this

[28] For a fine account of this too-often neglected aspect of Coleridge's intelligence see House, *Coleridge*, 47-50.

[29] '. . . if God *be* every Thing, every Thing is God -' (Griggs i. 192).

[30] *Osorio* is naturally not included in Beer's edition of the *Poems*; I quote here from *The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. E. H. Coleridge (2 vols., Oxford, 1912), ii. 596.

[31] For a good, wide-ranging account of Coleridge's neuroses, see 'Coleridge's Anxiety' in Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 104-36.

[32] Griggs i. 391.

sudden, unmeditated space, initially created by his requiring some cash, the young Coleridge poured himself: the poem, as Wordsworth says, 'grew and grew', like a fairy-tale beanstalk.

(iv)

One question critics ask (and, subsequently, divide over) is, as one might ask of *The Turn of the Screw*: does it really happen? We only have one person's account of what goes on during that terrible journey, and that is the Mariner's, who was hardly in his right state of mind for much of it; and, until 1817 at any rate, we only have one moralising interpretation offered us, and that is also the Mariner's:

> Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
> To thee, thou Wedding-guest!
> He prayeth well, who loveth well
> Both man and bird and beast.
>
> He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all. (ll. 610-17)

Many readers have found these lines to be an inadequate summary of the kinds of moral lesson we have been learning in the poem; but, like the final chorus in *Don Giovanni*, in which the survivors sing of the recently hell-sent Don, 'This is the end of all those who do evil', the inadequacy of the *moralitas* seems too emphatic to be anything other than dramatically deliberate. The point of such poised insufficiency would be the *impossibility* of reducing certain kinds of experience to the univocal summary and lesson-to-be-drawn which a fable or allegory normally demands.

The structure of the poem takes up what seems very like a crime-penance-redemption shape: the Mariner kills the albatross, suffers terribly, but, upon unconsciously blessing the water snakes begins a process by which, culminating in his confession and shrieving by the hermit, he acquires the spiritual wisdom and authority with which he ends his story. Certainly, when, presumably in or soon before 1817, Coleridge adds the marginal comments, this shape is apparently emphasized and the 'parable' nature of the work stressed. 'The ancient Mariner inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen'; 'By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm. . . . Their beauty and happiness. . . . He blesseth them in his heart. . . . The spell begins to break'; 'The curse is finally expiated'; 'to teach by his own example, love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth', writes the man in the margin, who seems an editorial commentator of positively Jamesian unreliability.

However, critics, knowing that in the 1790s Coleridge expresses belief in the unifying presence of God throughout the universe (the 'One Life'), are drawn to transplant those terms into the manifest structure of the poem and find it a fable of transgression against, and ultimate reconciliation with, that One Life. The most influential reading of this kind would be, I suppose, Robert Penn Warren's;[33] something like it is also proposed in M. H. Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism*.[34] There is, however, something unfitting about the reading. First,

[33] 'A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading' in Robert Penn Warren, *Selected Essays* (New York, 1958).

[34] *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London, 1971), pp. 272-5.

the allegory is not neat at the moments when it should be: the killing of the albatross is followed, after a little time, by a fair breeze, and the Mariner is thanked by the crew for ridding the ship of the ill-omened bird's fog; then, when the rot does set in it is rather noticeably the Mariner's shipmates, whose only sin was momentarily to misinterpret the kind of omen attached to the albatross, who die *en masse*. As Leslie Stephen remarked, the main moral would then seem to be: don't be on board with a man who inhospitably shoots albatrosses.[35] Then again, the fitness of the allegorical shape is manifestly undercut by the dice-throwing arbitrariness deciding the Mariner's own fate: as Einstein said, in rather different circumstances, God doesn't play dice. Arguably, the kind of redemptive moment the Mariner experiences is curiously unmomentous: pugnacious Irving Babbitt for one thought a spiritual restitution that could be effected by noticing how well sea creatures caught the light was a fairly trivial affair;[36] and, anyway, things only get worse still for a time after the moment of the snakes, unless one considers the springing-up of the crew's animated corpses a welcome respite from horror. Finally, the Mariner's return home is, to put it mildly, not the happily reintegrative event he must have been hoping for: the pilot's boy promptly loses his sanity upon seeing him, thinking he's the devil, hardly a hopeful sign; there is at least some doubt that the Mariner ever receives the 'shrieving' for which he petitions so earnestly (we never actually see it); his supposedly benevolent message of nature's sanctity is not passed on as a piece of evangelism, nor yet a piece of avuncular advice, but periodically wrenched out in a state of agony (an odd kind of state to still be in after the 'expiation' of a curse);[37] and the Wedding Guest is left, quite unlike the enlightened Wordsworth-figure of *The Ruined Cottage*, stunned and forlorn and gets up the next morning wiser, though about what exactly is hard to say, and sadder, about more, presumably, than missing the wedding feast.

But more even than all this, the testing point, especially for one so interested in the origin of evil, is how on earth, within the 'One Life', an evil act *could ever have been committed in the first place*. The One Life is not something one can opt out of, like national insurance; it is the very ground of being, of the universe itself. The Mariner's shooting of the albatross is as unpremeditated and spontaneous as is his blessing of the water snakes: one could not even claim the sin to be the - inexplicable - Luciferan self-assertion of the Monad against the Unifying Spirit. Coleridge's ideas about God clearly must play a part in the poem: there is enough sense of spiritual order vestigially present to make us doubt accounts of the poem as simply a nightmarishly parodic inversion of an otherwise well-held faith in a divinely ordered universe;[38] but it is clear that that God's part is not anything doctrinally straightforward.

That critics are so drawn to make of the poem a kind of parable is itself, perhaps, a clue. A parable is a way of reading as much as a style of writing: *The Song of Songs* can gain a place in the Bible if a parabolist or allegorist reads it with sufficient interpretative ingenuity and propgates his interpretation with sufficient persuasiveness; and what the 1817 marginal

[35] 'Indeed, the moral, which would apparently be that people who sympathise with a man who shoots an albatross will die in prolonged torture of thirst, is open to obvious objections' ('Coleridge' in Leslie Stephen, *Hours in a Library* [3 vols., London, 1909], iii. 316-43, 335).

[36] '. . . the Ancient Mariner . . . it will be remembered, is relieved of the burden of his transgression by admiring the color of water-snakes!' (Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* [Boston, 1919], p. 287).

[37] 'The curse is finally expiated', the marginal commentator announces beside line 442.

[38] As argued by E. Bostetter, 'The Nightmare World of *The Ancient Mariner*' in *Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. Kathleen Coburn (Englewood Cliffs, 1967), pp. 65-77.

comments pick up and amplify is the Mariner's own tendency to think of his experience in symbolic terms. Why should he do this?

An important observation is that whatever Coleridge believes, the Mariner himself does not believe in the One Life: he is not a late eighteenth-century non-conformist Protestant who knows about Dr Priestley; he is, presumably, within the dramatic structure of the piece, a fiteenth-century Catholic. This is more puzzling even than it might seem. For, through all his theological changes and shifts of heart, one thing can be firmly asserted about Coleridge's religious thought and this is that it was never much attracted by Catholicism. For an example: on Malta in 1804, Lady Ball, his chief's wife, seems to have made the kind of casual, inane comment which dinners require, causing (one imagines) Coleridge to bite his lip before pouring his withering anger out to his notebook in the privacy of his rooms:

> Well! (says [Lady Ball]) the Catholic Religion is better than none / Why, to be sure, it is called a Religion: but the [question] is, is it, a Religion? Sugar of Lead / Well! better that than no sugar. Put Oil of Vitriol into my Sallad - well, better that than no oil at all - or a fellow vends a poison under the name of James's powders - well! we must get the best we can - better that than none! So did not our noblest ancestors reason, or feel - or we should now be Slaves, and even as the Sicilians are at this day - or worse: for even they have been made less foolish in spite of themselves by others' wisdom.[39]

Yet the references in the poem to Maria, and the Catholic pattern of sin, penance and confession, so alien to Coleridge's Unitarianism, leave us in no doubt as to the kind of theological universe the Mariner himself inhabits. The poem is open in this way to all the imaginative possibilities of wrongness, like the narrator of *Christabel* asking 'For what can ail the mastiff bitch?' or 'Can she the bodiless dead espy?': a man clearly in the dark. Perhaps one way of reading both poems, then, is as finely dramatic studies in superstition and its misinterpretations. Coming to terms with his own bewildering, inexplicable, hallucinatory experience, the Mariner reaches naturally for the ways of explaining spiritual experience with which he is most familiar and tries to apply them to his own case: of course, they do not fit, penance is never effected and redemption never arises.

Yet, still, the needy ghost of redemption and confession flits about the poem like the bat in Maud's garden, half-answering not to Coleridgean theory, but to Coleridgean need. It is as if Coleridge adopts a Catholic framework in *The Ancient Mariner* (and *Christabel*) to exercise - and, perhaps, ideally, to exorcise - the deep anxieties lurking incongruously in his optimistic Christian determinism. Thus, he seeks to dramatize what are his properly illegitimate feelings of isolation and remorse and his longings for homecomings and atonement as the superstitious responses of his unenlightened spokesman. It is perfectly fitting that Lamb should have been one of the poem's earliest champions, for Lamb is of all the romantics most aware of the freeing imaginative possibilities created when the writer at once shields and exposes himself in the equivocal, dramatized half-light of 'middle emotions' and 'half-reality'.[40]

Now, this was not at all the scheme Wordsworth proposed as a good story for a spooky magazine poem on that walk to Watchet in the Autumn of 1797: that, in striking bad faith,

[39] *Notebooks* ii. 2324. (I have clarified some of Coleridge's informal shorthand.) And see, e.g., *Lectures 1795* 209-11, and *Aids to Reflection* 212-13, for other expressions of this anti-Papism.

[40] 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century', in Charles Lamb, *Elia and The Last Essays of Elia* ed. Jonathan Bate (Oxford, 1987), pp. 161, 164.

was going to be real Monk Lewis stuff with genuine, thrilling gothic circumstances and, presumably, the uninspired ethical scheme, derived from *Faustus*, that most Gothic relies upon. 'Certain parts I myself suggested', he modestly told Miss Fenwick in later life; but it is startling to realize that almost all the ostensibly objective events of the poem which seem to take up an allegorical shape are Wordsworth's contribution: the crime, the punishment of the crime by supernatural agencies, his wanderings about the sea; the specific detail of an albatross being the victim and of the ship being sailed by the dead men. When Wordsworth adds 'but [I] do not recollect I had anything more to so with the scheme of the poem,' one wonders what more to do with the 'scheme' there might be.[41] Significantly, the main Coleridgean contributions to the scheme seem to have been the allegory-complicating dice-game between Death and Life-in-Death and the brilliantly irresolved homecoming.

For Coleridge's alterations to Wordsworth's more normally gothic scheme of accepted spookiness make the poem, like *The Turn of the Screw* or, more so, Hogg's *Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, deliberately ambiguous. *The Ancient Mariner* exploits the fallibility of a first-person narrative of extreme events to play off the illusory inventions of the fevered brain against the objective supernaturalism of magical forces, leaving the reader, along with the Wedding Guest, caught between those rival interpretations and finding himself wrong-footed. '"Nay, if thou'st got a laughsome tale, / "Marinere, come with me",' (ll.11-12) says the misinterpreting Wedding Guest in 1798 and 1800 texts, after the bearded figure has button-holed him: he thinks the Mariner is going to tell him a funny story. '"I fear thee, ancient Mariner! I fear thy skinny hand"' (ll. 224-5), he cries at the beginning of Part IV, not unreasonably getting the wrong end of the stick again and thinking the Mariner dropped down with the rest of the crew and is walking dead. It is interesting to see that, in March 1798, as Coleridge's poem was coming to completion, Wordsworth began to write his own ballads ilustrating the power of the mind to create its own, properly illusory, kinds of reality, like *The Thorn*, itself a psychological reworking of a true gothic chiller ballad by Bürger, or that portrait of psychosomatic disease, *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*: he has been learning from Coleridge again.

One cannot say with certainty, as one probably can of *The Turn of the Screw*, that *The Ancient Mariner* is a study in what Empson called 'neurotic guilt':[42] for the quality of religious feeling in the poem seems to militate against so simple and secular a reading: 'O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been / Alone on a wide wide sea: / So lonely 'twas, that God himself / Scarce seeméd there to be' (ll. 597-600) - a powerfully ambiguous stanza, adroitly manoeuvering itself between the neurotic subjectivity of the isolated Mariner ('It was so lonely in that place that I felt, absurdly, that God was not there, whereas I know that He is everywhere') and a more universal claim of powerful metaphysical assertiveness ('So lonely that even the existence of God suddenly revealed itself to be utterly implausible'). For it is the equivocation, at once fraught and effortless, between the two kinds of reading which Coleridge exploits so brillantly; by contrast, *The Thorn* is an ingenious, almost Browningesque, dramatic monologue exemplifying the distorting lens of neurosis, but ultimately a simple enough affair, and winning its success by that simplicity.

When published in the 1800 edition, *The Ancient Mariner* is shifted out of its pride of place at the front of the book, and placed number 23 in what was now the first of two volumes, between *The Mad Mother* and the great conclusive Wordsworthian *vox humana*

[41] Mason 368.
[42] Empson 39ff.

swell of *Tintern Abbey* at the close of the volume one. One can sense Wordsworth taking over completely in the 1800 edition: only his name appears on the title-page, despite the fact that several of Coleridge's poems appeared (*The Ancient Mariner* did not appear under Coleridge's own name until 1817); and Coleridge himself wrote in a letter of 1800 that Wordsworth had sent off to the printers '*his* Lyrical Ballads'.[43] Wordsworth's increasing power manifests itself most startlingly in his successful petitions to Coleridge to move north, to nothing, and leave London, where he was set on a well-paid, highly prestigious career in journalism; Coleridge's adoration of his mighty friend - and neglect of his wife - is evident enough in his going. Once there, naturally, Wordsworth rather abandoned him in Keswick, suitably distant, where Coleridge grew ill and depressed: thus proving that authorship, as the excellent Lamb wrote, is a kind of warfare.

As if this were not sign enough of Coleridge's now secondary place in the once collaboratory partnership, the 1800 text of *The Ancient Mariner* was accompanied by a note by Wordsworth obligingly explaining to the reader all the poem's many faults, as well as its few admitted merits. There is no record of what Coleridge thought of this; other things may have preoccupied him, if we consider that his inability to finish *Christabel* had inspired Wordsworth to drop the poem altogether, thus effecting, as Stephen Parrish amongst others has argued, a disastrous blow to Coleridge's self-confidence as a poet.[44] The note by Wordsworth, which I am gratified to see its most recent editor calls 'controversial',[45] says, amongst other things:

> The Poem of my Friend has indeed great defects; first, that the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession of Mariner, or as a human being who having been long under the control of supernatural impressions might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural; secondly, that he does not act, but is continually acted upon; thirdly, that the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other; and lastly, that the imagery is somewhat too laboriously accumulated.

Can any poem of comparable stature have received so bad a press from a fellow labourer? It is like Pound publishing a bad review of *The Waste Land* or Isherwood putting in an appendix pointing out the defects of Auden's *Look Stranger!*. Wordsworth makes several points here. The lack of volition is, as we have seen, exactly the theological doctrine which Coleridge is examining, at least in part because of a terribly self-aware understanding of his own 'Strength without Power', a subject he is very likely to have discussed with his friend: we may be seeing in Wordsworth's note an uncharitable reproduction of Coleridge's own self-destructive insight.[46] The Wordsworth note's major complaint seems to be that Coleridge's poem is neither one thing nor the other. It was not clearly a tale of objective hauntings, as Wordsworth had probably proposed; nor did the Mariner seem to have learnt from the experience, as one might expect of a story with allegorical significance, for he was still stumbling round in the dark, vainly seeking to interpret his story, years later. Yet nor was it a piece of complete dramatization, as his own ballads had been, in which we would have seen the way the Mariner's nature as a seaman created his way of superstitiously

[43] Griggs i. 658.

[44] Coleridge's pain at his treatment by Wordsworth is described in Stephen M. Parrish, *The Art of the Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), p. 52.

[45] Mason 39.

[46] A suggestion made in conversation by Dr Jonathan Wordsworth.

misinterpreting things (a bizarre notion, surely, of what would have made a better poem). This latter course, it might be mentioned, would have made the poem much more like Wordsworth's *The Thorn*, for which Wordsworth helpfully provided another new note in the 1800 edition, later much ridiculed, not unreasonably, by Byron. The suspicion that Wordsworth was impatient with the equivocal nature of the work seems to be confirmed by the subtitle the poem acquired in the 1800 edition: 'A Poet's Reverie'. It pushes the work more emphatically towards the status of dramatic monologue and implies its theme to be the inventiveness of subjectivity and was almost certainly Wordsworth's idea - at any rate Lamb thought so and wrote him a furious letter on the subject. Lamb's sense that Wordsworth disapproved of the poem was characteristically shrewd: to have a 'reverie', presumably a low-grade sort of dream, sums up just about everything Wordsworth opposed in his 1800 Preface, which championed the real language of men and the passions of humans, not angels.

Wordsworth is not just being obtuse about Coleridge's poem, nor simply rivalrous, nor obliquely acknowledging the inadequate dramatization of his own *The Thorn*, though he is certainly doing these things as well; there is a radical difference in their world-views which is expressing itself in a disagreement about poetry. Coleridge's poem is haunted by an illicit sense of the denied possibility of atonement, a word which Coleridge himself was later to gloss, fancifully, as 'at-one-ment', the being-made-at-one with things: 'at-one', as Coleridge speculates, as flowers are selflessly at one with the global energies of God's nature, and, I suppose, water-snakes equally.[47] It is something like this that the marginal commentator in the 1817 text seems wishfully to claim for the Mariner, though the poet knows better. What is the use of responding to the variety of the world's enormous provision if one's soul is homeless and aimless? What if the brilliant apprehension of the world's diverse particularity - the sheer vibrant quiddity of the water-snakes - keeps feeling like the experience of a sheer, disunified, manifold chaos? What if one's conviction of the sublime, vital unity of all only serves to confirm one's own feeling of individual exclusion from that otherwise all-inclusive life? That quintessentially Coleridgean construction, 'And what if . . ?', by which religious hope and personal dejection come into unstable union, seems to find its perfect narrative form in the competing epic and dramatic perspectives of *The Ancient Mariner*.

Such deeply, tragically religious aspirations had no acknowledged home in Wordsworth's poetry: his flirtation around the turn of the century with the One Life, picked up from Coleridge, is brief and curiously non-committal in one sense, while being complete in another; and talking to Henry Crabb Robinson in 1812 Wordsworth famously announced himself in no need of a redeemer.[48] No comment could be more properly an optimist determinist's, yet no comment could seem less Coleridgean. The way the 1805 *Prelude* muscles in on Miltonic territory and seizes its Christian structures of thought for the Wordsworthian imagination is amply suggestive of Wordsworth's appropriative attitude towards the patterns of the spiritual life which Coleridge introduced with such poised dramatic equivocation in *The Ancient Mariner*, as if aware of their proper incongruity for a good Unitarian. The mere play of human perspectives, Wordsworth's foremost amongst them, is enough for the deeply, stoically humanistic vision which is Wordsworth's; the stubborn objectivity against which the individualizing subjectivities of the men and women of his *Lyrical Ballads* are measured is not the whole scheme of redemption and sacrifice, but the empiricist objectivity of the

[47] *The Statesman's Manual* in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons* ed. R. J. White (Princeton, NJ, 1972), pp. 55, 71.

[48] *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers* ed. Edith J. Morley (3 vols., London, 1938), i. 87, 158.

material world. One thinks of the young Wordsworth clinging onto the stone wall to convince himself of its external existence; or of the obsessional lines from *The Thorn*: 'I've measured it from side to side: / 'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide' (ll. 32-3). This Wordsworth, at his most moving, speaks of 'the very world which is the world / Of all of us, the place in which, in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all', in a uniquely Wordsworthian voice, in which the message of secularism acquires a practically Miltonic authority and forebearance.[49]

And there is a side of the young Coleridge which might assert itself for this world and commit himself to the obvious moral of his poem. This side would set itself against Babbitt, say that one *might* seek salvation in the sheer concreteness of its variety and the particularity of its diverse fecundity - that the water-snakes *are* enough - and agree with Louis MacNeice that the world is benevolently crazier and more of it than we think, incorrigibly plural.[50] (As he excitedly urges himself in an early notebook entry, 'But go & look & look!'.)[51] This side of Coleridge finds in the effortless, atoning innocence of the objective world, 'something out of me', what John Beer calls so well 'a whole world of relief':[52] 'The silly buckets on the deck, / That had so long remained, / I dreamt that they were filled with dew' (ll. 297-9). The One Life holds out for the young Coleridge all this world and blesses it with the organising inspiration of the deity.

But there is another side to Coleridge, one which says with Wallace Stevens, 'that we live in a place / That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves / And hard it is in spite of blazoned days', and finds that MacNeice's generously pluralistic craziness is but a kind of chaotic lunacy.[53] One loses a sense of that deep unity which should make sense of the diversity of experience and restore it all, oneself included, to the benevolence of order. This homeless, suffering Coleridge will come to search for routes to atonement altogether elsewhere, out of nature, coming eventually to see the natural world as nothing less than a wily witch set to confuse and obfuscate the spiritual life, and the redemption apparently brought by water-snakes to be simply an illusory fantasy. The full development of this position is a later phenomenon, but its seeds are already there in the equivocations of the early poem. *The Ancient Mariner* is poised unrepeatably between a conviction of hope and an awareness of hopelessness, between the conviction of an allegorical structure and the implication that that structure is quite subjectively perceived and actually misrepresents a quite arbitrary, meaningless series of events. Coleridge is uniquely enabled by the simultaneous authority and non-committedness of dramatized epic at once to preach a natural atonement and secretly to confess an implicit sense of isolated neediness. His compulsive returning to it is a compulsive returning to the difficult, anxious uncertainties which the later, more corpulent Highgate Sage garrulously strove to talk himself through, but of which the perpetually present evidence of his young poem must have stood as permanent reminder.

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[49] *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* x 725-7, in *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, Stephen Gill and M. H. Abrams (New York, 1979).

[50] *Snow* in Louis MacNeice, *Selected Poems* ed. Michael Longley (London, 1988), p. 23.

[51] *Notebooks* ii. 2102.

[52] Coleridge, *Poems* 172.

[53] *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, in Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poems* (London, 1955), p. 383.

Lamb's Reading of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800)

By DUNCAN WU

LAMB'S DETAILED CRITIQUE of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) is well known, and his remarks on this important work have rightly acquired a canonical status.[1] He was not only one of its earliest readers, but one of its shrewdest. However, the precise details surrounding his reading and acquisition of the volumes themselves have not hitherto been explained. His letter to Wordsworth of 30 January 1801 begins: 'Thanks for your Letter and Present. - I had already borrowed your second volume'.[2] Marrs makes no attempt to guess whose copy Lamb might have 'already borrowed', but he does suggest that Wordsworth's 'Present' to Lamb may have consisted of no more than the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800).[3]

Marrs' suppositions are entirely justified by Lamb's earlier comments. On 6 August 1800 he wrote to Coleridge: 'Pray give me an order in writing on Longman for "Lyrical Ballads." I have the first volume, and, truth to tell, six shillings is a broad shot.'[4] That he should go out of his way to tell one of the book's authors that he needed only the second volume would suggest that only one was sent. A few days later, on 9 August, he told Manning that Wordsworth and Coleridge 'have contriv'd to spawn a new volume of Lyrical Balads, which is to see the Light in about a month, & causes no little excitement in the *Literary World*'.[5] In fact, publication took longer than expected, and *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) was published *c.* 25 January 1801.[6] The next word on the subject from Lamb is his letter of 30 January 1801, thanking Wordsworth for 'your Letter and Present'.

What happened during the intervenient period? The answer, or at least part of it, lies in Wordsworth's Longman accounts, now preserved at the Wordsworth Library, Grasmere.[7] The first sheet of accounts are dated 16 January 1812, and cover the preceding 12 years, from his first dealings with the firm. It contains several entries relevant to Lamb's reading of Wordsworth's volume:

1801	
Jan 23	3 Lyrical Ballads boards M^{r} RW
	1 do Vol 2 M^{r} Stoddart
Jan 26	6 do 2 Vols M^{r} Hutchinson
Jan 29	1 Lyrical Ballads 2 Vols M^{r} Lambe

This reveals Wordsworth's 'Present' to Lamb to have consisted of one copy of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) - that is, '2 Vols' of the title, which were sent to 'M^{r} Lambe' on 29 January. Lamb's famous critique of the work is postmarked 30 January: apparently he wrote to Wordsworth as soon as he received it.

[1] See Lamb to Wordsworth, 30 January 1801, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marrs Jr. (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1975-8) (hereafter Marrs), i 265-9.

[2] Marrs i 265.

[3] See Marrs i 268n1.

[4] Marrs i 220.

[5] Marrs i 222.

[6] See Mark L. Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years 1800-1815* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), p. 111; *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800* ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY, 1992), p. 31.

[7] The accounts are catalogued as WLMS Box 6/Bundle 8/1. I am grateful to the Chairman and Trustees of the Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere, for permission to publish.

From whom might Lamb have 'borrowed' a copy of *Lyrical Ballads* volume 2 prior to that date? The Longman accounts indicate that no copies were issued prior to 23 January, so Lamb must have 'borrowed' someone else's copy between then and 30 January. There are, in fact, only a few candidates. The only recipients of copies debited from Wordsworth's account up to 29 January are 'Mr RW' (Richard Wordsworth, the poet's brother), John Stoddart, and 'Mr Hutchinson'.[8] It is possible that Lamb knew Wordsworth's brother, but there is no reason to think that he was a particular friend, and no evidence that they ever exchanged books. Thomas Hutchinson may have been known to Lamb through Wordsworth, but Hutchinson lived in Durham, and again there is no reason to think that Lamb was in the habit of borrowing any of his books.

This leaves John Stoddart, who was sent one copy of volume 2 of *Lyrical Ballads* on 23 January - prior to the volume's official publication. There was good reason for Wordsworth to send one to him. For one thing, he was a friend, having been one of the earliest visitors to Dove Cottage in April and October 1800, during work on the new crop of *Lyrical Ballads*.[9] Rather more importantly from Wordsworth's point of view, he had in December 1800 asked Stoddart to review the new edition. Stoddart worked quickly. Having received a copy on 23 January, he showed the finished review to John Wordsworth (the poet's seafaring brother) on or shortly before 30 January, the same day on which Lamb wrote to Wordsworth.[10] Stoddart's eulogistic account was published in *The British Critic* for February 1801. Stoddart had been known to Lamb since at least 9 June 1796 when Lamb described him to Coleridge as 'a cold hearted well bred conceited disciple of Godwin'.[11] That acquaintance might have only a marginal significance were it not for the fact that Lamb is known to have been seeing Stoddart, and to have shared books with him, during early 1801. On 27 February 1801 Lamb wrote to Manning, enclosing a copy of Dyer's *Poems* (1801) annotated by 'myself and a learned Translator of Schiller, - Stoddart Esqr'.[12] Lamb does not say when these marginalia were entered, but it is at least significant that Stoddart and Lamb were in the habit of sharing books *in early 1801* - and it raises the distinct likelihood that Lamb's first perusal of *Lyrical Ballads* volume 2 was of Stoddart's copy. Significantly, the paragraph in which Lamb tells Manning about the copy of Dyer's *Poems* also refers to *Lyrical Ballads*.

The Longman accounts therefore confirm that Lamb was sent both volumes of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) debited from Wordsworth's account on 29 January 1801, justifying his thanks for 'your Letter and Present'. The evidence indicates also that he had seen the copy of volume 2 sent to John Stoddart on 23 January during the preceding days. Incidentally, it is intriguing that both Lamb and Stoddart saw the new volume before its author did. In late February 1801 Wordsworth told Wrangham: 'My 2nd Vol: of L.B. has been out a month; we have not yet seen it ourselves'.[13]

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[8] Probably Thomas Hutchinson (1773-1849), brother of the Hutchinson sisters. He visited Dove Cottage in October 1801.

[9] Reed 60, 96-7, 97-8.

[10] 'I have seen Stoddarts review but I thoug[h]t it too flattering I mean too much of a panegyric', John Wordsworth told William; see *The Letters of John Wordsworth* ed. Carl Ketcham (Ithaca, NY, 1969), p. 82.

[11] Marrs i 22.

[12] Marrs i 276.

[13] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), p. 319.

Reviews

RODNEY STENNING EDGECOMBE, *Leigh Hunt and the Poetry of Fancy.* Farleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses: London and Toronto, 1994. ISBN 0 8386 3571 7. Pp. 276. £30 hardback.

ON A POSTER advertising an exhibition in Hampstead in 1984 to mark the bicentenary of Leigh Hunt's birth, the Jack-of-all-literary-trades was styled: Poet, Author, Dramatic Critic, Political Journalist, Essayist, Biographer, Wit, Publisher, Friend. To this list could have been added 'Translator'. Rossetti saw fit to declare Hunt to be 'the greatest translator England has produced'. It is, moreover, an attribute that Charles Lamb includes in his complementary couplet:

> Wit, poet, prose man, party man, translator -
> Hunt, your best title yet is Indicator.

In H. S. Milford's meticulously edited Oxford Edition of Hunt's poetry, published in 1923 and, needless to record, long out of print, about 120 pages out of some 500 comprise Hunt's translations from Greek, Latin, Italian and French poetry.

In his enlightening and admirably judged progression through Hunt's poetry, Edgecombe stops short not unreasonably of Hunt's translations. He follows, however, Milford's broad generic groupings of Hunt's poems in all their variety. Both editor and critic sensibly acknowledge that a chronological presentation of Hunt's poetic works is pointless, since he is not a poet whose thought and technique discernably develops. Furthermore, he was a persistent reviser of his poems, and in his tinkering revisions rarely improved upon the first flush of his inspiration.

Although Edgecombe does not include Hunt's translations in his discourse, his approach to Hunt's own poems and verses appears to match Hunt's translating practice: 'I read closely', Hunt wrote, 'and with a due sense of what the poet demands'. What Hunt implicitly demands of Edgecombe, he has been given: an appreciation of his poetry on its own terms, within the acknowledged limitations of Hunt's own objectives, tastes and versifying skills. Simply stated in his Preface - understated in my view - Edgecombe aims to show the reader 'how to enjoy the minority of his (Hunt's) decidedly minor poetry.'

Sharing 'enjoyment' is the dominant aim of Hunt's literary endeavours. In several ways he declares it, for instance, when he writes:

> Every lover of books, scholar or not, who knows what it is to have his quarto against a loaf at his tea, to carry his duodecimo about in his pocket, to read along country roads or even streets, and to scrawl his favourite authors with notes, ought to be in possession of Coleridge's poems, if it is only for *Christabel*, *Kubla Khan* and *The Ancient Mariner*.

Stimulator, indicator, and, here, discriminator - and it is these roles that Edgecombe shows himself well able to exercise in *Leigh Hunt and the Poetry of Fancy.* His eleven pages of selected bibliography list articles and essays galore on the various facets of the man and his writings, but Edgecombe is providing the first exclusive study of Hunt as poet. Until now, Hunt's readers - may their tribe increase! - have had only the more broadly based studies of Richard Brimley Johnson (1896), Edmund Blunden, and, recently, James R. Thompson's *Leigh Hunt* (1977).

Hunt made no great claims for his poetry himself. Indeed, in practice he was not discriminating in his choice of apt metrical forms, in his flights of fancy, or in his handling

of narrative structure. At their worst, as Edgecombe readily illustrates, his versifyings are trivial, arch, self-indulgent, elbow-nudging and clod-hopping. And Edgecombe will presume to tell you, dear reader, that the one poem of Hunt's that everybody knows, *Abou Ben Adhem*, is 'one of his least distinguished' poems. Though he praises the metrical roll leading up to 'the great credal statement': 'Write me as one that loves his fellow-men', Edgecombe finds the weakness of the poem in its 'nerveless sagging meter'.

But the implication of 'one of the least distinguished' is the demonstrated qualities of other, more distinguished poems. For instances, Edgecombe's proposals include: parts, chiefly descriptive, of *The Story of Rimini* (what an excellent radio commentator Hunt would have made!) and Hunt's Hampstead sonnets, written while Hunt was confined in Surrey prison in the cause of free speech and writing; his 'magisterial' sonnet, *The Nile*; his uncharacteristicaly trenchant and rumbustiously challenging attack on the glorification of military display and warfare in *Captain Sword and Captain Pen*; the heady sensuousness of his scene-paintings in *Hero and Leander* and *Bacchus and Ariadne*; his ebullient free-wheeling *Ballad of Robin Hood*, and his several relaxed and fertile essay-poems on the pleasures of domestic and suburban life-style, such as *A Rustic Walk and Dinner*.

In a referentially wide-ranging first chapter, *Fancy and Effects*, Edgecombe sets Hunt's aims and practice as a poet in their appropriate aesthetic context. As a poet of domestic and recreational Fancy, Hunt is a rococo artist in the mode of Watteau, airy, delicate, curvilinear in form, profuse in depiction of a rose-tinted view of Nature. With no aspiration to evoke the sublime, the 'masculine' power of a Wordsworthian imagination, Hunt chose to inhabit the fecund, 'feminine' domain of Fancy, drawing substance from the reflective and ornate poetry of his much loved Gray and Collins. In a fading Age of Sensibility, Hunt wrote his poetry as a pleasurable escape, to enrich his own and his reader's leisure.

As a prisoner of the State while writing *The Story of Rimini*, he turned his quarters, he tells us in his *Autobiography*, 'into a noble room. I papered the walls with a trellis of roses; I had the ceiling coloured with clouds and sky; the barred windows I screened with Venetian blinds; and when my bookcases were set up with their busts, and flowers and a pianoforte made their appearance, perhaps there was no handsomer room on that side of the water.'

This is affirmative action, not head-in-sand escapism. As Edgecombe justly concludes: 'Hunt's right to recreative escape was earned. He probably did more for liberty than all his detractors put together.'

For liberty, we should be eternally vigiliant. For why? Not only to resist its predators, but that we may have scope to enrich our leisure.

London DAVID JESSON-DIBLEY

The Arden Shakespeare: *Titus Andronicus* ed. Jonathan Bate. Pp. xvi + 308. ISBN 0 415 04868 0. *King Henry V* ed. T. W. Craik. Pp. xxi + 419. ISBN 0 415 01414 X. *Antony and Cleopatra* ed. John Wilders. Pp. xviii + 331. ISBN 0 415 01103 5. Routledge: London and New York. £30 hardback, £5.99 paperback.

IN THE PREFACE to his *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, who lived about the time of Shakspeare: with notes* (1808), Charles Lamb draws a clear distinction between Shakespeare and his contemporaries, showing 'how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind'. One might make a similar distinction between the Arden Shakespeare and its various textual competitors and Lamb (himself one of the most historically significant editors of Jacobean and Elizabethan drama) would have rejoiced in the fact that two

distinguished Elians, Jonathan Bate and T. W. Craik, are amongst the editors of the first three volumes of the Arden Shakespeare's Third Series (the other is John Wilders who has edited *Antony and Cleopatra*). Despite the anti-Coleridgean animus of much recent Shakespearean criticism, it is evident that when it comes to Shakespeare you can't keep a good Elian down.

Lamb writes in his 1812 essay 'On the Tragedies of Shakspeare, considered with reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation' that 'the plays of Shakspeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist whatever.' Though Lamb was a frequent theatregoer and a dramatist, he preferred reading Shakespeare to watching his plays performed. Seeing a theatrical performance entails the loss of 'that vantage-ground of abstraction which reading possesses over seeing.' Here at least, Professor Craik quarrels with Lamb, writing in the introduction to his edition of *Henry V* that 'the most important thing to do with a play [is] to enjoy it in performance'. He is sensitive to 'how *Henry V* works as a stage play' and one of the most absorbing sections of his introduction is its chapter on the play in performance. At over twice the length of its Arden predecessor, Craik's edition of *Henry V* is the most comprehensive of any popular edition. It contains a long introduction dealing with textual, interpretive and theatrical matters, generous notes, a facsimile of the Quarto, genealogical tables, maps and so on. The *Henry V* that emerges from Craik's introduction is a less complex, more celebratory play than is to be found in recent theoretical accounts which, antipathetic to the concept of patriotism, find an ambivalence in Shakespeare's treatment of the subject. For Craik, the Chorus serves 'to encourage the audience to be . . . patriotic' and to find a 'concealed uneasiness' in the play 'is surely misguided'. He offers a valuable account of twentieth-century interpretations of *Henry V*, from Bradley to Greenblatt, Sinfield and Dollimore. Interestingly, Craik demonstrates how 'political Shakespeare' (to borrow Sinfield and Dollimore's terminology) is nothing new. Hazlitt's 'emphatically political' essay in his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817) anticipates debates which are still potent today. One of the most important lessons to be learned from reading recent Shakespearean criticism is the fact that writers of the Romantic period still play a vital role in the contemporary hermeneutical debates surrounding Shakespeare.

Talking of Shakespeare, Coleridge echoes Act II of *Hamlet*: 'Time and manners lend their form and pressure to genius'. The pressures evident upon the Arden Third Series are those critical tendencies which inform much of the Shakespearean criticism of the last two decades: the 'linguistic turn taken by post-1960s literary theory' (as Jonathan Bate calls post-structuralism and deconstruction), feminism (the Routledge publicity material proudly boasts that the series has 'a higher representation of women editors . . . than any competing edition'), and the re-historicizing of Shakespeare (much of which has grounded its analysis on the by now shopworn manoeuvre of repudiating a supposedly ahistorical, idealist Romantic conceptualisation of Shakespeare best exemplified in Coleridge, who is the straw man ceremonially burnt in much new historicist and cultural materialist criticism). Professor Bate draws judiciously and not uncritically upon all three critical strands in his edition of *Titus Andronicus*. He writes illuminatingly on the political resonance of the play's particular Roman setting in the context of Elizabethan England, builds upon the critical techniques of the *nouvelle critique* in his analysis of *Titus Andronicus*' 'interest in the signifying potential and the limitations of language' and borrows from feminist analysis in his discussion of play's most harrowing incident, the rape and disfigurement of Lavinia.

If, with Lamb, we see an 'inherent fault' in the 'stage representation' of Shakespearean tragedy, then perhaps the rarely performed *Titus Andronicus* is the most Elian of

Shakespeare's plays. On the other hand, it is not difficult to imagine that the play was the first to be dismissed when the Lambs were deciding what to include in the *Tales from Shakespeare*. With its scenes of rape, slaughter and mutilation, *Titus Andronicus* is the most blood-soaked of all Shakespeare's tragedies. As Bate points out in his historical survey of criticsm of the play, its repellent subject matter has alienated critics as diverse as Dr Johnson ('scarcely . . . tolerable to any audience') and T. S. Eliot ('one of the stupidest ... plays ever written'). Bate's revisionist project is to establish 'the greatness of *Titus Andronicus*', and the compelling advocacy of his introduction goes a long way to establish that greatness. If *The Tempest* was the talismanic Shakespearean play of the 1980s, Bate argues strongly that *Titus Andronicus* should perform a similar role in the 1990s. Its examination of the nature of political power and attention to matters of gender and sexual violence mirrors the concerns of modish contemporary literary theory and, in raising issues surrounding the representation of violence, it anticipates a key preoccupation of contemporary society in general (as the furore surrounding the recent release of Oliver Stone's film *Natural Born Killers* demonstrates). Bate makes a persuasive case that *Titus Andronicus* is 'an important play and a living one'.

University of Sunderland JOHN STRACHAN

Above: the Arden editors in fine Elian form, enjoying a quip and a well-earned drink at their recent press launch at the Royal National Theatre. From left to right: Jonathan Bate, John Wilders, T. W. Craik. Photograph by Susan Greenhill; reproduced by permission.

PRABHAT MATHUR, *Dramatization of 'Self' in the Works of Charles Lamb*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Meerut, India, 1990. Pp. 185.

IN *DISTANT CORRESPONDENTS* Lamb wrote to Barron Field in Australia: 'The weary world of waters between us oppresses the imagination. It is difficult to conceive how a scrawl of mine should ever stretch across it. It is a sort of presumption to expect that one's thoughts should live so far. It is like writing for posterity . . .' More than 150 years later, Lamb might well be astonished (and gratified) that his works should be the subject of a doctoral thesis by an Indian scholar, the typescript of which has finally reached us after many vicissitudes.

In Chapter I, 'The Man and his Style', Dr Mathur defines his aim as 'an attempt to understand how, where, and why Lamb's "self" is revealed in his works in general and in his essays in particular' - a formidable undertaking when one remembers Lamb's love of mystification and (as the study focusses on the essays) Lamb's warning 'Let no one receive these narrations of Elia for true records. They are in truth but shadows of fact - verisimilitudes not verities - or sitting but upon the remote edges and outskirts of history'. Dr Mathur defines 'self' as 'a conscious individual aware of his identity in all his changing experiences. It is further understood as an individuation process by which the true self . . . emerges as the goal of the whole personality'.

A brief survey of the development of the essay in English is followed by an account of Lamb's family circumstances, childhood and schooldays. The hardships of life at Christ's Hospital and the poverty of the family are perhaps exaggerated when considered in the context of social conditions at the end of the eighteenth century. (Dr Mathur's identification of Lamb with the boy who took scraps from the C.H. tables for his poverty-stricken parents is surely not correct.) The influence of Lamb's early visits to Blakesware and his recollections of Mackery End are well described, although the conclusion 'Lamb kept himself aloof from the beauties of nature' might be modified in the light of Dr D. G. Wilson's birthday celebration address, 'How Green Was My Elia?' (see *CLB* 78 [April 1992] 185-92). We can, however, agree that 'for him [Lamb] the joys and sorrows of human beings were more real than the aspects of natural beauty'.

Chapter II, 'Self and Early Writings', traces Lamb's early days at South Sea House and his subsequent career with the East India Company. More might have been made of Lamb's duties at Leadenhall Street and his interest (or lack of it) in the source of the shipments of tea, indigo, spices, and piece-goods which he daily recorded. His early romance with Ann Simmons is recalled in *Dream-Children* - surely the most heart-rending of all the Elia essays.

Lamb's life-long commitment to the care of Mary, his early ambition to be a poet and his abortive attempts at play-writing, with his collaboration with Mary in producing *Tales from Shakespear* are chronicled. Due weight is given to *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*, a rich field of study which we, in the Charles Lamb Society, have recently rediscovered.

Skipping forward to 1819 we have Lamb's proposal of marriage to Fanny Kelly. Her refusal is mainly ascribed to the taint of insanity in Lamb's family, but it is probable that Lamb's 'can you quit these shadows of existence' did not in any way accord with Fanny's attitude to her profession (any more than they did to Dora Jordan - another of Lamb's favourite actresses).

Chapters III and IV take us to the heart of the matter, with detailed commentaries on a selection from the *Essays* of Elia and the *Last Essays*, with what they reveal of Lamb's true character - his love of libraries and old books; his loyalty to his friends; his love of sympathetic solitude; his yearning for a University education; his melancholy; his archaisms ('I am naturally shy of novelties'). One Elian puzzle: Dr Mathur quotes from *The Wedding*,

Elia's excuse for wearing a black coat when giving away the bride. 'I got over the omen by a lucky apologue, which I remembered out of Pilpay, *or some Indian author*, of all the birds being invited to the linnet's wedding . . .' Jonathan Bate's note supplies the information, 'Pilpay: (or Bidpai) Indian collection of fables', but one wonders how Lamb came across this particular book. *Confessions of a Drunkard* is given extensive coverage as being at variance with the picture we want to have of Lamb; Bonnie Woodbery's 'Lamb's "Confessions of a Drunkard" in Context' supplies a corrective (see *CLB* 90 [April 1995] 94-100).

Chapter V, 'Final Assessment', reviews the evidence accumulated in the preceding chapters and reflects Dr Mathur's deep knowledge of Lamb's works and his admiration for him as a person. With some conclusions we may not agree; for example, 'he was strangely indifferent to the events of the tumultuous age in which he lived' - Winifred Courtney's *Young Charles Lamb 1775-1802* gives a different view. In mainly restricting his study to the essays, the evidence of Lamb's letters is virtually excluded - a pity, as these tell us so much about Lamb's real 'self'.

Each chapter contains a generous helping of quotations from the essays and other works. The notes following each chapter give page references to the OUP 1969 edition of the *Essays and the Last Essays*; it would have been helpful if actual essay titles had been named as there have been other (and better) editions since, notably Jonathan Bate's World's Classics edition (1987). In the select bibliography on books by and about Lamb Dr Mathur indicates the wide scope of his reading, including works by Ainger, David Cecil, John Mason Brown, S. M. Rich, and, of course, Prance's invaluable *Companion to Charles Lamb*.

Not the least merit of this substantial work is the incentive it provides to reread not only many of the essays but also subsequent articles and book reviews in the *Bulletin* which continue to add to our knowledge and understanding of Charles Lamb.

Richmond MADELINE HUXSTEP

Society News and Notes from Members

FROM THE HON. SECRETARY

Charles Lamb's Birthday Celebration Luncheon

We are delighted to have Professor J. R. Watson as our Guest of Honour at our annual luncheon on Saturday 17 February 1996 at the Royal College of General Practitioners. UK members will find enclosed with this *Bulletin* a booking form. Numbers are limited to about 50 so please book early. Of course, if any overseas members expect to be in London in February they will be most welcome.

Hazlitt's Tombstone

The following item appeared in the *Soho Clarion* for summer 1995:

> Restoration Progress
>
> *Clarion* readers with exceptionally retentive memories may recall proposals to clean up the memorial stones to William Hazlitt and King Theodore on St Anne's Tower and also render some of the other memorials safe and legible. According to Mark Hill, the Churchwarden of St Anne's, the wheels of English Heritage have almost finished grinding and a restoration scheme will shortly be laid before the world. So it may happen after all.

CLB NS 77 (January 1992) 181 contained the following note:

> Visitors to the churchyard (now a garden) of St Anne's Soho, were distressed to see the poor state of Hazlitt's tombstone. As Hazlitt has no Society of his own, we feel that Charles Lamb would want us to help restore this memorial to one of his closest friends. We are in touch with the Soho Society and hope that before long restoration will be carried out.

Revisiting the churchyard nearly four years later, the same visitors were distressed to see that the wording on the tombstone had become virtually illegible. We have again written to the Soho Society renewing our offer of financial assistance.

Christ's Hospital
The following notice appeared in *The Times*, 22 June 1995:

> The Council of Almoners of Christ's Hospital has accepted with sadness the retirement of Richard Poulton in 1996, when he will have completed 10 years as Headmaster . . . His successor will be Dr Peter Southern, MA, Ph.D. Dr Southern graduated in History from Oxford University and took his Doctorate at Edinburgh.

The National Lottery
'Make a lottery of a hundred thousand tickets with but one fortunate number - and what possible principle of our nature, except stupid wonderment, could it gratify to gain that number as many times successively without a prize?' (from *Mrs Battle's Opinions on Whist*)

More Crossword Clues
Thrash the writer on the way (Lambast)
Plant acquired by shy author (Lobelia)

From the Editor

The Coleridge-Wordsworth Meeting in Bristol: Bicentenary Celebrations
One of the *unmissable* Romantic bicentenary events of the year is approaching fast. To celebrate the first meeting of Coleridge and Wordsworth in Bristol Reggie Watters is organizing a series of events beginning with a concert at St George's Church, Brandon Hill, Bristol. The programme includes the first performance of a song-cycle based on Wordsworth's Lucy Poems, and readings by Reggie himself. It will be followed by a buffet supper in the crypt. This is a unique opportunity to celebrate what must be one of the most important literary encounters in the city's history, and Elians in the area, or with easy access to Bristol, are strongly urged to attend. The concert takes place on 14 October at 7.30pm, and admission is by ticket at the very reasonable price of £7.50 (£12.50 including supper), with concessions available at £5 (£10 including supper). For further information please contact either Coleridge Books, 11 Castle Street, Nether Stowey, Bridgwater, Somerset TA5 1LN, or telephone (0117) 923 0359, Mon-Fri 9am-1pm, 2pm-5pm.

This initiates a series of important lectures sponsored by the City Museum to which admission is free: on 18 October Jonathan Wordsworth delivers the inaugural lecture; on 15 November Nicholas Roe will speak on radicalism in the 1790s; on 13 December Stuart Andrews lectures on Coleridge, Bristol, and Revolution; and on 17 January next year Tom Mayberry will speak on Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the West Country. These lectures should not be missed by anyone in the area. For further details of time and place contact Dr Alison Hems, Collections Manager, Bristol Museums and Art Gallery, Queen's Road, Bristol BS8 1RL (tel.: 0117 922 3576).

Society Notes and News from Members

The Lambs' Dwelling in Covent Garden: Another Footnote

Patrick O'Leary, in a footnote to D. E. Wickham, 'The Lambs' Dwelling in Covent Garden - An Old Controversy Settled' (see *CLB* NS 89 [January 1995] 53 and NS 90 [April 1995] 115), points out that Lamb himself had nearly settled the question by appending to a letter to B. R. Haydon the uncharacteristically explicit address '20, Russell Court [not however Russell *Street*, as in Mary's splendid letter of 21 November 1817], Covent Garden East. half-way up, near the corner, left hand side.' Two delightfully characteristic Elian jokes ought not to be overlooked here. Lamb was being unwontedly explicit in order to poke gentle fun at his correspondent. He was replying to a letter of invitation, an invitation to the 'Immortal Dinner' in fact, in which Haydon, anxious that everything should go well, had given a provokingly explicit, and yet considerately intended, elaboration of his own address, which Lamb now deliberately mimics. The whole letter is so short (a brief masterpiece) that it may be quoted entire:

> [26] December 1817
>
> My dear Haydon, - I will come with pleasure to 22, Lisson Grove North, at Rossi's, half-way up, right-hand side - if I can find it.
>
> Yours,
>
> C. Lamb
>
> 20, Russell Court, Covent Garden East.
> half-way up, next the corner, left hand side.

One can almost see Lamb, with pen raised and a puckish grin on his face, preparing to add the *coup de grâce* afterthought, '- if I can find it'. (But one can only guess with what further drolleries he would have responded to the present painstaking and supererogatory gloss.)

Stanley Jones

Kilve by the Green Sea: A Footnote

It was good to read Berta Lawrence's article (*CLB* NS 91), with its characteristically helpful collation of local knowledge about Kilve's delightful shore. Might I just add a short tributary footnote, which, like the waters which meet at Kilve Pill, is in two parts.

First, the shore, just below Kilve Pill, where Coleridge said he saw Walsh, the spy, hiding behind a bank, was not an entirely inappropriate place for such an incident. A creek for small craft had existed in Tudor times (it was condemned as unsafe by the port commissioners in 1558). From the eighteenth into the nineteenth centuries it may have been useful in supplying the series of limekilns, remains of which still exist along the shore. Boats brought stone from Wales over for use in the process of providing fertilizer for West Somerset farmers. The ruins of a limekiln can still be seen immediately behind the now overgrown creek, and a wharf is shown at Kilve Pill on the OS 1:2500 map of 1887. (I am indebted to R. A. Croft, the Somerset County Archaeologist, for this information.) So, although STC disarmingly claimed in the *Biographia* that the coast from Clevedon to Minehead 'scarcely permits the approach of a fishing-boat', the locals had some grounds for their suspicions of these young strangers who might be mapping out possible landing-places for a French invasion in 1797.

Second, on the Wordsworths' use of place-names, I suspect these reflect that pawky northern sense of humour, which led to the laugh-lines Hazlitt remarked in William's face when they first met at Nether Stowey. Dorothy's 'Potsdam' for Putsham (William Knight's original transcript from the lost manuscript of the Alfoxden journal) suggests a comic allusion to the Prussian Royal Palace in her passing February reference to a muddy Somerset lane.

Similarly, *Anecdote for Fathers*, surely, bears the hallmarks of an in-joke? Basil Montagu's innocence of association might be contrasted here with that of the original adult receivers of the poem, William and Dorothy, Sam, Uncle Tom Poole and all. The adults well knew that Liswyn was the 1798 Welsh retreat of their rather inconveniently notorious radical friend John Thelwall. (Significantly, Wordsworth's later Fenwick note on the poem, though it seems to confuse the moment at which he visited Liswyn, also provides a quietly depoliticized variant version of STC's anecdote about talking to 'Citizen John' about 'treason' on his visit to the Quantocks in 1797.)

Put simply, the choice offered the child in *Anecdote for Fathers* may have held private resonances which juxtaposed the kind of radical pastoral retreat not entirely remote from Welsh pantisocracy with a more consciously apolitical and literary retreat in West Somerset, where, indeed, there was no need for any political 'weathercock'. William's use of Welsh place-names here and elsewhere in *Lyrical Ballads* surely deserves to be looked at more closely?

Reggie Watters

FROM D. E. WICKHAM

'Janus Weathercock' and his Letters from Charles Lamb: For the Record

CLB NS 86 (April 1994) prints on pages 74-5 a letter dated 29 May 1823 from Charles Lamb to Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, which is in my collection, and my commentary upon it.

When drafting those notes I did not know that the letter had been in Phillips' sale on 12 November 1992, as part of Lot 123. Nor had I then seen our member Wallace Nethery's contribution to *Notes and Queries* 9 (May 1962) 182-3, where he drew together the reasons for believing that the dinner invitation printed by E. V. Lucas as Letter 386 (Vol. II of his 1935 edition, page 297), attributed to '?May 1821' and supposed to be addressed to Bryan Waller Procter, may be about right as to date but was actually sent to Thomas Griffiths Wainewright. It was [1962] the only communication known to exist between Lamb and 'Janus Weathercock' and had then been missing for decades.

Whether or not that letter has reappeared since and without following the trail further, one sees that my letter gains considerably in importance, being apparently the second communication known to exist between Lamb and Wainewright and perhaps the only one currently traceable.

Cornwall in Two Volumes

Our old friend the Assiduous Reader may recall my reference (*CLB* NS 78 [1992] 208) to a copy of Barry Cornwall's *Charles Lamb* 'marvellously extra-illustrated and enlarged and extended from a single octavo to two quarto volumes' in the Society's collection at Guildhall Library. The work wavered between being regarded as books and as ephemera but is not in Deborah Hedgecock's Handlist (Supplement to *CLB* NS 89 [1995]) and so is presumably now regarded as books.

Inspection of the two volumes, finely bound in crimson leather by Palmer and Howe of Manchester, showed that they contained the signature, dated 1874, of a Darnton of Ashton-under-Lyme. They later belonged to Mr A. T. Ellis of Freshwater in the Isle of Wight, who joined the Charles Lamb Society in 1957 and is last listed in 1962. His executors sold the books to Thomas Thorp, the dealer of 170 High Street, Guildford, Surrey. They became Item 813 in Thorp's Catalogue 637, and were bought by Ernest Crowsley, in August 1963, for £15 plus 5*s*.9*d*. (almost 29p) postage.

After such a build-up I regret to say that there is nothing amazing among the extra-illustration material. There are the usual numbers of engravings of portraits and places: one

can only say that they would be more scarce or difficult to find today. There are several Ackermann plates as well as a few attractive sepia aquatints of the Inns of Court and some views of Christ's Hospital which were new to me. There are no pieces of manuscript and no autographs.

Fornham All Saints and Emma Isola

Mr Graham K. Scott, a bookseller who wanted a copy of Elian Booklet No. 1, wrote from his home in Fornham All Saints near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk to say that The (Old) Rectory, where Emma Isola had a situation as a governess and Charles Lamb visited her, is still in existence. It was there that Emma suffered an attack of brain fever and was brought home with the joke about turnips and boiled legs of mutton. Chapters 46 and 48 of Lucas' *Life* refer.

Dalston and Charles Lamb

We know that Charles Lamb spent time in then-rural Dalston, even that his address there was 14 Kingsland Row, and it is must have been somewhere near today's Geffrye Museum. We should not lose track of a most useful discussion of the exact whereabouts of his dwelling, though the building has long since disappeared.

Notes and Queries (8th Ser.) 5 (10 March 1894) 194, prints a long topographical discussion by F. Adams which states that Kingsland Row was a turning on the eastern side of Kingsland Road, three houses beyond Dalston Terrace, which by 1894 had become Dalston Lane. The entrace to the turning was then already completely occluded [shut up? absorbed?] and Kingsland Row was swept away to allow the railways company to carry out the Dalston Junction scheme, apart from a few houses at the Dalston end called Market Row but numbered 20, 21, etc. It was now [1894] an area full of business, suggesting that it would probably have been a very cheap area for lodging, even in Lamb's time.

In *Notes and Queries* 5 (16 June 1894) 477, Colonel W. F. Prideaux noted that Dalston was frequently mentioned in Lamb's letters to Allsop and was probably used for rest, quiet and essay writing between 1820 and 1823 only. In the issue for 7 July 1894, Vol. 6, pages 9-10, F. Adams added more detail, particularly concerning alternative names for Kingsland Row and Market Row.

Charles Lamb and the Personalised Number-Plate

On 9 December 1994 Christie's branch at 85 Old Brompton Road in London auctioned a series of what are called Attractive Registrations released by the DVLA. They included 1 BA, 1CD, D1 ANA, 1 E, 1 J, 1 MA, MGM 1, M1 CKY, M1 KES, M15 SPY, RLS 1, and 1 RR.

I was taken aback to learn that 1 CL, surely of fairly limited attraction, fetched no less than £19,800 nett, i.e. that hammer-price figures plus (? at least) 10% buyer's premium and 17½% VAT on the premium.

Lamb's Letters Counted: For the Record

These details appear in a cutting from the *Journal of The Bookman Circle* for September 1935, preserved in the Society's Samuel Rich Collection (Rich viii 48). They are noted here for the record, despite possible errors and potential miscounting because, for example, letters by Mary Lamb may or may not always be included. The figures should at least encourage Elians to reread the Introduction to the current edition of the Letters by our Vice-President, Professor Edwin W. Marrs, Jr., particularly the fascinating Section III on pages lxii-xcii of his first volume, which gives an analytical summary of how the letters have been brought together and edited.

The totals of Charles Lamb's letters printed in the 1935 article are:

Ainger's last edition 467
Everyman's (or Dent?) 572
E.V. Lucas' 1912 edition 617
A Boston edition (Bibliophiles, 1905) 762
Lucas' 1935 three-volume edition c.1200

The last figure is definitely an error for c.1000.

One might add that Professor Marrs' first three volumes print 331 letters and that his No. 330 is Lucas' (1935) No. 300. Allowing for any disagreements over dating of undated items, this suggests that the complete Marrs edition will be about ten per cent longer than Lucas' version - and further unpublished items still appear occasionally.

A Cornwallism: For the Record

'Charles Lamb was fifty-nine years old at his death; of the same age as Cromwell; between whom and himself there was of course no other similitude'.

This comment is to be found in Barry Cornwall's *Charles Lamb: A Memoir*, 1866, page 228. I do not ask what it means - but do you suppose there is a point to be made in it?

Charles Lamb and Chimney Sweepers - An Elian Precursor

E. V. Lucas quotes in *Notes and Queries* (10th Ser.) 5 (6 January 1906) 5, from a letter published in *The Scourge* in *Vindication of the Church of England* by T[homas] L[ewis], 1717 and 1720: 'Well I shall live to be revenged of all the Chimney Sweepers in England and only for Charles Lamb, I do love that dear Fellow, I did not care if they were all hang'd and damn'd'.

As Lucas adds, 'One can simply rub one's eyes in the presence of so odd an anticipation of Charles Lamb's championship of chimney-sweepers'.

New Members

The Society warmly welcomes the following new members: Mrs Francoise Baud, Mr Scott McEathron, Mr R. P. Musgrove, Thomas O'Neill Library (Boston College), University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

50 Years Ago: from *CLS Bulletin* No. 68 (Eleventh Year) October 1945

Six Times a Year

Beginning in 1946, the *Bulletin* [of four quarto printed pages] will appear six times each year, January, March, May, July, September and November. It should reach members about the first of the month.

In Editorial Bowers by William Kent

The gentleness of Charles Lamb, we are told, has been much exaggerated. At these sentimentalists even Birrell barked. He could sometimes rear, even roar, though perhaps only in the softer key of the 'very gentle beast' represented by Bottom. Then he illustrated the odd phrase in the Book of Revelations about 'the wrath of the Lamb'.

Can it be that editors brought clouds to his benign brow? [And off goes the essay about Elian editors and editorial bowers, that of the Charles Lamb *Bulletin* and of others.]

Subscriptions for 1946

'Good finance makes good friends'. (French proverb)