The Charles Lamb Bulletin

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Contents: Wordsworth Winter School Issue

Editorial

Thanks to a generous subvention by the British Academy, for which the Society is deeply grateful, the *Bulletin* is able to publish three of the lectures delivered at this year's Wordsworth Winter School alongside its usual complement of Elian features. The Winter School – held, as always, at the Prince of Wales Hotel, Grasmere – was this year snowbound, providing those who attended with ample opportunity to ponder the lectures, the theme of which was Wordsworth's *Two-Part Prelude* of 1798-9. This poem is a relatively new addition to the canon, its first appearance in print dating from 1979. Its usefulness to teachers, and accessibility to readers in general, stems from the fact that it contains the central spots of time, along with such episodes as the infant babe passage.

It is a pleasure also to include here J. R. Watson's address at this year's Charles Lamb Birthday Luncheon, which begins with a recollection of my predecessor as editor of this journal, Bill Ruddick.

Claude Prance will be familiar to Elians as the author of that indispensable guide to the subject, the *Companion to Charles Lamb*. He is also one of the most senior and distinguished of Elians, having composed the two notes published here in his ninetieth year.

The dates for next year's Wordsworth Winter School are 9-14 February 1997; the theme will be Wordsworth's poems of spring 1802. Enquiries should be directed to the Conference Organizer, The Wordsworth Trust, Dove Cottage, Grasmere, Cumbria LA22 9SH; tel.: 015394 35544. It is to be hoped that next year's weather will be less severe than it was this year.

The Magic of Childhood in the *Two-Part Prelude*

By MARY R. WEDD

I THINK IT WAS at the second Wordsworth Summer Conference I attended, in 1972, that I inadvertently got into a fierce argument with a certain learned gentleman. Making polite conversation about Wordsworth, I had let fall what I thought was a truism, that we all know in childhood a particular vividness of perception and intensity of experience, whether of good or ill. I was taken by surprise not only by my companion's categorical denial of this but also by the aggression with which he made it, which has fixed this conversation in my memory. I had the idea that if, as Lamb says, 'lawyers, I suppose, were children once', so too were learned professors. I tried to bring supportive evidence by referring to the exceptional brilliance which many fine writers show when describing their early years in autobiographical or fictional form, but I soon saw that I had better change the subject. I could see what he was thinking about me and I, for my part, was thinking, 'Oh dear! *Poor* little boy!' Perhaps I am wrong but I still tend to the opinion that most people, asked to describe their childhood, pour it out freely and in a much more imaginative way than in their usual communications. When they do not wish to remember, it is for some catastrophic reason and even then, as with Dickens and the blacking-factory, it is liable to erupt.

If one sits down and clears the mind, just allowing things to come, out of the mysterious realm of childhood, even quite ordinary people such as we are will find we have written with a beauty and poignancy quite alien to our workaday selves. If you have not already done so, try it. You may surprise yourself. How much more must this be so where a great poet is concerned, 'a chosen son'. For this was what Wordsworth was doing, letting memories spill out in an inspired stream in the manuscripts that went to make the *Two-Part Prelude*. I do not mean, as we shall see, that he did not use all his poet's art in the process but the inspiration from the childhood memories is undoubted. Later he was to disperse some of the incidents throughout the longer poem but in this early draft we have many of them concentrated together, and, though in the main I do not regret the rearrangement or the extension of the poem to thirteen or fourteen books, there is no denying that we have here a treasure-trove beyond compare.

For each of us there are certain writers whom we read with a sort of self-discovery – 'Goodness! I didn't know anyone else felt like that!' What first made me fall in love with Wordsworth's poetry when I read it at school was that recognition of a familiar inner landscape, particularly of childhood, and I am sure that I am not alone.

> Ah! is there one who ever has been young
> And needs a monitory voice to tame
> The pride of virtue and of intellect,
> And is there one, the wisest and the best
> Of all mankind, who does not sometimes wish
> For things which cannot be, who would not give,
> If so he might, to duty and to truth
> The eagerness of infantine desire? (*Two-Part Prelude* ii 17-24)[1]

[1] All quotations from the *Two-Part Prelude* are taken from William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1798-1799* ed. Stephen Parrish (Ithaca, NY, 1977) (hereafter Parrish).

But, of course, try as we may, we cannot recapture in its pristine state the experience of childhood, for it has inevitably become modified by our subsequent development, by adult ways of seeing, by memory. For example, the tiny boy who 'Made one long bathing of a summer's day' or 'stood alone / A naked savage in the thunder-shower' is seen from outside, as in those photographs we are all so shamed by which show a bare baby on a rug. Or, in the woodcock incident, we recognize resonances from *Macbeth* in the words 'when the deed was done' which bring an alien sophistication to the childish sense of guilt. Even a particular memory, vivid though it is, may be inaccurate. My sister and I, relating the same early event, can rarely agree about its details. So it is not an exact recreation of his youthful history that Wordsworth has presented to us. It is something much more complicated and interesting. Certainly he is recalling particular occasions and places which contain for him that vividness, that intensity, that magic which characterize childhood experience and generally they are associated with real remembered locations. In 1805 he adds to his account of the Derwent that it was in 'A little mill-race severed from his stream' that he bathed. It is covered now by concrete but its course on the far side of the river opposite Wordsworth House was still shown on the Ordnance Survey map First Series. In 1974 I followed its hidden course to the old mill with its wheel, still there, though then about to be converted. On the other hand, often there is a conflation of several elements, as in the case of the gibbet which he did *not* see near Penrith, where he rode as a small boy, and the one near Priest Pot at Hawkshead, which he must often have passed later, the remains of which were unearthed during draining operations within living memory. Wordsworth recognizes the situation, both the magic of the recollection and the adult's separation from it.

> A tranquillizing spirit presses now
> On my corporeal frame, so wide appears
> The vacancy between me and those days,
> Which yet have such self-presence in my heart
> That sometimes when I think of them I seem
> Two consciounesses, conscious of myself
> And of some other being. (ibid. ii 25-31)

The adult poet, looking back, provides also a delightful touch, here and there, of the mock-heroic, which juxtaposes the crude fairy-tale nature of the child's conscious imagination at that stage with his deeper supernatural experience. When he is kitted out with a bundle of snares at his back, he sees himself as an armed warrior out for slaughter.

> That time, my shoulder all with springes hung,
> I was a fell destroyer. (ibid. i 34-5)

Is a pun intended? 'Fell' meaning 'fierce, destructive' and 'Fell' meaning on the fells? I wouldn't put it past Wordsworth. But when he had stolen a bird from someone else's trap,

> I heard among the solitary hills
> Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
> Of undistinguishable motion, steps
> Almost as silent as the turf they trod. (ibid. i 46-9)

There is a pleasant Cumbrian tale, which I always associate with Coleridge's stanza,

> Like one, that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,

And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a fearful fiend
Doth close behind him tread. (*The Ancient Mariner* 446-51)

It is very irreverent of me because really that passage probably relates to Dante's *Inferno*,[2] but the story, which applies even better to Wordsworth's lines, is of a countryman walking home at night over the high fells. To his horror he heard a swishing movement hehind him and was convinced that he was being followed. When he stopped the phantom stopped and when he continued walking so did it. At last he plucked up courage to look behind him. There was nothing there. After a while it dawned on him that what he was hearing was the rubbing of one of his trouser-legs against the other.

I don't offer this insight into superstition in order to diminish Wordsworth's experience. When I was very small an evil creature lived behind a curtain that hung on a landing which I had always to pass when I went to bed. Our house had no gas or electricity, only oil-lamps and candles. Perhaps we don't remember sufficiently the primitive conditions in which people used to live and the effect this had on their perception of the world; walking home from work across the fells, for example, or children trudging ten miles to school and back across a Welsh mountain. Anyway, I had no more doubt of the existence of the phantom behind the curtain than I had of my own.

What is remarkable is the way Wordsworth conveys the terrors of childhood and compels us to participate in them, by what Jonathan Wordsworth calls 'deliberate imprecision'.[3] It is uncertainty about what the fearful thing is that is its chief menace. 'Low breathings' - whose? 'Sounds / Of undistinguishable motion' - what can they be? And 'steps / Almost as silent as the turf they trod' - what does he mean, 'Almost'? Soon one's flesh begins to creep. Yet we are left, as the child was, with a sense that we are on the edge of another kind of reality.

Similarly, when he describes taking the stolen boat, Wordsworth at first regards his younger self with affectionate humour. In his childish imagination based on fairy-tales his boat is 'an elfin pinnace' and, proud of his rowing, he sees her 'heaving through the water like a swan' as he fixes his eye on 'the bound of the horizon'. But his heroic fantasies are doomed to shocked deflation, as behind the 'rocky steep' a 'huge cliff', behaving like a giant with a will of its own, 'Uprear'd its head', 'Rose up between me and the stars' and 'like a living thing / Strode after me.' The word 'Strode' is terrifying. In the passage that follows how brilliantly Wordsworth conjures up that frightening state of disorientation in which nothing seems to be what it is or when the identity of common objects that we take for granted suddenly seems to be in doubt.

and after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being: in my thoughts
There was a darkness, call it solitude,
Or blank desertion; no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields:
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live

[2] Canto 21; 25-30. See John Livingstone Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu* (London, 1955), pp. 480-1.
[3] Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982) (hereafter *Borders of Vision*), p. 17.

Like living men, moved slowly through my mind
By day, and were the trouble of my dreams. (*Two-Part Prelude* i 119-29)

As adults, at least for most of the time, we know that dreams are dreams: as children we are not so sure. Those events - of the ghostly footsteps or the ogre cliff - which take place mainly in the mind, are no less real or shocking than the actual horrific sight of the drowned man who, by contrast with the surrounding 'beauteous scene',

bolt upright
Rose with his ghastly face. (ibid. i 278-9)

Such 'tragic facts / Of rural history', Wordsworth says, are 'archetypes', which both persist in their original impact and also provide a nucleus to which 'Far other feelings were attached', the whole constellation having permanence in memory. For example, the 'ordinary sight' at Penrith Beacon was so coloured for the young boy by tales he had heard about the murderer who had been hanged nearby that, combined with the desolate landscape and his temporary separation from the reassuring company of his grandparents' servant, it became imbued with a 'visionary dreariness' impossible to paint in 'colours' or 'words'. He had most of his facts wrong but 'a long green ridge of turf / whose shape was like a grave' was quite enough. Similarly, the unpromising ingredients for nightmare of a sheep, a tree and a wall were always associated in his memory with the subsequent death of his father. These experiences are given permanence by the strong charge of emotion attached to them and, though grievous, such memories are cherished for the power they exercise. Even when the sense of the supernatural is based on misconception it nevertheless does give an inkling that there is another dimension to existence.

Not all these intimations, however, are related to those severer interventions which correspond to Burke's 'sublime', though Wordsworth says, 'Of their school was I'. In the ravens'-nesting incident, though his object was 'mean' and 'inglorious' - he hoped to extend his pocket-money by claiming destruction of predators – the outcome was not ignoble' (ibid. i 55-7). There *is* an element of fear, indeed. It was physically dangerous and, on another level, there is strangeness and mystery in the transformed world that he experiences, but the fear is not paramount. The wonderful use of 'deliberate imprecision' here conveys, rather, a brief communion with another state of being, uplifting and inspiring.

Oh, when I have hung
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass,
Or half-inch fissures in the slipp'ry 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! (ibid. i 57-66)

Wordsworth is confident that the juxtaposition of the child's developing human emotions 'with high objects, with eternal things' (ibid. i 136), rather than with everyday man-made objects, provides a privileged upbringing.

purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,

And sanctifying by such discipline
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. (ibid. i 137-41)

But the boy, thank goodness, is a real boy. He is of 'A race of real children, not too wise, / Too learned, or too good'.[4] He is proud of his physical prowess and by no means a goody-goody. Equally he rejoices in being in the warm kitchen on a winter's day, playing noughts and crosses or games with grubby playing-cards, or, with his friends he makes a frightful row, staying out late when he ought to be back home, and showing off like nobody's business his skill at skating. Wordsworth uses all his adult poetic expertise to conjure up this scene. First comes the noise and the vigorous physical activity.

I wheeled about
Proud and exulting like an untired horse
That cares not for its home. (*Two-Part Prelude* i 154-6)

I am old enough to remember when cars in our country village were a rarity. In fact, in my early childhood I don't remember ever seeing one. In general, if one wanted to get from one place to another, one walked. But if we went some distance – for a picnic say – we were conveyed in a pony-trap with my mother driving. When we children did at last go for our first ride in a car, we were bitterly disappointed because it did not make the glorious echoing noise that the horse's hoofs did under bridges. On the outward journey the pony was frisky and eager to be moving. On the return trip, though one could have left him to find his own way home because he so much wished to be there, his place was slower and if we went up a steep hill we all got out except the driver and walked, 'to spare the horse', as the saying then was. To young Wordsworth in the days when all travel was by horses or on foot this was a simile from everyday life.

Instead of Tennyson's 'murmuring of innumerable bees', which always used to be given in textbooks as an example of onomatopoeia, one could equally well cite

All shod with steel
We hissed along the polished ice . . . (ibid. i 156-7)

An economical illustration this would be, too, as it includes alliteration and assonance as well. Or

the precipices rang aloud,
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron . . . (ibid i 163-5)

Wordsworth calls on all his arts to make the experience vivid.

The description then modulates from one key to another.

while the distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed . . . (ibid. i 165-7)

That typically Wordsworthan double negative suggests an almost subconscious picking up of the message sent by the quiet landscape.

[4] *Thirteen-Book Prelude* v 436-7. All quotations from this poem are from *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* ed. Mark L. Reed (2 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1991).

while the stars,
Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away. (ibid. i 167-9)

Even to the child, in the midst of his 'glad animal movements' and surrounded by the 'din', comes a hint of human transience against the permanence of the everlasting hills.

In this changed mood he seeks solitude.

Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideway leaving the tumultuous throng
To cut across the shadow of a star
That gleamed upon the ice . . . (ibid. i 170-4)

There follows a kind of recapitulation in another shape, of the previous first and second subjects. The boys were all whizzing along in joyous abandonment.

When we had given our bodies to the wind
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion . . . (ibid. i 175-8)

then Wordsworth suddenly checked his consciously propelled move forward, though he was still carried on by the former momentum.

. . . then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round . . . (ibid. i 178-82)

It was as if he could see the world turning on its axis in front of his eyes, as the 'solitary cliffs' whizzed by.

Behind me did they stretch in solemn train
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a summer sea. (ibid. i 183-5)

He has felt an intimation of 'the peace that passes all understanding'. He has been in touch with what the American Indians call 'the Great Spirit'.

It seems a come-down, then, when in the following passage he addresses what seem to be separate Greek-style nature spirits.

Ye Powers of earth! ye Genii of the springs!
And ye that have your voices in the clouds
And ye that are Familiars of the lakes
And of the standing pools . . . (ibid. i 186-9)

They seem to be the adult equivalent of the child's giants and ghosts. He makes them slightly more acceptable in the *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, where he calls them 'presences', 'visions' and 'souls', but I am still uneasy with them. Jonathan Wordsworth says 'they have very much the air of supernatural machinery added later like the sylphs of *The Rape of the Lock*' but, as he points

out, they were not an afterthought but were in MS JJ.[5] I remember at an early Wordsworth Summer Conference William Empson asserting vigorously that both Coleridge and Wordsworth believed in such spirits. But I think Wordsworth perhaps did not try to pin down too exactly the presence that he felt. Whether he 'saw one life and felt that it was joy' (ibid. ii 460), or whether tutelary spirits formed him, or he was 'With God and Nature communing' (ibid. i 476), he was alike affirming that there is a transcendental power of which the child is aware in his visionary moments. Whatever it was that was educating him, he says,

> I may not think
> A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
> Such ministry . . . (ibid. i 189-91)

The word 'vulgar' here is not used in the full pejorative sense it has now, but simply means 'ordinary' or 'commonplace'. Wordsworth felt that he was singled out

> . . . when ye through many a year
> Thus by the agency of boyish sports
> On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
> Impressed upon all forms the characters
> Of danger or desire, and thus did make
> The surface of the universal earth
> With meanings of delight, of hope and fear,
> Work like a sea. (ibid. i 191-8)

It is as though the nature-spirits had used the child's unthinking physical activity as a vehicle whereby they could inscribe on everything round him the characteristic handwriting of the sublime and the beautiful – 'danger or desire', 'hope and fear', which being translated became 'meanings of delight'. Thus the whole earth became so full of varied impressions that it was like a fermenting wine or an ever restless sea. When one considers the immense amount a child learns just in the first months one can understand this well.

To a very young child everything is new. Nothing can be taken for granted. One has only to observe a baby discovering its own fingers. Recently I gave some wooden bricks to my great-grandson for his first birthday. You could see him thinking, 'Now, what have we here? What do I do with this?' This process continues with increasing sophistication until at my age I have to learn the function of computer-buttons. But that early wonder is a precious gift that cannot be entirely preserved once the subsequent body of associations has built up which, in memory, modify the original experience. One does not need to be steeped in the philosophy of Hartley, as Wordsworth and Coleridge were at this time, to recognize in a more general and pragmatic way the importance to us all of the accretion of associations. But occasionally one recaptures something of the freshness, even as an adult. At the age of ten, looking at the sea, Wordsworth felt that original newness.

> How I have stood to images like these
> A stranger, linking with the spectacle
> No body of associated forms . . . (ibid. i 403-5)

Nor did he bring with him any 'peculiar sense / Of quietness or peace',

[5] *Borders of Vision* 38.

. . . yet I have stood
Even while my eye has moved o'er three long leagues
Of shining water, gathering, as it seemed,
Through the wide surface of that field of light
New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers. (ibid. i 407-12)

He is living predominantly in the world of his senses but 'even then',

A Child, I held unconscious intercourse
With the eternal Beauty . . . (ibid. i 394-5)

By some miracle, Wordsworth manages to convey the child's sense of everything being new, nothing being taken as read, despite the intervening years in which the freshness has been obliterated by habit. In recapturing that pristine state of opening the self up to incoming sights and sounds with a kind of surprised discovery, Wordsworth recognizes that, unbeknownst, that receptiveness has allowed the entry also of spiritual visions, 'Gleams like the flashing of a shield' (ibid. i 418), which bring with them calmness and peace.

Not that habit or accumulated associations have no place in the creation of a soul. The pristine wonder of the very young child is replaced by the love that is engendered by familiarity.

– And if the vulgar joy by its own weight
Wearied itself out of the memory,
The scenes which were a witness of that joy
Remained . . .

and

. . . did at length
Become habitually dear, and all
Their hues and forms were by invisible links
Allied to the affections. (ibid. i 427-30, 439-42)

In Part II, which, as Stephen Parrish says, was 'taken over almost intact into Book II of 1805',[6] it is the turn of Beauty rather than Fear, and perhaps it is particularly in this Part that the last lines of Part I are most vividly exemplified.

Those recollected hours that have the charm
Of visionary things, and lovely forms
And sweet sensations that throw back our life
And make our infancy a visible scene
On which the sun is shining. (ibid. i 460-4)

The Second Part begins by showing how 'the passion' for Nature at first 'came unsought' as concomitant to the 'round of tumult' of the children's games, which were

Prolonged in summer till the daylight failed;
No chair remained before the doors, the bench
And threshold steps were empty, fast asleep

[6] Parrish 26.

The labourer and the old man who had sate
A later lingerer . . . (ibid. ii 8-12)

These lines are very evocative to me. My grandmother was a needlewoman whose embroidery was so intricate that when she left a piece unfinished at her death no one could be found capable of completing it. One of my earliest memories is of her moving to the window, as evening came, to catch the last of the daylight. Just so might the spinning-wheel be moved in Wordsworth's time and even taken outside. I hope you will forgive me if Wordsworth's reminiscences seem to be touching off mine: it is part of their function for the reader. Also some living *Old* Historicism can sometimes help us to feel ourselves back into the young poet's world. One day in the 1970s I had walked over Claife Heights to Belle Grange in a heatwave. On my way back, passing through Colthouse, I saw an old lady sitting on the wall opposite one of the Beckside cottages which are on the other side of the road from where Wordsworth lodged. She told me that the sun never penetrated inside those houses, so that in summer she came out for warmth. So what with the search for light and the search for heat, it must have been night indeed if the 'threshold steps were empty'.

Every crowd of children needs a headquarters and

A grey stone
Of native rock, left midway in the square
Of our small market-village, was the home
And centre of these joys . . . (ibid. ii 31-4)

As emerges later, in the Furness Abbey passage, it was their equivalent of a tuck-shop. It was known as 'Nanny's stone' after 'that old dame / From whom the stone was named', as T. W. Thompson tells us;[7] and she was Nanny Holme. As Carl Ketcham suggests the word scribbled in the margin of MS A which Miss Darbishire read as 'Rowe' is probably 'power', the old lady's 'counter' being a rocking-stone which folklore endowed with magic qualities.[8] These lines must have been written after Wordsworth had revisited Hawkshead with Coleridge and John in November 1799, when the atrocity of the Assembly Room first outraged their sights. Wordsworth says of this visit in a sonnet of 1802, 'So narrow seemed the brooks, the fields so small'. Like all of us when returning to childhood haunts in later years, William and John doubtless found that everything had shrunk. Everything, that is, except the 'smart assembly-room that perked and flared'. There had been a building of sorts erected about 1650 but it was an unpretentious affair, an upper storey with a shambles underneath, and it left plenty of room where Nanny's stone stood. The new Market House, built in 1790 increased in size so much that the stone had to be removed to make room for it. It perks and flares even more now, having been 'considerably enlarged in 1887', as Cowper tells us.[9]

In the summer more ambitious activities became possible for the schoolboys, 'calmer pleasures' such as rowing among the islands on Windermere or the adventure of riding, for a greater distance than they let on to the landlord of the Red Lion from whom they probably hired the horses. After the roundabout journey they took to and from Furness Abbey, there would certainly not be among them 'an untired horse / That cares not for its home'. In talking of 'Sabine

[7] T. W. Thompson, *Wordsworth's Hawkshead* ed. Robert Woof (Oxford, 1970), pp. 251-6.

[8] Carl H. Ketcham, '"That 'Stone of Rowe'": *Prelude* (1805) II: 33-47', *Wordsworth Circle* 13 (1982) 174-5. See also *The Fourteen-Book Prelude* ed. W. J. B. Owen (Ithaca, NY, 1985), p. 48.

[9] H. S. Cowper, *Hawkshead* (London and Derby, 1899) (hereafter Cowper), p. 29.

fare' Wordsworth is a bit unjust both to Ann Tyson's housekeeping and to the amount of pocket-money the boys received, as we know from her account-book, which Mrs Heelis (Beatrix Potter) found one day mouldering in an outhouse. In his last year at school Wordsworth received sixpence a week. In the depression of the 1930s the National Assistance allowance for a child's keep was two shillings a week. As Cecil Day Lewis put it,

> Two shillings a week is
> The price of a soul.[10]

In case you have forgotten, there were only four sixpences in two shillings. So I cannot think the Hawkshead schoolboys were deprived, though William, as the eldest then still at school received more than his brothers. But pocket-money always seems a mere pittance to children and it is true that their meals were a bit few and far between. However, when

> to school
> Returned from the half-yearly holidays,
> We came with purses more profusely filled, (ibid. ii 84-6)

things were different. In January 1796 William received fifteen shillings and the following year a whole guinea, that is one pound one shilling or 105p. With such a sum they could afford more expensive dainties than Nanny's wares, though I expect their pockets were well stocked up with these as well, when they indulged in the welcome extravagance of hiring horses.

The glorious exuberance of the ride is vividly conjured up, with again a touch of the mock-heroic, as they delighted 'To feel the motion of the galloping steed'. 'With whip and spur we by the Chantry flew' or

> Through the walls we flew
> And down the valley, and, a circuit made
> In wantonness of heart, through rough and smooth
> We scampered homeward. (ibid. ii 130-3)

Notice that they did to a degree 'spare the horses' 'when, with slackened step, we breathed / Along the sides of the steep hills'. But more typical of their mode is the onomatopoeic line which in the 1805 *Prelude* Wordsworth repeats with such effect in Book X: 'We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand.' However, alongside the pleasure in 'a boisterous race', the presence of Furness Abbey itself is deeply felt, 'A holy scene'.

> in more than inland peace
> Left by the winds that overpass the vale
> In that sequestered ruin trees and towers
> Both silent, and both motionless alike,
> Hear all day long the murmuring sea that beats
> Incessantly upon a craggy shore. (ibid. ii 112-17)

In Wordsworth's *Unpublished Tour* he leads the reader into the Lake District across the sands and says, 'When the Traveller has reached Ulverston, he may be inclined to visit Furness Abbey'.[11] He praises 'the situation of this Monastery' in its fertile valley 'in a remote corner of

[10] Carol (c. 1935).

[11] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974) (hereafter *Prose Works*), ii. 293.

the Island & backed by the sea', safe from invasion by the Scots and well suited to meditation and self-discipline. Wordsworth imagines a 'Meditative Monk' retiring to the neighbouring Beacon, which must have 'contributed to devotional feeling by a display of the sublimest works of the Creator'.[12] Alas! if he were to do so today he might get rather a shock, for, as Norman Nicholson pointed out, the Abbey is now 'almost enclosed in Barrow suburbs' . . . 'Yet before the Industrial Revolution Barrow did not exist'.[13]

Once again the children's physical activity is juxtaposed to a contemplative peace.

> Our steeds remounted, and the summons given,
> With whip and spur we by the Chantry flew
> In uncouth race, and left the cross-legged Knight
> And the stone Abbot, and that single wren
> Which one day sang so sweetly in the nave
> Of the old church that, though from recent showers
> The earth was comfortless, and touched by faint
> Internal breezes from the roofless walls
> The shuddering ivy dripped large drops, yet still
> So sweetly 'mid the gloom the invisible bird
> Sang to itself that there I could have made
> My dwelling-place, and lived for ever there
> To hear such music. (ibid. ii 118-30)

At the risk of breaking the mood, since I am talking about the magic of childhood in more than one of its manifestations, I can't resist a story Wordsworth tells which he would certainly have known in boyhood. Cowper speaks of an underground passage which was reputed to run from Furness Abbey to Hawkshead Hall, where the Monastery administered its very considerable property.[14] Wordsworth does not mention this but outdoes it when he says of the Abbey's quarters,

> Among these gloomy cells is one more terrible than the rest where the wealth of the Abbey is reported to lie hid. Many Persons, as the tradition goes, have attempted to grope their way along the blind passage, which leads to this treasure house, but in vain – lizards, vipers, adders, huge toads, & monsters casting out flames from their wide jaws force them to relinquish their purpose, & madness & death have been the consequence of their fears.[15]

So don't go looking for it tomorrow, whatever you do!

The episode of the boat on Coniston is most interesting, both as to Wordsworth's developing working methods and to the greater or lesser success of them. In *The Vale of Esthwaite*, written in his last year at school, 1787, there is a passage beginning

> Yet if Heaven bear me far away
> To end the evening of my day . . .

and ends

[12] *Prose Works* ii 296-7.
[13] Norman Nicholson, *Greater Lakeland* (London, 1969), p. 134.
[14] Cowper 337-8.
[15] *Prose Works* ii. 295.

My soul shall cast the wistful view
The longing look alone on you.
As Phoebus, when he sinks to rest
Far on the mountains in the west,
While all the vale is dark between
Ungilded by his golden sheen,
A lingering lustre softly throws
On the dear hills where first he rose.[16]

He is writing in the eighteenth-century mode which influenced him at this early time, heroic couplets and some slightly poetic-y language, the sun being called Phoebus, for example, but the lovely simile is essentially there. Just as the sun when sinking in the west throws a reflected light on the eastern hills, so the boy imagines that on his deathbed he would think of the scenes endeared to him in youth. In 1815 he published a reworked version of this – with no Phoebus this time, just the sun – under the category of 'Juvenile Pieces'. In neither poem does he connect the thought with the boat on Coniston, though in the Fenwick note years later he does associate 'The beautiful image' with that occasion. He says, 'The Poem of which it was the conclusion was of many hundred lines, and contained thoughts and images most of which have been dispersed through my other writings.'[17]

The first fact that emerges is that Wordsworth composed what Stephen Parrish calls 'detached pieces written to be inserted into it'[18] – the *Two-Part Prelude* – and also utilized passages from other poems such as *The Vale of Esthwaite* and *The Pedlar*, already written, in a kind of patchwork. Some of the 'detached pieces', such as 'Nutting', eventually were not included, and in 1805 neither was the boat on Coniston passage. In 1850 an abbreviated version of it was restored but relegated to Book VIII. In 1799, on the other hand, we are given all the delightful details which, for me, bring the whole thing to life.

There was a row of ancient trees, since fallen,
That on the margin of a jutting land
Stood near the lake of Coniston and made
With its long boughs above the water stretched
A gloom through which a boat might sail along
As in a cloister. An old Hall was near,
Grotesque and beautiful, its gavel end
And huge round chimneys to the top o'ergrown
With fields of ivy. Thither we repaired
'Twas even a custom with us, to the shore
And to that cool piazza. They who dwelt
In the neglected mansion-house supplied
Fresh butter, tea-kettle, and earthen-ware,
And chafing-dish with smoking coals, and so
Beneath the trees we sate in our small boat

[16] Lines 498-513; text from *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford, 1940-9) (hereafter *PW*), i. 281.
[17] *PW* i. 317-18.
[18] Parrish 8.

And in the covert eat our delicate meal
Upon the calm smooth lake. (*Two-Part Prelude* ii 140-56)

It is all so solid, the tunnel of trees, the distinctive ancient building, the domestic implements borrowed from the caretakers so that the boys could cook their catch of fish. Then, as in the skating episode, there is a most miraculous, yet natural, modulation into another key.

It was a joy
Worthy the heart of one who is full grown
To rest beneath those horizontal boughs
And mark the radiance of the setting sun,
Himself unseen, reposing on the top
Of the high eastern hills. (ibid. ii 156-61)

He tells us he was in his fourteenth summer and, as his reference to 'the heart of one who is full grown' has already indicated, he fears we may doubt such an unboyish thought at this time and he hastens to reassure us. I rather wish he had not, as it is an interruption.

And there I said,
That beauteous sight before me, there I said
(Then first beginning in my thoughts to mark
That sense of dim similitude which links
Our moral feelings with external forms)
That in whatever region I should close
My mortal life I would remember you,
Fair scenes! that dying I would think on you,
My soul would send a longing look to you:
Even as that setting sun while all the vale
Could nowhere catch one faint memorial gleam
Yet with the last remains of his last light
Still lingered, and a farewell lustre threw
On the dear mountain-tops where first he rose. (ibid. ii 161-74)

The 'sentiment', he tells us, 'far outran the habit of my mind'. Despite, perhaps, protesting a bit too much, Wordsworth has with great skill incorporated the simile from *The Vale of Esthwaite* as the consummation of the vivid childhood scene. Compare this, at your leisure, with the abbreviated version in 1850. Wordsworth calls it a 'beautiful image' and so it is, but is it strong enough to stand on its own, marooned in Book VIII (lines 458-75)? It must be acknowledged that the apostrophe itself, starting 'Dear native Region', has been tightened up and is an improvement on the rather repetitive passage in 1799, but – oh dear! – I do miss the picnic!

For the second question that the successive changes in this episode raise is that of the relation between the down-to-earth everyday experiences of boyhood and the deeper reflections they give rise to. Coleridge criticized Wordsworth for 'clinging to the palpable' but I think he knew his own business best. The matter-of-factness provides both an anchor and a springboard, if for once I may mix metaphors, and is absolutely essential.

The passages of commentary, which are often most memorable in themselves and provide some of the best loved lines in the poem, are interdependent on the first-hand experiences to which they are attached and integral to the whole. Similarly, the glimpses of a spiritual world,

as we have seen, often though not always, follow on from intense physical activity. One is reminded of Wordsworth's words to De Quincey on Dunmail Raise.

> At the instant when the organs of attention were all at once relaxing from their tension, the bright star hanging in the air above those outlines of massy blackness fell suddenly upon my eye and penetrated my capacity of apprehension with a pathos and a sense of the infinite that would not have arrested me under other circumstances.[19]

A wonderful example of this relaxation after tension occurs at the end of the passage I call 'strawberries and cream', a favourite of mine. Their pockets flush after the midsummer break, the boys felt that they could afford something 'posh' for once. So they rowed across Windermere to Bowness and the White Lion, renamed the Royal after a visit of Queen Adelaide in 1840. This was no village pub but 'a splendid place, the door beset / With chaises, grooms and liveries'. You could even get a glass of Sir Patrick Spens' 'blood-red wine'. Wordsworth pretends he would have liked it better when it was a more modest inn before the building of the round house on Belle Isle had brought more gentry-trade, but the schoolboy obviously gloried in the 'foolish pomp'. There on the bowling-green they played, making as usual a great noise. I wonder the snooty guests did not complain! But perhaps the children's purchase of strawberries and cream entitled them to commandeer the garden;

> the shouts we sent
> Made all the mountains ring. (*Two-Part Prelude* ii 203-4)

But after all the excitement and exertion comes the peace and 'a sense of the infinite'.

> But ere the fall
> Of night, when in our pinnace we returned
> Over the dusky lake, and to the beach
> Of some small island steered our course with one,
> The minstrel of our troop, and left him there
> And rowed off gently while he blew his flute
> Alone upon a rock – oh then the calm
> And dead still water lay upon my mind
> Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
> Never before so beautiful, sank down
> Into my heart and held me like a dream. (ibid. ii 204-14)

Wordsworth goes on to show how Nature, which had seemed to be only incidental to his boyish activities, 'now at length was sought / For her own sake'. He is trying to trace his development but what a difficult exercise it is: 'Hard task to analyse a soul.' Of course, the first introduction to life and learning comes through the mother, to whom Wordsworth pays tribute in the 'infant babe' passage. Fortunately she was there, a beneficent presence, during his crucial earliest years and, surely, as he himself recognized and, in 1805 Book IV, acknowledged, he was most blessed too in lodging with Ann Tyson, 'my old dame, so motherly and good' who 'perused me with a parent's pride' when he returned to her after his first year at Cambridge. She provided him with the security he needed during his years at Hawkshead, while allowing him the equally necessary freedom, for those walks round Esthwaite before breakfast, for example, either alone

[19] Thomas De Quincey, *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets* ed. David Wright (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 160.

or with his friend John Fleming of Rayrigg. As school began at 6 or 6.30 in summer and 7 or 7.30 in winter, they must have been out very early indeed. On his solitary dawn expeditions when he 'sate / Alone upon some jutting eminence', the borders between the worlds dissolved, so that he did not know which was which.

> Oft in those moments such a holy calm
> Did overspread my soul that I forgot
> The agency of sight, and what I saw
> Appeared like something in myself – a dream,
> A prospect in my mind. (ibid. ii 397-401)

Wordsworth is in doubt whether he is indulging in a subjective activity of projection or whether he is really penetrating the veil and entering into another dimension. Either way, this seeming sensitivity to a spiritual world was characterized by a temporary abdication of the physical sense of sight and sound.

> wonder not
> If such my transports were, for in all things
> I saw one life and felt that it was joy.
> One song they sang, and it was audible,
> Most audible then when the fleshly ear,
> O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
> Forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed. (ibid. ii 458-64)

I don't think that Wordsworth was a theoretician in the sense that Coleridge was. He speaks of 'a toil / Than analytic industry to me / More pleasing' (ibid. ii 427-9). He *felt* the unity of apparently disparate things, and 'Saw blessings spread around me like a sea'. So when along came Coleridge with a theory of 'the One Life' that seemed to fit his experience like a glove, he happily, for the moment, adopted it, as this passage demonstrates. He ends the *Two-Part Prelude* with an apostrophe to Coleridge, calling him, after their wonderful year together in Somerset, 'In many things my brother'.

So Wordsworth completes his record of the magic of childhood. But, apart from the pleasures of nostalgia, what is the point of it? Well, you will have been very much aware that I have missed out so far that famous passage from part I that we all know so well,

> There are in our existence spots of time
> Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
> A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
> By trivial occupations and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
> (Especially the imaginative power)
> Are nourished, and invisibly repaired.
> Such moments chiefly seem to have their date
> In our first childhood. (ibid. i 288-96)

So childhood has a magic not just for itself but also to nourish, repair and make fruitful the adult mind and imagination, and, as we started by asserting, so it does, particularly when mediated through the art of a great poet, who assures us of the continued existence of a higher realm to which we then seemed to have the key.

Sevenoaks

'Orphans Then': Death in the *Two-Part Prelude*

By GORDON K. THOMAS

> For many a time and oft were heard
> Cries coming from the mountain-head,
> Some plainly living voices were,
> And others, I've heard many swear,
> Were voices of the dead. (*The Thorn* 170-4)[1]

IT IS SIMPLY ASTONISHING, once you begin to listen for them, as I have been listening in recent months, how many 'voices of the dead' are heard in Wordsworth's poetry, and especially in his early poetry. Astonishing because, we rightly assume and even take for granted, this is the poet of life, of the celebration of our earthly existence, of affirmation. This is the poet who desires to convey to his readers not a sense of life's difficulties and disasters but rather 'the sense of difficulty overcome'.[2] This is the great poet of 'the faith that looks through death'.[3]

But all this is what Wordsworth would become. The very great blessing in our having the *Two-Part Prelude*, written by a very good and very young poet, still in his twenties, is that it captures for us Wordsworth's youth, makes it permanently available for us, not to take precedence, of course, over the greatness later to be developed, but to allow us to observe with him the *process* of knowledge sought, knowledge gained, and knowledge sought but not yet fully grasped. I believe this early version of *The Prelude* speaks to us with such power because in this young Wordsworth we see, or hope we see, something of our own young selves that is not permanently available to us: what were those questions that long ago troubled me? What were my tentative answers before I found, and kept, my more lasting assurances? Would I be so satisfied with my long-settled answers now if I could remember better the questions and the time of questioning?

Death presents the young child, the adolescent, the growing young man with one such question, perhaps the most powerful of the questions. Death comes often unexpectedly. Sometimes it comes bringing peace and comfort. But death can also be terrifyingly ugly. It brings an abrupt transformation from the familiar and comfortable to the utterly foreign and harrowing.

Wordsworth tells us repeatedly that childhood and death do not mix. In the Fenwick note to the *Intimations Ode*, he tells us that 'Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being'. In fact, 'a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me', he says, led him 'almost to persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated, in something of the same way, to heaven'.[4] All this, as he writes in a letter to Catherine Clarkson in January 1815, is not mere Wordsworthian peculiarity but, in fact, is a universal feeling. All of us, he writes, have as children 'an indisposition to bend to the law of death as applying to our own particular case'.[5]

[1] Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from the poetical works of Wordsworth are taken from *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford, 1940-9) (hereafter *PW*).

[2] Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), ll. 403-4, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974) (hereafter *Prose Works*), i. 150.

[3] *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* 188.

[4] *PW* iv. 463.

[5] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years 1806-20* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (2 vols., Oxford, 1969-70), ii. 189.

But Wordsworth knew that children are realists – hence the careful language here. He was not certain that he would be translated; instead he 'almost' persuaded himself that he could evade death by translation. And that 'indisposition to bend to the law of death' is not an absolute defiance and utter refusal to acknowledge reality. For death does come into children's lives – as we shall see in several childhood encounters with death depicted in the *Two-Part Prelude*. And when a child encounters death we observe an acute instance of the growth of the mind.

I remember vividly today, more than fifty years later, my own first encounter with death. I mention it here only because it is curiously similar to his own encounter with death which Wordsworth puts first in *The Prelude*. I grew up in Virginia, and one late spring evening when I was five years old my father and my older brother and I set up our little camp on the banks of the Potomac River. We fished, I at least with great enthusiasm, in the river until it grew too dark to see; then we went to bed. The next morning I was up before the sun, to fish some more. After a couple of hours, the river current finally brought alongside the rock where I was perched an object that I had noticed many hours earlier without paying it much attention. Now on nearer view, it was clear enough: it was the drowned and bloated corpse of a man, drowned in the treacherous currents of the river three days before, as we later learned. My father quickly ran to notify the police, and we left the place. The man was unknown to me, but he now became, for weeks afterwards, 'the trouble of my dreams'.[6] I *always* think of him when I read Wordsworth's description of his encounter with death on Esthwaite Lake. I have never been much interested in fishing since that time.

The early confronting of death by a child, the encounter of two seeming opposites – this is just the sort of thing that prods the developing mind to activity, conscious or unconscious.

> – A simple Child,
> That lightly draws its breath,
> And feels its life in every limb,
> What should it know of death? ('We Are Seven' 1-4)

Well, in fact, a child can know, or guess, or be fed, quite a lot of knowledge or supposition about death. The 'little cottage Girl' (l.5) of 'We Are Seven' knows, or thinks she knows, quite a bit: she knows that the dead leave behind memories in the minds of the living, that the dead are given physical memorials by the living, that death can be a release from pain, that dying is in the hands of God, and that death cannot sever bonds of love. She may know nothing, or not much, about physiological functions and their transformations at death, but that important matter somehow seems considerably less important than what she does know.

That little girl in the poem is 'eight years old, she said' (l.6). Wordsworth said he was the same age, or just about, when he first went to Hawkshead, to gain an education, and, in his first week there encountered death. Actually, as we know, he had just turned nine. Did he just make a mistake about his age? Or is this a conscious, artistic attempt to identify with the little girl and her level of understanding and consciousness in the earlier poem? In fact, the summer that followed soon after his arrival in Hawkshead in May 1779 would have been his tenth, but for whatever reasons of his own, the least likely of which, I think, would be a faulty memory, since he is so very precise about most other details, he begins the passage in the 1799 *Prelude* with a specific reference to his age, a reference which he was to leave out in later versions of the experience:

[6] *Two-Part Prelude* i 129. Quotations from all versions of *The Prelude* come from *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, Stephen Gill, and M. H. Abrams (New York, 1979) (hereafter Norton *Prelude*).

Ere I had seen
Eight summers - and 'twas in the very week
When I was first transplanted to thy vale,
Beloved Hawkshead; when thy paths, thy shores
And brooks, were like a dream of novelty
To my half-infant mind - I chanced to cross
One of those open fields which, shaped like ears,
Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's lake.
Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom
I saw distinctly on the opposite shore,
Beneath a tree and close by the lake side,
A heap of garments, as if left by one
Who there was bathing. Half an hour I watched
And no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake
Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast,
And now and then a leaping fish disturbed
The breathless stillness. (*Two-Part Prelude* i. 258-74)

How ominous it all is, though neither we nor the little boy yet knows any definite reason for feeling it so. But we observe a transformation in the language of the passage: it begins with a salute to 'Beloved Hawkshead' and its 'dream of novelty', but then we move from twilight to gloom to what, for a boy, is surely a lengthy sentinel watch of half an hour, but a watch that reveals 'no one' (and what do we suppose was going on in the child's mind for that silent and lonely half hour?), and then the scene grows 'dark with all the shadows on its breast', finally with only an occasional disturbance by a mindless fish of 'the breathless stillness'. We surely do not need to be told what the abandoned 'heap of garments' means nor what happened to their owner. Wordsworth's insistence on telling us is not because he lacks subtlety, which he surely does not, but rather to make a further point. Our minds, he insists in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, gain their greatest and most valued growth from the awareness of opposites, 'from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude'.[7] And this was his first great lesson learned, his first great educational experience at Hawkshead, in his first week as a schoolboy there. He must have gone home to sleep that night after the darkness and stillness fell on the lake. What did he think about that night? How well did he sleep? The next morning he was back at the side of the lake to watch some more, for he needed to see the outcome:

The succeeding day
There came a company, and in their boat
Sounded with iron hooks and with long poles.
At length the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene
Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
Rose with his ghastly face. (*Two-Part Prelude* i 274-9)

The body of James Jackson, the schoolmaster from Sawrey, had been found - hideous, 'ghastly' - and the natural beauty of the setting was all the more 'beauteous' for the contrast. So the schoolboy's first lesson at Hawkshead came from a schoolmaster, but not in the classroom, and

[7] *Prose Works* i. 148, l.375.

came in the form of a contrasting and yet a juxtaposing of the beauteous lakeland scene and the ghastly face of death.

When Shakespeare's noble Othello told his life story in Desdemona's hearing, told of disasters and warfare, of captivity and slavery, of living among cannibals, 'She lov'd [him] for the dangers [he] had pass'd'.[8] That is, his tale awakened sympathy, perhaps the surest element of love. With all this in mind we see that Wordsworth's comparing of Othello's adventures with his own as a child is not so strange nor out of place as it might seem at first glance. Desdemona loved Othello for his mind, and the young Wordsworth developed his own lovely mind by observing and pondering his own childish encounters with death and disaster:

> numerous accidents in flood or field,
> Quarry or moor, or 'mid the winter snows,
> Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
> 0f rural history, that impressed my mind
> With images to which in following years
> Far other feelings were attached - with forms
> That yet exist with independent life,
> And, like their archetypes, know no decay. (*Two-Part Prelude* i 280-7)

How like Wordsworth to take the description of the ghastly decaying corpse of the drowned schoolmaster and feed it into a mental process by which 'images' become attached to 'feelings' and 'forms' which do not die but 'exist with independent life' and 'know no decay'!

Before leaving this very important encounter with death in the passage on the drowned man, I can't help noticing with you how much the experience and the passage lose in power by being made, in their placement and treatment in Book Five in the later long versions of *The Prelude*, just a sort of footnote to the poet's discussion of what books did for him, where he makes the rather commonplace, and not terribly convincing, point that seeing the drowned corpse, 'a spectre shape / Of terror',[9] failed to produce in him any 'vulgar fear' [10] nor any 'soul-debasing fear' [11] because he had already read about corpses in fairy tales. I can't make this quite ring true to my ears. Books, especially the books we read in childhood, do not in my experience detract from the power of what we later experience in real life but rather enhance and deepen it. I think the poet knew, in later times, that he had a very fine spot of time in this passage about the drowned man but didn't quite know what to do with it. What it really tells of is the very fruitful beginning of his formal education. I think it belongs in the Hawkshead section of the poem, right alongside, by the way, the first-person version of 'There Was a Boy', written about this same time and treating these same ideas, and then somehow left out altogether from the *Two-Part Prelude.*

As I say, encounters with death are a frequent theme in Wordsworth's early poetry, and they form a recurrent motif in the *Two-Part Prelude*. These are the 'tragic facts / Of rural history'[12] which shaped his youthful mind. One of these which he obviously attached great importance to, for it reappears in the same context in all versions of *The Prelude*, is that which, in the *Two-Part Prelude* immediately follows the incident of the drowned man. The poet introduces it with

[8] *Othello* I iii 167; quotations from *The Riverside Shakespeare* ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1974).
[9] 1850 *Prelude* v 450-1.
[10] 1805 *Prelude* v 473.
[11] 1850 *Prelude* v 451.
[12] *Two-Part Prelude* i 282-3.

famous words which describe one of his most important psychological theories and also one of his most important techniques of poetic composition and organization:

> There are in our existence spots of time
> Which, with distinct preeminence retain
> A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
> By trivial occupations and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds –
> Especially the imaginative power –
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
> Such moments chiefly seem to have their date
> In our first childhood. (ibid. i 288-96)

In later years, when he both knew more and had suffered more, he would mention in this passage such troubles as 'false opinion and contentious thought, / Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight',[13] and he would, famously, replace the 'fructifying virtue' of these 'spots of time' with the carefully considered phrase 'a renovating virtue',[14] thereby gaining a greater sense of linkage and permanence but, as the Norton editors observe, losing some of the sense of mental creativity.[15] In later versions, Wordsworth also adds the recognition that

> This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
> Among those passages of life in which
> We have had deepest feelings that the mind
> Is lord and master, and that outward sense
> Is but the obedient servant of her will.[16]

But however much the poet revised and enlarged and clarified the general theory of the spots of time in ensuing versions of *The Prelude*, the great example of just what a spot of time *is* remains always the same: it is the telling of what happened to the child William, 'yet an urchin'[17] and only at 'the twilight of rememberable life',[18] when he got lost one day in the hills beyond Penrith. This time there is no grim and ghastly corpse rising up from the waters of the lake, and there is also no anticipatory period of watching and wondering, as with the drowned man. Instead, the encounter is abrupt, without warning, and the confrontation with death is purely in the imagination, where the child sees, but only inside his own head, a murder, a victim, a murderer, an execution, and a grim display of judicial vengeance:

> I remember well
> ('Tis of an early season that I speak,
> The twilight of rememberable life),
> While I was yet an urchin, one who scarce
> Could hold a bridle, with ambitious hopes
> I mounted, and we rode towards the hills.
> We were a pair of horsemen: honest James

[13] 1805 *Prelude* xi 260-1.
[14] 1805 *Prelude* xi 210.
[15] Norton *Prelude* 8n4.
[16] 1805 *Prelude* xi 268-72.
[17] *Two-Part Prelude* i 299.
[18] ibid. i 298.

Was with me, my encourager and guide.
We had not travelled long ere some mischance
Disjoined me from my comrade, and, through fear
Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor
I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length
Came to a bottom where in former times
A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung
In irons. Mouldered was the gibbet-mast;
The bones were gone, the iron and the wood;
Only a long green ridge of turf remained
Whose shape was like a grave. I left the spot,
And reascending the bare slope I saw
A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
The beacon on the summit, and more near
A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
Against the blowing wind. It was in truth
An ordinary sight, but I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
Did at that time invest the naked pool,
The beacon and the lonely eminence,
The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind. (ibid. i 296-327)

There are several elements here in this description to which Wordsworth was to become sufficiently attached to use again and again. There is the oxymoronic 'lost guide,' certainly akin to the guide who would later leave him and Robert Jones in the Alps, at the lunch table below the Simplon Pass, of Book VI, and to the shepherd-guide who trailed behind the same two climbers in the ascent of Mount Snowdon in the final book of the long versions of *The Prelude*. There is the girl forcing her way against the wind who seems much related to the 'hunger-bitten girl' of France who was to personify all against which the Revolution, in its early stages, was fighting,[19] and who makes several other appearances in Wordsworth's shorter poems. There is the pool and the nearby patch of grass 'whose shape was like a grave,' which also appear in *The Thorn*.

And these repetitions, of course, are the poet's main point: what the five-year-old child experienced that day near Penrith stayed with him and 'nourished' the 'imagmative power' of his mind. But central to this spot of time is the picture of the little boy on foot, 'stumbling on', and coming to the scene of death where memories of the murdered wife and the executed murderer remained so strong. How did the boy know, since all physical evidence was gone – 'Mouldered was the gibbet-mast; / The bones were gone, the iron and the wood' – about the horrors associated with that spot? Especially since the history he describes does not represent a real series of events in this very real place. There really was a murderer who was hanged in Penrith three years before Wordsworth was born, whose story the boy's grandparents or mother

[19] 1805 *Prelude* ix 511-20.

might have told him sometime before he went out on his horse that day, though it seems a grim story to be sharing with a five-year-old child. There was a real 'murderer of his wife' who had been hung in irons in a gibbet a century before just outside Hawkshead, near Ann Tyson's home,[20] whose story Wordsworth could well have learned from his landlady – except that he did not even meet Ann Tyson for another four years after the experience described. What we clearly do not have in this spot of time is a literal encounter with death at all but a combination story gathered in later years and attached by the grown man, the poet, to the fears and imaginings of the little boy lost. No matter. Wordsworth's point is that 'the mind / Is lord and master' and the senses are subject to the magination.[21] This murderer hung in chains from a gibbet-mast, whom Wordsworth never even saw, remained ever in his mind and reappears tellingly in *Guilt and Sorrow*, when the wandering discharged sailor, fleeing from the effects of his 'miserable work' of robbery and murder, first hears, then sees what very much seems to be that same corpse:

> Now, as he plodded on, with sullen clang
> A sound of chains along the desert rang;
> He looked, and saw upon a gibbet high
> A human body that in irons swang,
> Uplifted by the tempest whirling by;
> And, hovering, round it often did a raven fly. (*Guilt and Sorrow* 76-81)

But we cannot ignore the fact that a good many of Wordsworth's thoughts and imaginings in his early years seem rather morbid; and that, more often than we might have guessed from carrying in our minds just a general sense of his generally affirmative and healthful state of mind, he often felt oppressed by his own memories and imagination.There are a good many pictures of death in the early poetry, and very often they are hideous pictures of ugly forms of death.The Pastor in *The Excursion* relates the story of 'hapless Ellen' (vi 840) who finds merciful peace in a beautiful death:

> So, through the cloud of death, her Spirit passed
> Into that pure and unknown world of love
> Where injury cannot come. (vi 1049-51)

For Wordsworth would come to be one who could speak with authority of how

> The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
> Do take a sober colouring from an eye
> That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality. (*Intimations Ode* 196-8)

But this is not the poet of the *Two-Part Prelude*, where ugly death is encountered and repeatedly found to be ghastly and hideous. He tells us, indeed, that a strong intent in undertaking the composition of *The Prelude* was to rid himself of mental oppression,

> that with outward life
> I might endue some airy phantasies
> That had been floating loose about for years,

[20] See *Prose Works* ii. 445-6.
[21] 1805 *Prelude* xi 270-2.

> And to such beings temperately deal forth
> The many feelings that oppressed my heart.[22]

In later years, 'probably 1838/39',[23] Wordsworth paid tribute to Coleridge, of all people, in a passage then added to *The Prelude*, for ridding him of his sense of oppression over death's horrors. The Norton editors understandably distrust the accuracy of the 'assessment' (ibid.) in which this tribute is couched, and certainly it came several years after Coleridge's death, at a time when the aging Wordsworth may have grown a bit sentimental about his deceased friend, but the statement as it was published in the 1850 *Prelude* is at least interesting for its confession of a morbid state of mind in Wordsworth's youth. Speaking of Coleridge, he writes:

> Thy kindred influence to my heart of hearts
> Did also find its way. Thus fear relaxed
> Her overweening grasp; thus thoughts and things
> In the self-haunting spirit learned to take
> More rational proportions; mystery,
> The incumbent mystery of sense and soul,
> Of life and death, time and eternity,
> Admitted more habitually a mild
> Interposition – a serene delight
> In closelier gathering cares, such as become
> A human creature, howsoe'er endowed,
> Poet, or destined for a humbler name;
> And so the deep enthusiastic joy,
> The rapture of the hallelujah sent
> From all that breathes and is, was chastened, stemmed
> And balanced by pathetic truth, by trust
> In hopeful reason, leaning on the stay
> Of Providence; and in reverence for duty,
> Here, if need be, struggling with storms, and there
> Strewing in peace life's humblest ground with herbs,
> At every season green, sweet at all hours![24]

Whatever or whoever was the cause of this improvement in outlook, and one suspects that both Dorothy and Mary are likelier sources for relief from morbid oppression than Coleridge, the fact that there *was* a change in Wordsworth is clear.

But what was the cause of the youthful Wordsworth's morbid state of mind in the first place? It seems not to fit with his own theories and beliefs about childhood and death – 'A simple Child . . . / What should it know of death?' I'm not sure, of course, but I suspect that the answer may again lie in the *Two-Part Prelude*, particularly in its treatments of two undoubtedly important events in Wordsworth's own life.

One of these, understandably enough, is the death of the poet's father, John Wordsworth, on 30 December 1783, when the son was not yet fourteen years old. The father was just 42 at his death, and that death seems to have been precipitated by another of those 'numerous accidents

[22] 1850 *Prelude* i 119-24.
[23] Norton *Prelude* 475n8.
[24] 1850 *Prelude* xiv 281-301.

. . . 'mid the winter snows', those 'tragic facts / Of rural history' to which the poet refers in *The Two-Part Prelude* (i 280-4). John Wordsworth was as usual on business for Sir James Lowther, this time in the southern part of the lakes; riding home to Cockermouth he lost his way in bad weather and had to spend a night on Cold Fell without shelter: 'He suffered a severe chill from which he never recovered'.[25] So John Wordsworth's death came abruptly and unprepared for, and left his family with a sense of his not ever having quite lived. As Dorothy later wrote to Jane Pollard, 'When my Father died his affairs were in a very unsettled way' and it was 'indeed mortifying' to her and her brothers 'to find that amongst all those who visited at my father's house he had not one real friend'.[26] Though Dorothy wrote with great feeling of 'the loss I sustained when I was deprived of a Father',[27] it is also true that John Wordsworth, especially in his last years, was a somewhat morose and distant parent. His daughter no doubt spoke for her brothers as well as herself in describing the last half dozen years of his life as a period 'which I cannot think of without regret for many causes'.[28]

All this only adds to the interest of Wordsworth's description of his father's death in *The Prelude*. And here I am struck by two very different treatments of this death by two of Wordsworth's most famous biographers. Emile Legouis wrote a century ago in his great and important biography of these same early formative years that the 1799 *Prelude* requires us to look at, that John Wordsworth seemed to him entirely missing from his son's poetry: 'To his father', wrote Legouis, 'Wordsworth . . . devoted not a single line'.[29] This is clearly not perfectly accurate in literal terms, and it also seems to me to miss the point of one of the finest and most memorable passages in *The Prelude*. On the other hand, Mary Moorman recognizes in *her* biography covering that early period of the poet's life that the death of Wordsworth's father 'made an impression of peculiar importance' on the boy, and on the poet and was accompanied in the son by what she calls 'a strong religious mood of Job-like contrition and self-abasement'.[30] I think that *is* an echo of Job here, but as I will shortly explain I think there is an even stronger and more powerful echo too.

What we have to see right off in Wordsworth's description of his father's death in *The Prelude* is that the poet's focus is assuredly not on his parent; it is not remotely like the heartfelt tribute to Coleridge that I've mentioned, not in fact any real tribute at all to one who was presumably a beloved father. Rather, the focus is entirely on the young William, his memories and especially his feelings, both before his father's death and afterwards.

Now here I must interrupt myself to state some distrust which I know many other readers of Wordsworth share, of so-called Freudian analyses of Wordsworth's writings. I think that Sigmund Freud, whatever his merits as a psychologist, was a close and thoughtful and astute reader of great literature and that his insights and methods can be useful in literary study. But when it comes to Wordsworth, I find an interesting reversal of expectations: I have not heard particularly convincing Freudian analyses of Wordsworth's writings, but I have several times found Wordsworth *anticipating* some of Freud's key observations and theories. One such case is the famous Freudian theory of the 'Oedipus complex'. We know that Freud taught that every

[25] Hunter Davies, *William Wordsworth* (Feltham, 1983) (hereafter Davies), p. 17.

[26] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967) (hereafter *EY*), p. 7.

[27] *EY* 9.

[28] *EY* 663.

[29] *The Early Life of William Wordsworth, 1770-1798* (London, 1897), p. 25.

[30] *William Wordsworth: The Early Years 1770-1803* (Oxford, 1968) (hereafter Moorman), pp. 68-9.

human being experiences in childhood the 'kernel',[31] as he calls it, of the experience of the mythic Oedipus. Regarding the Oedipus complex, Freud writes: 'The name tells you: you all know the Greek myth of King Oedipus, whose destiny it was to slay his father and to wed his mother, who did all in his power to avoid the fate prophesied by the oracle, and who in self-punishment blinded himself when he discovered that in ignorance he had committed both these crimes', and, further, that in Sophocles' dramatic treatment of this myth, the best-known version of the story, we can all 'experience the profound effect' that the myth has on our own conscious and unconscious minds and both witness and experience in the drama 'a certain resemblance to the course of a psychoanalysis'.[32] Not, says, Freud, that we are ever likely to see in real human beings a reenactment of 'the deeds of Oedipus',[33] but rather than deeds a mental, generally less than fully conscious, awareness, that we carry in ourselves what it is very common, perhaps universal, to observe in the children we see, that they, and we, while recognizing in a practical way the value and helpfulness of both parents, tend to find in the parent of the opposite sex a source of expectable pleasure and in the parent of the same sex a hindrance to pleasure. Freud never accuses the whole race of childhood of plottng both patricide and incest, only of sensing, in the case of little boys, that while both parents can serve them, they can, or hope they can, expect more pleasure to be offered by the mother and more obstacles and discipline to be given by the father.

Wordsworth could not have known Freud, of course, nor would he ever have needed to. He would know the Oedipus story from a variety of sources, and his mind would go to work on that story and come up, all on his own, with at least as much psychological understanding of the universality of the oedipal feelings as Freud himself could manage. Duncan Wu's very valuable book on Wordsworth's reading in the years leading up to the composition of the *Two-Part Prelude* tells us all we really need to know on this subject. The boy read Homer in Greek at Hawkshead School, and of course the basic elements of the Oedipus story are in Book XI of *The Odyssey*. At the very beginning of his poetry-writing career, Wordsworth, Wu tells us, also 'displays a thorough knowledge' of Pope's translation of both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.[34] When he was eighteen years old and at Cambridge, he was examined on Sophocles; the 'considerable merit' he showed in that examination was likely to have been based on his knowledge of both *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Oedipus Rex*.[35]

And now I must return to the *Two-Part Prelude*. But all this about Freud and Oedipus is only my way of getting at Wordsworth's very mysterious description in *The Prelude* of the death of his father. As I've said, it hardly qualifies as a description of John Wordsworth Sr's death at all; all the poet says of him is 'he died'.[36] The passage tells us much more about the son, 'in such anxiety of hope' (ibid. i 357), with his 'eyes intensely straining' (ibid. i 347) for sight of the horses to come and take him and his brothers home, but also 'feverish, and tired, and restless' (ibid. i 332) and 'impatient' (ibid. i 333) for the time to pass. In effect, though unknown to him, the boy Wordsworth was wishing away his father's short remaining time on earth, for John Wordsworth was to die less than a fortnight later. Now this is not patricide, and it is not the stuff

[31] *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* tr. Joan Riviere (Garden City, NY, 1953) (hereafter Freud), p. 341.

[32] Freud 340.

[33] Freud 341.

[34] *Wordsworth's reading 1770-1799* (Cambridge, 1993) (hereafter Wu), pp. 75-6.

[35] Wu 129.

[36] *Two-Part Prelude* i 351.

of which deep and rational guilt is made. But it is worth poetic pondering, and such is the use that Wordsworth makes of it.

I want to cite the whole passage as it appears in the 1799 *Prelude*, and I want you to observe with me what details are present in the description, for there are a few striking details in the poetry, and also what details, and they are many, are missing:

> One Christmas-time,
> The day before the holidays began,
> Feverish, and tired, and restless, I went forth
> Into the fields, impatient for the sight
> Of those three horses which should bear us home,
> My brothers and myself. There was a crag,
> An eminence, which from the meeting-point
> Of two highways ascending overlooked
> At least a long half-mile of those two roads,
> By each of which the expected steeds might come –
> The choice uncertain. Thither I repaired
> Up to the highest summit. 'Twas a day
> Stormy, and rough, and wild, and on the grass
> I sate half sheltered by a naked wall.
> Upon my right hand was a single sheep,
> A whistling hawthorn on my left, and there,
> Those two companions at my side, I watched
> With eyes intensely straining, as the mist
> Gave intermitting prospects of the wood
> And plain beneath. Ere I to school returned
> That dreary time, ere I had been ten days
> A dweller in my father's house, he died,
> And I and my two brothers, orphans then,
> Followed his body to the grave. The event,
> With all the sorrow which it brought, appeared
> A chastisement; and when I called to mind
> That day so lately passed, when from the crag
> I looked in such anxiety of hope,
> With trite reflections of morality,
> Yet with the deepest passion, I bowed low
> To God who thus corrected my desires.
> And afterwards the wind and sleety rain,
> And all the business of the elements,
> The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
> And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
> The noise of wood and water, and the mist
> Which on the line of each of those two roads
> Advanced in such indisputable shapes –
> All these were spectacles and sounds to which
> I often would repair, and thence would drink
> As at a fountain. And I do not doubt

That in this later time, when storm and rain
Beat on my roof at midnight, or by day
When I am in the woods, unknown to me
The workings of my spirit thence are brought. (*Two-Part Prelude* i 330-74)

Now consider the facts as they are given here. Why had the boy Wordsworth been so impatient that day? Did his brothers share his feelings? How long did they actually wait for the horses to arrive? How was the journey home in all that 'wind and sleety rain,' and how long did it take them? Was their father anxiously awaiting their arrival, and did he greet them with joy? The strong sense of impatient anticipation that the poet gives us leads us to such questions as these, but none of these questions is answered. How did the father die? Was his final suffering long and intense? Did his sons observe that suffering, and share it? What sort of funeral did he have, and how and by whom was it arranged? *The Prelude* is silent on all this. There is a great deal that seems both interesting and important here that we do not know from the poem.

But there is a lot we do know too, though at first glance it seems rather trivial compared to what we are not told. The poet is very precise about exactly where he and his brothers were while he felt so impatient (and the Norton editors even more so: 'on the ridge north of Borwick Lodge, a mile and a half from the [Hawkshead] school'[37]). It was a spot where the road out of Hawkshead forked into 'two highways', either of which could bring horses from Cockermouth and take the boys home. That point is insisted on three times – those 'two highways' (ibid. i 337), 'those two roads' (ibid. i 338). Again, 'those two roads' (ibid. i 366). It is a spot where the road from Hawkshead meets two roads from Cockermouth – a place where three roads meet. May I remind you that while this detail does not appear in Homer, in Sophocles' treatment of the Oedipus story, the fact that Laius, father of Oedipus, was killed 'at a place where three roads meet'[38] becomes the crucial and all-determining clue that leads to the revelation of what Freud calls 'the deeds of Oedipus'?[39] I leave it to you to ponder with Freud, if you wish, the anatomical implications of the setting of the fork in the road. But there really seems to me no question that Wordsworth, in giving us a passage which conveys so very little concrete information but which so insistently conveys this *one* bit of information, is making an important link between his own boyish feelings and the Oedipal symbolism.

Why else did he feel such guilt over the childish act of wishing the time away? Why else did he accept his father's death as a 'chastisement' for that childish act? Why else can he tell of how

With trite reflections of morality,
Yet with the deepest passion, I bowed low
To God who thus corrected my desires? (ibid. i 358-60)

Why else does he feel that now, when so many years have passed since that incident, he still recognizes that 'the workings of [his] spirit' still flow from this experience? And who needs Freud when we have Wordsworth?

Freud speaks of how in Sophocles's play we all have the opportunity to 'experience the profound effect' of the Oedipus myth and observe within ourselves 'a certain resemblance'.[40] Moorman writes of the 'impression of peculiar importance' that John Wordsworth's death had

[37] Norton *Prelude* 10n2.
[38] *Oedipus the King and Antigone* ed. and tr. Peter D. Arnott (Northbrook, Illinois, 1960), l.688.
[39] Freud 341.
[40] Freud 340.

on his son's mind and of how 'the recollection' of waiting impatiently, though hardly patricidally, for those horses at the highway junction 'set his imagination stirring and nourished his creative power'.[41] She offers no explanation for why this nourishing of creative power would have taken place, nor of how it was manifested. And I am more than a little concerned that only a fool would rush in where the angel Mary Moorman feared to tread. But I *do* have a suggestion. As Wordsworth thought back fifteen years or so later on his own experience in the place where three roads met, and now connected it with his university reading of Sophocles and with all those years of weighing and pondering and connectings, all those 'workings of [his] spirit', he could 'drink' insight and self-understanding 'as at a fountain' and recognize as great a truth as any young poet could possibly learn – that art is *true*, poetry is true, with truth such as that given in Sophocles's play far deeper and more universal and more important than the truths given by the best of biographers and even by our own conscious memories.

Of course, the parallels between the Oedipus story and the Wordsworth story are inexact – as indeed they must be to matter. Oedipus actually met his father at the place where three roads meet, while the boy Wordsworth only awaited a messenger from his father at the similar place. Or – maybe not? What can we make of that mist –

> the mist
> Which on the line of each of those two roads
> Advanced in such indisputable shapes? (ibid. i 365-7)

'Indisputable shapes'? Even the metre causes our minds to stumble here – enough so that the Norton editors have to tell us how to pronounce the word, namely as it is not generally pronounced: 'indísputáble'.[42] However we pronounce the word, the meaning is that the shapes formed by the mist coming up both roads from Cockermouth were clear, certain, obvious – all the things that to us they are not. I think Wordsworth, not at the time but in retrospect, recognized his father's spirit in the indisputable shape of the mist. I agree with Jonathan Bate, who, in his fine book *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, writes that for Wordsworth 'the ghost of his father comes to him with the memory, for the phrase with which he describes the images of the scene is . . . [a] recollection of Hamlet and the ghost' of *his* father, the mist which 'Advanced in such indisputable shapes' being an ironic reversal of Hamlet's saying to his father's ghost, 'Thou com'st in such a questionable shape'.[43] (Bate's book, one notes with interest in this context, is written 'in memory of my father'.[44] But fear not: we shall not next delve here into psychoanalysis of Wordsworth's scholarly critics!).

Let me say again here that I do not intend to be presenting a Freudian or psychoanalytical interpretation of Wordsworth and *The Prelude*. My objective is the reverse: to suggest, even if by just one example, how crucially and clearly Wordsworth anticipates some of Freud's most interesting precepts.

And with that claim as a foundation, I move now to consideration of the last episode of death in the *Two-Part Prelude*. This one is the strangest of all, and in terms of its effects on the growth of the young poet's mind no doubt the most important. I call it strange because in the *Two-Part Prelude* this key episode does not appear at all. It is, of course, the death of William's wise and

[41] Moorman 70.

[42] Norton *Prelude* l0n4.

[43] Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford, 1986), p. 116; see *Hamlet* I iv 43.

[44] Ibid. p. v.

dearly beloved and deeply appreciated mother, Ann Cookson Wordsworth, on 8 March 1778, in Penrith, at the home of her parents. This event, of course, followed the child Wordsworth's encounter with the scene of death, imaginary or real, on that day when he rode up into the hills above Penrith, became separated from his guide, 'honest James', and came upon that 'long green ridge of turf . . . / Whose shape was like a grave' (ibid. i 312-13). But the death of Wordsworth's mother preceded the other experiences with death of which I have been speaking, and in a kind of childlike sense could be seen as having caused them. The Wordsworth boys were sent away to Hawkshead when their mother died, and that fact would make possible William's encounter with the 'ghastly face' of the schoolmaster drowned in Esthwaite Lake. As close as Wordsworth comes to mentioning his mother's death in the *Two-Part Prelude* is to note that when his father died, five years later, he and his siblings were 'orphans then' (ibid. i 352).

That is not much of a mention. As one of the poet's biographers writes, 'As for the death of his mother, who knows what scars that created[?]'.[45] The 1799 *Prelude* seems silent on the matter.

For later, longer versions of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth included a genuine and handsome tribute to his mother and her effect on his life in opening and nurturing his mind and spirit and in teaching him to trust his own nature. I quote the passage from Book V of the 1850 version, but it is almost the same in the 1805 version. What mother would not prize such a tribute – particularly in its very clear echo of Christ's parental lament over Jerusalem: 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!' (Matthew 23:37). Ann Wordsworth's children were more responsive to her gathering and nurturing:

> Behold the parent hen amid her brood,
> Though fledged and feathered, and well pleased to part
> And straggle from her presence, still a brood,
> And she herself from the maternal bond
> Still undischarged; yet doth she little more
> Than move with them in tenderness and love,
> A centre to the circle which they make;
> And now and then, alike from need of theirs
> And call of her own natural appetites,
> She scratches, ransacks up the earth for food,
> Which they partake at pleasure. Early died
> My honoured Mother, she who was the heart
> And hinge of all our learnings and our loves:
> She left us destitute, and, as we might,
> Trooping together. . . .
> but let me boldly say,
> In gratitude, and for the sake of truth,
> Unheard by her, that she, not falsely taught,
> Fetching her goodness rather from times past,
> Than shaping novelties for times to come,
> Had no presumption, no such jealousy,
> Nor did by habit of her thoughts mistrust

[45] Davies 10.

Our nature, but had virtual faith that He
Who fills the mother's breast with innocent milk,
Doth also for our nobler part provide,
Under His great correction and control,
As innocent instincts, and as innocent food;
Or draws for minds that are left free to trust
In the simplicities of opening life
Sweet honey out of spurned or dreaded weeds.
This was her creed, and therefore she was pure
From anxious fear of error or mishap,
And evil, overweeningly so called;
Was not puffed up by false unnatural hopes,
Nor selfish with unnecessary cares,
Nor with impatience from the season asked
More than its timely produce; rather loved
The hours for what they are, than from regard
Glanced on their promises in restless pride.
Such was she – not from faculties more strong
Than others have, but from the times, perhaps,
And spot in which she lived, and through a grace
Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,
A heart that found benignity and hope,
Being itself benign.[46]

Lovely as this tribute is, and well deserved too, it is no wonder that it does not appear in the 1799 *Prelude*. I think it reflects a view and understanding of parenthood that is much more likely to come from a son who has himself become a parent and has had opportunity to observe and learn from his own children, such opportunity as Wordsworth's first-born son John offered by the time these lines were composed, as revealed, among other places, in William's letter to his brother Richard a month after John's birth: 'The boy is as fine a boy as ever was beheld. This is the involuntary language of every body who sees him. He is very stout large healthy and of uncommonly manly features. We shall have great pleasure in shewing him to you'.[47] In this state of mind, a man may become eloquent indeed on the subject of his own parents.

But surely the poet felt gratitude for his mother as well as a great sense of loss in her death as he composed the 1799 *Prelude*. And certainly, in the second part of the *Two-Part Prelude* he works to express that gratitude as well as the sense of loss in a passage which combines an attempt at philosophical distancing with an image of his own mother as both forerunner and personification of Nature:

blest the babe
Nursed in his mother's arms, the babe who sleeps
Upon his mother's breast, who, when his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,
Doth gather passion from his mother's eye. . . .
Thus day by day

[46] 1850 *Prelude* v 246-93.
[47] *EY* 399.

Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quickened, are more vigorous. . . .
From early days,
Beginning not long after that first time
In which, a babe, by intercourse of touch
I held mute dialogues with my mother's heart,
I have endeavoured to display the means
Whereby this infant sensibility,
Great birthright of our being, was in me
Augmented and sustained. (*Two-Part Prelude* ii 269-317)

This is the same idea present in the *Intimations Ode*, where earthly nature takes on, 'with something of a Mother's mind', the roles of 'homely Nurse' and foster-mother (ll.78-83). In the 1799 *Prelude*, it seems to me, Wordsworth's efforts are not entirely successful; as in the treatment of his father's death, the focus here remains on the child William, and the dead parent is reduced to little more than a benign influence in the boy's growth. The whole project, at this stage, says the poet, is 'a path / . . . difficult before me' (*Two-Part Prelude* ii 317-18). The personality and character of Ann Wordsworth, so deserving of celebration, do not receive it here. I think Wordsworth was not yet ready to do her justice; I think the pain for him of her death, and all its aftermath, was still too overwhelming for him to deal with poetically in 1799. I think we probably in fact have another anticipation of a key Freudian principle, this time the principle of *repression*, in which, says Freud, feelings too difficult to deal with may be, in effect, 'incapable of becoming conscious';[48] and the struggle to move such feelings from the unconscious to the conscious mind, where they can be dealt with freely, may, for a time at least, leave them stuck in what Freud calls a 'preconscious' level.[49] The important emotion here is pain – pain too powerful to accept and to deal with. In the death of his mother, the boy William assuredly experienced such a pain, and its effects lingered on for years. That famous letter that Dorothy wrote to Jane Pollard on the pain accompanying the predicament of orphanhood no doubt spoke her brother's feelings as well – those sorrowful and yet angry phrases that fill the letter – 'tears of the bitterest sorrow', 'the loss we sustained', 'insults . . . of the most mortifying kind', 'ill-nature', 'mortifications', 'we are found fault with every hour of the day both by the servants and my Grandfr and Grandmr, the former of whom never speaks to us but when he scolds which is not seldom', 'quite unhappy', 'the greatest misfortune that can befal one'.[50]

After speaking in the *Two-Part Prelude* of the 'mute dialogues with [his] mother's heart' of his infancy, Wordsworth writes simply, 'I was left alone'.[51] It is not much to say at the death of a mother like Ann Wordsworth but it seems to be all that Wordsworth was capable of expressing even twenty years after her death. And yet I do believe that it is her death, that event which the young poet found so hard to write about, which underlies the theme of death throughout the *Two-Part Prelude* and makes the theme of death so essential in the poem, and not the peace of death, which might also have poetic possibilities but which does not appear here, but the fear and horror and loneliness occasioned by death – those nightmarish though at least partially imaginary

[48] Freud 306.
[49] Freud 306.
[50] *EY* 3-5.
[51] *Two-Part Prelude* ii 322.

encounters with haunted gravesites and places of execution of murderers, the 'breathless stillness' (ibid. i 274) and heavy suspense preceding the ghastly drowned schoolmaster's body bolting from the lake, the nearly unspeakable sense of final loss at the death of the boy's father with all its attendant symbolism and mythic power of guilt and chastisement.

'My Mother . . . died when I was a boy,' Wordsworth wrote tersely in 1801 in a letter to Anne Taylor.[52] He did not mention his mother again in any surviving letter for more than three decades. It was not a subject on which he wrote much directly, but it seems to have led him to a lifelong consideration of 'Life, death, eternity! momentous themes'.[53] In the process of his consideration of life and death and the eternity which stretches both backwards and forwards from this earth life, Wordsworth would become the greatest poet ever to treat the whole range of human experience, of human *being*, of what he later calls in the later *Prelude* 'what we are and what we may become'.[54] I think it is impossible to overstate just how much we owe to the revelatory light he sheds on our existence as we find that light throughout the whole corpus of his work. But our subject here is the *Two-Part Prelude* of 1799. And this poem is not by any means the final achievement. If the poet would eventually come to understand and view our existence as a 'field of light' (i 411), the illumination depicted in the *Two-Part Prelude* is much less certain. What the poem mostly describes is some early stages in a process of becoming, not an arrival. Still, in 'that giddy bliss' of 'a child's pursuits' (i 414-15), light, brilliant light, did come, sporadically, unevenly –

> Even then I felt
> Gleams like the flashing of a shield. (i 417-18)

These flashes of illumination in childhood came, he would later say, 'sometimes . . . / By chance collisions and quaint accidents'[55] – 'collisions' and 'accidents' like the encounters with death that we have been looking at here. In the 1799 *Prelude* Wordsworth largely and intentionally limits himself to the occasional brilliant flashes of light, but still with a promise of the 'more habitual sway'[56] of everlasting light to come. And although the poem by intent keeps its focus on the *basis*, not the fullness, of that light to come, on that 'visible scene' of childhood 'On which the sun is shining' (i 463-4), even here he promises that

> these same scenes,
> So beauteous and majestic in themselves,
> Though yet the day was distant, did at length
> Become habitually dear, and all
> Their hues and forms were by invisible links
> Allied to the affections. (ibid. i 437-42)

That distant day would be glorious indeed, but this early day with its flashes of light not so much on what we may become but on what we are, especially what our being is and what our struggles are when we confront death, non-being, sheds a peculiar and lovely and invaluable glow of its own.

Mendoza, Argentina

[52] *EY* 327.
[53] *Excursion* viii 10.
[54] 1850 *Prelude* v 220.
[55] 1805 *Prelude* i 616-17.
[56] *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* 192.

Tautology and Imaginative Vision in Wordsworth

By DUNCAN WU

WHO IS the drowned man of Esthwaite? Where does he come from, and where does he take us? That enigmatic figure may be found at the centre of the first of the *Prelude* spots of time, which describes an incident dating from Wordsworth's first week at Hawkshead, in May 1779.

> Ere I had seen
> Eight summers – and 'twas in the very week
> When I was first transplanted to thy vale,
> Beloved Hawkshead; when thy paths, thy shores
> And brooks, were like a dream of novelty
> To my half-infant mind – I chanced to cross
> One of those open fields which, shaped like ears,
> Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's lake.
> Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom
> I saw distinctly on the opposite shore,
> Beneath a tree and close by the lake side,
> A heap of garments, as if left by one
> Who there was bathing. Half an hour I watched
> And no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake
> Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast,
> And now and then a leaping fish disturbed
> The breathless stillness. The succeeding day
> There came a company, and in their boat
> Sounded with iron hooks and with long poles.
> At length the dead man, mid that beauteous scene
> Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
> Rose with his ghastly face. (*The Two-Part Prelude* i 258-79)[1]

It may be that the drowned man of Esthwaite never exists as a 'living being' – at least within the poem – but it is hard to avoid the feeling that he resurfaces as something other than what once he was. He is, in a way, a paradox. That 'ghastly face' distinguishes him from the living, while affirming his likeness to us. All the while we know, as well as the poet, that he is no longer human.

> Full fadom five thy father lies,
> Of his bones are coral made:
> Those are the pearls that were his eyes:
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange.[2]

[1] All quotations from *The Two-Part Prelude* are from the text in *William Wordsworth: The Pedlar, Tintern Abbey, The Two-Part Prelude* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Cambridge, 1985).

[2] *The Tempest* I ii 397-402; text from *The Riverside Shakespeare* ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1974).

At first glance the drowned man and the subject of Shakespeare's song have much in common. Both enjoy a kind of immortality, undergoing not the expected disintegration but instead a magical translation into 'something rich and strange'. There is an added dimension to Wordsworth's drowned man, however. He is part of an experience beyond time. When Wordsworth tells us that the 'breast' of the calm lake darkens as the young poet waits for the owner of the 'heap of garments' to return, he is doing more than merely filling in the narrative; in fact, he is not telling a story but sabotaging it. The young poet's interminable wait does not advance the 'drama' at all. In those terms, it is an irrelevance – because the story (if there is one) is not dependent on event.

> Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom
> I saw distinctly on the opposite shore,
> Beneath a tree and close by the lake side,
> A heap of garments, as if left by one
> Who there was bathing. Half an hour I watched
> And no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake
> Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast,
> And now and then a leaping fish disturbed
> The breathless stillness.

The use of the word 'breast' in describing the lake may prompt us to ask why the water should be so humanized. One possible answer lies in the observation that it anticipates the infant babe in Part II of the poem, who 'sleeps / Upon his mother's breast'.[3] That resonance might lead us to wonder whether the infant's mother – effectively that of the poet – is somehow present in the Esthwaite landscape, perhaps in the underworld beneath the water's surface; or perhaps the 'calm lake', as it darkens, brings the watching boy closer to her, affirming the primal bond forged when he was an infant. If the recollected landscape manages to admit Wordsworth to the underworld, it does so through the stillness that characterizes the no man's land on the borders of life and death – a state that describes not so much the landscape but the mood of the young boy as recollected by the mature poet.

So far the experience, internalized as it is, imbued with emotion, has been spatial. But the drowned man is part of a psychological complex; the 'breast' of the lake, and its 'breathless stillness', indicate that in some obscure sense he has come to pervade the scene. And that persistent sense of his dissipated continuation is only compounded by Wordsworth's casual reference to the passing of time: 'Half an hour I watched . . .' Who are the 'company' that floats out into the lake with hooks and poles? The fact is, Wordsworth is not concerned with the trivia of narrative; he is right to leave such things to the annotator, randy, to use Larkin's phrase, for antique. And yet, contrived by someone so shamelessly indifferent to the mechanics of linear narrative, the recollection climaxes, surprisingly, with a denouement that seems to satisfy the quest for a corpse:

> At length the dead man, mid that beauteous scene
> Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
> Rose with his ghastly face.

[3] *Two-Part Prelude* ii 270-1.

The discovery itself is treated with the same contempt meted out to the mechanicals responsible for it, dispatched in two and a half lines. What counts is the *manner* of the man's appearance, 'bolt upright', as if, despite being dead, he were coarsely parodying the ways of the living. It is shocking not because it is sensational, but because, in spite of his apparent vitality, he has been so ruthlessly stripped of life and humanity. 'Bolt upright', he may mimic the hungry generations of which he was once part, but he is also horribly reminiscent of the hooks and poles that have fetched him from the deep. His face is 'ghastly', and therefore drained of colour amidst the 'trees and hills and water'; it is also, by a shift of vowel, 'ghostly'. His fate has been to suffer translation into an object; he is the inhabitant not of the Vale of Esthwaite, but of the underworld into which Wordsworth's mother had passed years before.

All of which may be said to have taken place in May 1779. The reason why such particulars, so important to the harmless drudge, are nonetheless so insignificant to Wordsworth (he himself miscalculates his age at the time, telling us that he was seven when in fact he was nine), is that the entire episode is re-enacted not in realistic terms, but in the heightened world of his adult imagination. Matters of fact have been filtered out so as to highlight the spirit of the event, infinitely susceptible to the abstracting powers of the poet's mind. Which is why the episode takes place beyond time, in an Esthwaite that exists more intensely and vividly in the imagination than its real-life counterpart ever could. Everything has undergone change. The energies once contained in the drowned man have passed into the landscape into which he has mysteriously disappeared. Why? Because redemption is integral to Wordsworth's vision. Death does not result in nothingness; it triggers an imaginative response in the living, anxious to affirm the survival of those who are gone. If indeed this is redemption, it is pagan. Wordsworth wants it here and now, mediated through the human mind, rather than through an afterlife. That emphasis on the mind explains why the drowned man episode - like the other spots of time – is not merely about, but contained by, an act of perception. We might say that the real, if not very helpful, answer to the enquiring detective, asking who might be the victim and who the culprit – is Wordsworth himself.

There are in our existence spots of time, and it is in their nature that what was lost will be retrieved. This is true also in the second of this group of recollections, where Wordsworth's younger self becomes separated from his grandparents' servant, 'honest James', who was escorting him home from school.

> I remember well
> ('Tis of an early season that I speak,
> The twilight of rememberable life),
> While I was yet an urchin, one who scarce
> Could hold a bridle, with ambitious hopes
> I mounted, and we rode towards the hills.
> We were a pair of horsemen: honest James
> Was with me, my encourager and guide.
> We had not travelled long ere some mischance
> Disjoined me from my comrade, and, through fear
> Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor
> I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length
> Came to a bottom where in former times
> A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung
> In irons. Mouldered was the gibbet-mast;

The bones were gone, the iron and the wood;
Only a long green ridge of turf remained
Whose shape was like a grave. I left the spot,
And reascending the bare slope I saw
A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
The beacon on the summit, and more near
A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
Against the blowing wind. It was in truth
An ordinary sight, but I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
Did at that time invest the naked pool,
The beacon on the lonely eminence,
The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind. (*Two-Part Prelude* i 296-327)

As Wordsworth recalls his descent 'down the rough and stony moor', he conducts us into the landscape of the mind. His passage downwards parallels that of the drowned man beneath the surface of the lake, and, rather pertinently, echoes that of Orpheus. But what marks Wordsworth out as a genius is that nothing he writes is predictable – and if we were half expecting him to find his Eurydice, we are disappointed. So, oddly enough, is the boy:

Mouldered was the gibbet-mast;
The bones were gone, the iron and the wood;
Only a long green ridge of turf remained
Whose shape was like a grave.

The turf is merely *like* a grave – which is not to say that it was one. The gibbet, bones, and iron have vanished too – but were they ever there? One approach would be simply to say that the child's frightened imagination was summoning ghosts out of air. And we know from *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* that Wordsworth was fascinated by the ability to generate alternative realities. But that explanation does not go quite far enough. The 'rough and stony moor' closely parallels the 'heap of garments' in the preceding episode. In themselves, mundane enough, they are extrapolated into evidence of the thing by which the boy's mind is most preoccupied at that time: death. It is in the belief that he has seen a grave (as opposed to an innocent ridge of turf) that he staggers back out of the bottom to see nothing out of the ordinary - a girl with a pitcher, the Penrith beacon, a pool of water – all infused with an intensity that does not desert him. It is emphatically not the objects themselves that are in any way peculiar ('It was in truth / An ordinary sight'), but the way in which they are perceived – and, later, described.

. . . I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
Did at that time invest the naked pool,
The beacon on the lonely eminence,

The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind.

The 'vision' is distinguished by the manner in which external objects acquire human qualities: the pool is 'naked'; the eminence 'lonely'. If their vulnerability reminds us of the boy's desperation in being separated from honest James, it is worth bearing in mind that the poet states that it was not him but James who was lost: 'while I looked all round for my *lost* guide'. Although alienated from his surroundings, the boy has arrived in a landscape that is oddly familiar, full of features that seem to mirror his state of mind. They are, in a sense, produced by it. It is nearly the landscape of dream, but is nonetheless connected to a reality that never loses its concreteness, its 'dreariness'. What this adds up to is that even though Wordsworth has climbed out of the bottom, he remains the inhabitant of a psychological underworld. By which time all hope of a conclusion to the narrative is wrecked; he does not bother to tell us how he was reunited with honest James, got home, etc. Story matters less than our own translation into an experience necessarily mythologised by its re-enactment in the poet's mind – and, by implication, in our own.

These patterns, familiar to readers of this poet, are foreshadowed in the poetry of his early youth. At the age of 16 Wordsworth composed a poem entitled *The Dog: An Idyllium*, ostensibly an elegy composed in the manner of *Lycidas* for the dog belonging to his landlady at Hawkshead, Ann Tyson.

Where were ye nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Clos'd o'er your little favourite's hapless head?
For neither did ye mark, with solemn dread
In Derwent's rocky woods, the white Moon's beam
Pace like a Druid o'er the haunted steep,
Nor in Winander's stream;
Then did ye swim with sportive smile
From fairy-templ'd isle to isle,
Which hear her far-off ditty sweet
Yet feel not ev'n the milkmaid's feet.
What tho' he still was by my side
When lurking near I there have seen
Your faces white, your tresses green,
Like water lillies floating on the tide?
He saw not, bark'd not, he was still
As the soft moonbeam sleeping on the hill,
Or when, ah! cruel maids, ye stretch'd him stiff and chill!
If, while I gazed (to Nature blind)
On the calm Ocean of my mind,
Some new-created Image rose
In full-grown beauty at its birth,
Lovely as Venus from the sea;
Then, while my glad hand sprung to thee,
We were the happiest pair on earth![4]

[4] Quotations from Wordsworth's juvenilia are from my doctoral thesis, 'An Annotated Chronological Edition of Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose, 1785-90' (University of Oxford, 1990).

The extended meditation directed at the water-nymphs of Windermere – a product of the neoclassicism which permeated much contemporary literature, in most of which the young Wordsworth was well-versed – gives way in the final paragraph to something original and unexpected. Moving from the exterior reality - the 'remorseless deep' into which the dog has disappeared – he takes us into 'the calm Ocean of my mind', out of which the 'new-created Image' of his four-legged friend rises up, 'Lovely as Venus from the sea'. In terms of the mature poetry, it is an imaginative act. It is in the first place meditative, and is thus similar in kind to the mystic trance of *Tintern Abbey*, where we are told that the 'beauteous forms' of the Wye valley were responsible for 'sensations sweet, / Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart'. What is so extraordinary about 'The Dog' is that the imaginative process leads directly to the animal's resurrection:

> Then, while my glad hand sprung to thee,
> We were the happiest pair on earth!

In other words, the final paragraph of *The Dog: An Idyllium* describes a spot of time, twelve years prior to the composition of those in *The Prelude*. Its teenage author countenances the dog's demise only so that he may redeem him through an imaginative act. As in the *Prelude* spots of time, retrieval occurs in this world, through an emphatically human, rather than divine, agency.

The psychological and emotional patterns embedded in the *Prelude* originate in Wordsworth's early verse. Their template is to be found in his translations from Virgil's *Georgics*, composed during his first year at St John's College, Cambridge. He was still only 18. It can be no surprise that the section on which he spent most time was the Orpheus and Eurydice episode from Book IV. As it is little known, I would like to present my text of the translation here, edited from the manuscripts in the Wordsworth Library. The earliest extant part begins after Eurydice has died after being bitten by a water-snake, and describes how Orpheus descends the underworld to retrieve her.

> He, wandering far along the lonely main,
> Sooth'd with the hollow shell his sickly pain:
> 'Thee, thee, dear wife', he sung forlorn
> From morn to eve, and 'thee', from eve to morn.
> He pierced the grove where death-like darkness flings
> A cold black horror from his [dusky] wings,
> To where hell's King in griesly state appears,
> And round him hearts unmov'd by hum[an] tears.
> On as he pass'd and struck the plaintive shell,
> Ambrosial music fill'd the ear of hell;
> [Arising] from the lowest bound
> Of Erebus the shadows flock'd around
> As birds unnumber'd seek their leafy bow'r
> Driv'n by the twilight dark, or mountain shower –
> Boys, men, and matrons old, the tender maid
> And mighty heroes' more majestic shade.

Significantly, Orpheus' descent is accompanied by his lament for Eurydice, the passage into the underworld being essentially part of an imaginative act: '"Thee, thee, dear wife", he sung forlorn / From morn to eve, and "thee", from eve to morn.' His grief at her passing is no less passionate

for his repetitions. The editions of Virgil from which Wordsworth was translating commended the technique,[5] but the mature poet is known for his own distinctive use of it; as he points out in his 1800 note to *The Thorn*: '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, or words of the same character.'[6] He pinpoints with characteristic shrewdness the psychological hinge on which the spots of time turn: in each there is at some profound level an unsatisfied craving in the mind – a yearning for what has been taken away. And so it is at this early moment in the translation from Virgil. Driven by his passion for Eurydice, Orpheus finds himself, in the throes of grief, unable to move beyond that one syllable – thee. There is a correlative to the act of repetition in the later poetry – again one that springs directly out of Wordsworth's flawless grasp of human psychology. When he began work on *The Ruined Cottage* in 1797, he started not at the opening of the poem, but with its conclusion, where the Pedlar describes Margaret's increasing depression at the disappearance of her husband and the deaths of her children:

> I have heard, my friend,
> That in that broken arbour she would sit
> The idle length of half a sabbath day –
> There, where you see the toadstool's lazy head –
> And when a dog passed by she still would quit
> The shade and look abroad. On this old bench
> For hours she sate, and evermore her eye
> Was busy in the distance, shaping things
> Which made her heart beat quick.[7]

Like Orpheus, Margaret is engaged in an imaginative act, as her mind shapes what she sees in the far distance in the hope that it might be her long-lost husband. The solecism is deliberate and effective. Although her eye has not detached itself from the rest of her body in order to travel to the far horizon, it might have done, so intense is her unsatisfied craving for what she has lost. That act of perception is foreshadowed by the 'calm ocean of the mind' into which the 16 year old poet had 'gazed' in the hope of seeing his dog; it also looks forward to the drowned man episode, where he remembers staring across Esthwaite for half an hour into the lake's 'breathless stillness'. The act of staring for a long time into the middle distance, searching for what has been lost, is, I would suggest, precisely analogous both in psychological and poetic terms to the use of tautology. Both lead to imaginative retrieval: Orpheus indeed takes possession, though for a short time, of Eurydice, just as young Wordsworth extends his hand to retrieve his dog. In each case, Wordsworth is, to use the expression given resonance by Seamus Heaney, seeing things: not merely a matter of observing, but of responding to the overpowering compulsions that betray the traumas of the past. The act of seeing, in other words, is inextricably connected with psychological need. That said, Wordsworth's consistency in this respect should not confuse our reading of each work. Whatever is shaped in the distance, Margaret is not reunited with Robert,

[5] See my 'Wordsworth and Helvellyn's Womb', *Essays in Criticism* 44 (1994) 6-25, pp. 9-10.

[6] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800* ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY, 1992) (hereafter Butler and Green), p. 351.

[7] *The Ruined Cottage* 449-57; text from *The Ruined Cottage, The Brothers, Michael* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Cambridge, 1985).

although the young Wordsworth *does* find the dog: *The Ruined Cottage* is about loss; *The Dog* is about recovery. The point is that in thinking as she does – in allowing her imagination free play with the shapes seen dimly on the horizon – Margaret engages with the *possibility* of Robert's redemption, if not its actuality. That redemptive possibility lies at the centre of Wordsworth's comments to De Quincey on the road between Grasmere and Keswick:

> Just now, my ear was placed upon the stretch, in order to catch any sound of wheels that might come down upon the Lake of Wythburn from the Keswick road; at the very instant when I raised my head from the ground, in final abandonment of hope for this night, at the very instant when the organs of attention were all once relaxing from their tension, the bright star hanging in the air above those outlines of massy blackness, fell suddenly upon my eye, and penetrated my capacity of apprehension with a pathos and a sense of the Infinite, that would not have arrested me under other circumstances.[8]

De Quincey uses Wordsworth's remarks to interpret *There was a boy* (though, as W. J. B. Owen has pointed out, the intervening moment of relaxation mentioned by the poet plays no part in the poem).[9] What I want to note here is that the placing of the senses 'on the stretch' is a physical and mental enactment of the emotional need that underlies the poetry. In the Dunmail Raise episode the need is comparatively trivial – the two men are waiting for the mailcoach to bring Southey's copies of *The Courier* from Keswick – though it could be argued that, despite that, the intensity with which the poet listens is itself evidence of what psychologists call displacement.

Margaret's deepest impulse is to retrieve her lost husband; in *The Dog*, the young poet wants to reclaim his drowned pet; Orpheus pines repeatedly for his deceased lover – but what does the protagonist of the spots of time want? The oddity of the *Prelude* spots of time is that the question of the poet's underlying compulsions is elided. Admittedly, loss is alluded to in both: in the first a man drowns, and in the second the boy is separated from his encourager and guide. But they contain no emotional relation of the kind posited in *The Dog*, the Orpheus translation, or *The Ruined Cottage*. That reluctance to reveal his hand breaks down in the third of the spots of time, which takes us back to December 1783, when the young poet waited for horses to take him and his brothers from Hawkshead Grammar School to Cockermouth.

> 'Twas a day
> Stormy, and rough, and wild, and on the grass
> I sate half sheltered by a naked wall.
> Upon my right hand was a single sheep.
> A whistling hawthorn on my left, and there,
> Those two companions at my side, I watched
> With eyes intensely straining, as the mist
> Gave intermitting prospects of the wood
> And plain beneath. Ere I to school returned
> That dreary time, ere I had been ten days
> A dweller in my father's house, he died,
> And I and my two brothers, orphans then,
> Followed his body to the grave. (*Two-Part Prelude* i 341-53)

[8] *De Quincey as Critic* ed. John E. Jordan (London, 1973), p. 442.
[9] See W. J. B. Owen, 'A Sense of the Infinite', *The Wordsworth Circle* 21 (1990) 18-27, p. 22.

As in the drowned man episode, hints are offered by the vitality of the boy's surroundings: the stone wall that shelters him is 'naked'; the hawthorn 'whistles'. Once again, his own vulnerability is mirrored in the things he perceives – and it is in the act of perception that Wordsworth invests his attention: 'I watched / With eyes intensely straining'. That undeviating focus is precisely analogous with Orpheus' lament, the correlative of tautology. Tautology is integral to the spots of time; it is what makes them so valuable to the poet. Their distinguishing characteristic is that they are

> spectacles and sounds to which
> I often would repair, and thence would drink
> As at a fountain. (*Two-Part Prelude* i 368-70)

They are not merely sources of inspiration – though they certainly do serve that function – they are the means whereby the central emotional drama of the poet's life may be reiterated. This is paralleled in a very literal way by the evolution of the waiting for the horses episode. It occurs in its earliest form in Wordsworth's *The Vale of Esthwaite*, composed in 1787 – three and a half years after the event it describes. Although it has often been the focus of critical attention no one has yet, to the best of my knowledge, observed that it contains, in even more explicit form, the psychological configurations traceable in the *Prelude*. It begins with an observation – that certain places, or, to use the poet's word, 'spots', in the landscape, are inextricably related to intense emotional experiences. Such claims seem unexceptional to those familiar with Wordsworth, but it is necessary to remember that these lines were composed by a 17 year old, at a time when the highly ornamented couplet manner associated with Pope was in vogue, and poetry was expected to deal only with the comparatively superficial emotions related to the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility.

> No spot but claims the tender tear
> By joy or grief to memory dear:
> One Evening, when the wintery blast
> Through the sharp Hawthorn whistling pass'd;
> And the poor flocks, all pinch'd with cold,
> Sad-drooping sought the mountain-fold;
> Long, Long, upon yon steepy rock,
> Alone I bore the bitter shock;
> Long, Long, my swimming eyes did roam
> For little Horse to bear me home,
> To bear me (what avails my tear?)
> To sorrow o'er a Father's bier.
> Flow on – in vain thou hast not flow'd,
> But eas'd me of an heavy load,
> For much it gives my soul relief
> To pay the mighty debt of Grief.

The similarities between this and the *Prelude* are so numerous as to suggest that it was before the poet as he composed the later poem. But I would like to offer another explanation: that by the time he composed the *Prelude* Wordsworth had retraced his steps so many times in his head that he had memorized the features described in the earlier passage. Whatever the case, the most significant feature of the early lines seems to me to be that which has so far been neglected: that, even at the age of seventeen, he is aware that his interminable straining to discern the horses in

the mist may be embodied in verbal repetition. In other words, rhetorical style – tautology in this case – is capable of describing the operations of the mind at their deepest level:

> Long, Long, upon yon steepy rock,
> Alone I bore the bitter shock;
> Long, Long, my swimming eyes did roam
> For little Horse to bear me home,
> To bear me (what avails my tear?)
> To sorrow o'er a Father's bier.

It could be argued that the repetition of the word 'long' is purely emphatic – that Wordsworth is saying only that he waited for a long time. But the deliberate use of repetition in the Orpheus translation less than a year later indicates that he was by then aware that it could be an indicator of intense passion. In the *Prelude* the boy's eyes 'strain'; here they 'swim' – anticipating the tears that will express grief at his father's death. And Wordsworth's treatment of the experience submerges the exterior narrative in precisely the same way as in the *Prelude*, so that mourning is understood to be the inevitable result of the wait for the horses. In short, the teenage poet understands that the act of perception is the result of intense trauma.

It is commonly supposed that the Lucy poems, composed at the same moment as the spots of time, are concerned only with love. But at least one of them is really concerned with perception – and precisely the kind of perception found in the *Prelude*. Like the spots of time it comprehends the act of seeing as a tautology, and reaches beyond it as a means of coming to terms with the possibility of loss.

> Strange fits of passion I have known,
> And I will dare to tell,
> But in the lover's ear alone,
> What once to me befel.
>
> When she I lov'd, was strong and gay
> And like a rose in June,
> I to her cottage bent my way,
> Beneath the evening moon.
>
> Upon the moon I fix'd my eye,
> All over the wide lea;
> My horse trudg'd on, and we drew nigh
> Those paths so dear to me.
>
> And now we reach'd the orchard-plot,
> And, as we climb'd the hill,
> Towards the roof of Lucy's cot
> The moon descended 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 mov'd on; hoof after hoof
> He rais'd and never stopp'd:

When down behind the cottage roof
At once the planet dropp'd.

What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
Into a Lover's head –
'Oh mercy!' to myself I cried,
'If Lucy should be dead!'[10]

The remarks made by the poet of the Dunmail Raise episode fit the poem well; the relaxation of the sense organs is covered by the speaker's daydream at lines 17-20 – a daydream that does not interrupt the concentration with which he 'fixes' his eye on the moon. That fixation is evidence of a passionate longing only hinted at by such phrases as 'Those paths so dear to me' – and, as such, it is essentially repetitive in its nature. The fond and wayward thought of the final stanza reiterates that feeling, though in an unexpected manner. Although it is the unpredictability, the eccentricity of its expression that interests the poet, it is a repetition nonetheless – a repetition signalled by the trudging of the horse's hoofs (lines 11, 21) and the 'bending' of the speaker's way (line 7). But what is it that is repeated? Everything that has already passed through his head in the course of the poem – all the emotions of love, which retains the power to surprise through the strangeness of its 'fits'.

University of Glasgow

[10] Butler and Green 161-2.

Bachelors in Paradise

By J. R. WATSON

A Response to the Toast of the Immortal Memory of Charles Lamb
at his Birthday Lunch, held on 17 February 1996

I BEGIN WITH a very characteristic remark by Bill Ruddick, who will be remembered by almost everyone in this room not only as a fine scholar and a discriminating literary critic whose work was commemorated in the memorial number of the *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, but also as a good friend, and one in whom the Elian virtues were frequently personified. On one occasion, not long after his cancer had been diagnosed, I met Bill in Grainger Street in Newcastle (not far from his beloved Literary and Philosophical Society) and he said:

> I was wondering whether or not to buy a season ticket for Scottish Opera this year, because I may not be here for some of them; and then I thought – I shan't need money where I'm going – so off I went to the booking office.

I marvelled at the time at his courage: being able to laugh in the face of death, to remain as a person who could talk and joke with the rest of us, seemed to me then to be wonderful, and still does. But I thought also that one might tell a great deal about a person by considering his or her idea of what would happen after death. For Bill, heaven would be a place where you wouldn't need money, where there would be opera, and friends and laughter, and a Literary and Philosophical Society that was always open; and then I thought of the way other people had thought of heaven, and of the kind of friends that Bill might meet there. You will remember that Lamb said, 'The shapings of our heavens are the modifications of our constitution', and that is my subject today.[1]

Beatrice, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, got as far as the gate of hell, leading apes (as unmarried women were traditionally pictured as doing):

> and there will the Devil meet me like an old cuckold with horns on his head, and say, 'Get you to heaven, Beatrice, get you to heaven, here's no place for you maids.' So deliver I up my apes, and away to Saint Peter for the heavens; he shows me where the bachelors sit, and there live we as merry as the day is long. (II i 39-45)

In heaven, where the bachelors sit, is where we might find Charles Lamb and Bill Ruddick: and it might give us an insight into Lamb's life and work if we gave some thought as to what kind of heaven this might be. I do not want to turn Lamb into a religious writer, but it is true, I think, that one can tell a great deal about someone from probing into his or her beliefs about what – in Lamb's day – were called the 'serious' things of life, meaning 'serious about matters of religion'. So we should see Lamb's views about heaven, or what we might deduce them to be, not just as an extension of the fun which gathers round his name and the study of his works, but also as something more profound, revealing something of the deeper side of his lovable and wonderful personality.

Lamb, like Bill, would have rejoiced to meet his friends there. He described his idea of heaven – in the 'Letter of Elia to Robert Southey, Esquire' – in these words –

[1] From the 'Letter of Elia to Robert Southey, Esquire', *London Magazine* (October 1823), part of which was later used for 'The Tombs in the Abbey', in *The Works of Charles Lamb: the Prose* ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London, 1924) (hereafter *Prose*), pp. 289-302, p. 291.

> One man shall love his friends and his friends' faces; and, under the uncertainty of conversing with them again, in the same manner and familiar circumstances of sight, speech, &c., as upon earth – in a moment of no irreverent weakness – for a dream-while – no more – would be almost content, for a reward of a life of virtue, to take up his portion with those he loved, and was made to love, in this good world, which he knows– which was created so lovely, beyond his deservings. Another, embracing a more exalted vision – so that he might receive indefinite additaments of power, knowledge, beauty, glory, &c. – is ready to forego the recognition of humbler individualities of earth, and the old familiar faces. The shapings of our heavens are the modifications of our constitution; and Mr Feeble Mind, or Mr Great Heart, is born in every one of us.[2]

It is characteristic of Lamb to identify himself, deprecatingly and whimsically, with Mr Feeble Mind, although the reader perceives the general tone of the passage as unironic and deeply felt. Lamb, of course, would have wanted to meet the old familiar faces, the kind that Crabb Robinson met when he went to Lamb's house in June 1815, on the eve of Waterloo, and meeting what he called 'a numerous and odd set' of people – 'George Dyer, Captain and Martin Burney, Ayrton, Phillips, Hazlitt and wife, Alsager, Barron Field, Coulson, John Collier, Talfourd, White, Lloyd and Basil Montagu.'[3] In addition to those, of course, there was a much wider acquaintance – Coleridge, and Haydon, and Keats, and Bernard Barton, and Leigh Hunt: for Lamb, it would always be Wednesday or Thursday evenings, when he was at home and ready for whist, even with Martin Burney, who played cards with dirty hands. Or he would be talking books, as Hazlitt noted, delighting to compare eating to literary criticism ('carving up') in gustatory metaphors: 'How often did we cut into the haunch of letters, while we discussed the haunch of mutton on the table! How we skimmed the cream of criticism! How we got into the heart of controversy! How we picked out the marrow of authors!'[4] In heaven, too, Lamb would be able to see the 'Persons One Would Wish to have Seen', as recorded in Hazlitt's essay, where Lamb's choice was Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville.[5] Then there were others, such as the clerks with whom he worked at the India House – 'Chambers, dry, sarcastic, and friendly! Dodwell, mild, slow to move, and gentlemanly! Plumley, officious to do, and to volunteer, good services!'[6] and of course, Brook Pulham, who was involved with Lamb in the fracas at Barnet one Sunday morning in 1809 for which Lamb was put in the stocks.[7] Old friends would have returned, such as Thomas Manning – who went to China: 'China – Canton – bless us – how it strains the imagination and makes it ache!'[8] All would have been found conversing, in a restoration of the good fellowship that Lamb so hated to lose:

> I have had playmates, I have had companions . . .
> So might we talk of the old familiar faces –
> How some they have died, and some they have left me,

[2] Ibid., 290-1.

[3] *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers* ed. Edith J. Morley (3 vols., London, 1938), i. 170.

[4] 'On the Conversation of Authors' in *The Plain Speaker*; in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt* ed. P. P. Howe (21 vols., London, 1930-4) (hereafter Howe), xii. 36.

[5] 'Of Persons One Would Wish to have Seen', Howe xvii. 122-34, pp. 123-4.

[6] 'The Superannuated Man', *Prose* 717.

[7] E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (London, 1907), p. 544.

[8] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr. (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1976-8) (hereafter Marrs), ii. 244.

> And some are taken from me; all are departed;
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

In the background there would be a landscape, probably Hertfordshire, not far from Wheathampstead, about Mackery End: not, one feels, the Lake District, in spite of the way in which Lamb was bowled over by it in 1802, when he and Mary climbed Skiddaw – 'It was a day that will stand out, like a mountain, I am sure, in my life.' He resented going back to work: 'I felt very *little*. I had been dreaming I was a very great man. But that is going off, & I find I shall conform in time to that state of Life, to which it has pleased God to call me. Besides, after all, Fleet Street & the Strand are better places to live in for good & all than among Skiddaw.'[9] So somewhere, not far away, would be Lamb's London:

> The Lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the innumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, waggons, play houses, all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden, the very women of the Town, the Watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles;– life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night, the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street, the crowds, the very dirt & mud, the Sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old Book stalls, parsons cheap'ning books, coffee houses, steams of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes, London itself . . .

Lamb's love for London is nowhere more beautifully expressed than in this letter to Wordsworth: 'I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fullness of joy at so much Life.'[10] His preference for London was fuelled by a suspicion that Wordsworth and Coleridge, and Southey too, were overdoing it: when he and Mary got there, in the summer of 1802, he told Thomas Manning that 'I have satisfied myself, that there is such a thing as that, which tourists call *romantic*, which I very much suspected before: they make such a spluttering about it, and toss their splendid epithets around them, till they give as dim a light, as four oClock next morning the Lamps do after an illumination.'[11] It is clear, I think, that while Lamb would have been on friendly terms with Wordsworth, and admired him, and on even more friendly terms with Coleridge, and loved him, his real enjoyment was in his friendships with such people as Manning, and he had a kind of perverse love for the eccentric George Dyer. To Charles and Bill in heaven, George Dyer would be an endless source of gentle and unmalicious amusement: you will remember how Lamb once tried to see if Dyer would say anything ill about anybody by confronting him with the example of what today would be called a serial killer – Williams, the highway murderer – 'I should think, Mr Lamb, he must have been rather an eccentric character.'[12] It was Dyer who was described by Lamb, as so rapt in his visionary schemes as to be oblivious of all around him – 'For with G.D. – to be absent from the body is sometimes (not to speak it profanely) to be present with the Lord.'

Not to speak it profanely, indeed: for Lamb recognized in Dyer the real holiness of an innocent mind - of a man who was put upon by others, so that he spent his time drudging at low rates for unappreciating booksellers and trying to bring out an edition of his poems. Dyer was a type that we can all recognize, that of the holy fool; leaving a shoe behind under Leigh Hunt's table, and walking into the river outside Lamb's house.

[9] Marrs ii. 69-70.
[10] Marrs i. 267.
[11] Marrs ii. 69.
[12] Lucas, *Life* 163.

The presence of Dyer in Lamb's heaven would be necessary for Lamb's amusement and happiness: but it would also have been a part of his heaven that would certainly have been undogmatic and perhaps not strictly orthodox. It is clear, I think, from the letter to Walter Wilson of 14 August 1801 that Lamb could give offence to a strict believer: they had been with a party to Richmond, gone out in a boat, and nearly been overturned by Lamb's playful rocking: what Wilson, many years later, pompously described as 'those bodily movements that were quite unsuited to so unsteady a conveyance in the watery element.'[13] Wilson's prose – his way of describing the rocking boat – suggests that he was somewhat lacking in a sense of humour – and he went on to say that Lamb 'could not restrain his wit, even upon the most solemn subjects. This I considered offensive . . .'.

Lamb's reply to Wilson is a model of its kind – that is, a letter to somebody who has been upset because he or she cannot or will not see the funny side of things – and a wonderful example of a gentle but firm attempt to assuage hurt feelings:

> do not rashly infer, from some slight and light expressions which I may have made use of in a moment of levity in your presence, without sufficient regard to your feelings - do not conclude that I am an inveterate enemy to all religion. I have had a time of seriousness, and I have known the importance and reality of a religious belief. Latterly, I acknowledge, much of my seriousness has gone off, whether from new company or some other new associations; but I still retain at bottom a conviction of the truth, and a certainty of the usefulness of religion. I will not pretend to more gravity or feeling than I at present possess; my intention is not to persuade you that any great alteration is probable in me; sudden converts are superficial and transitory; I only want you to believe that I have *stamina* of seriousness within me, and that I desire nothing more than a return of that friendly intercourse which used to subsist between us, but which my folly has suspended. Believe me, very affectionately yours . . .[14]

Lamb's religion was of the most undogmatic kind, and it would never have been possible to find him preaching a gospel of salvation by faith alone, as many evangelical Christians of his time did; and he was cross, when a Unitarian, who had been married in the Church of England, made a protest afterwards. He considered this bad manners, and self-righteousness.

Then also it would not always have been possible, in Lamb's heaven, to have the strict adherence to truth which might be normally expected in such a place. Lamb, generous man that he was, preferred what might be called the kind lie to the absolute veracity of what Matthew Arnold described as 'the high white star of truth'. The best example of this, I think, is the visit of condolence which Lamb and George Dyer paid to Joseph Cottle and his younger brother in 1800, after the death of Amos Cottle. They sat in silence for a while, until George put in the question about Joseph Cottle's *Alfred*, and whether it was likely to sell. Cottle wheeled himself about to face Lamb, who described the scene to Coleridge:

> At that moment it came strongly into my mind, that I had got Uncle Toby before me he looked so kind and so good. I could not say an unkind thing of Alfred. So I set my memory to work to recollect what was the name of Alfred's Queen, and with some adroitness recalled the well-known sound to Cottle's ears of Alswitha. At that moment I could perceive that Cottle had forgot his brother was so lately become a blessed spirit. – In the

[13] Wilson's account is printed in Marrs ii. 12.
[14] Marrs ii. 11.

> language of Mathematicians the Author was as 9 the brother as 1. I felt my cue, and strong pity working at the root, I went to work, and beslabberd Alfred with most unqualify'd praise – or only qualifying my praise by the occasional politic interposition of an exception taken against trivial faults, slips, & human imperfections, which by removing the appearance of insincerity did but in truth heighten the relish.– Perhaps I might have spared that refinement, for Joseph was in a humour to hope and believe all things.[15]

The last phrase echoes I Corinthians 13, about Charity, which 'believeth all things, hopeth all things', and it is part of the real complexity of moral feeling which is found in this wonderful paragraph. Lamb's sense of the ridiculous blends with his very real desire to comfort the bereaved - 'strong pity working at the root': so assisted by George Dyer, to whom all poems were good poems, Lamb contrived to discuss *Alfred*, entirely to the satisfaction of Joseph Cottle and his brother. He then went on to question Coleridge – 'Was I a Candied Greyhound now for all this? or did I do right? I believe I did.'[16]

'I believe I did.' Being kind took precedence over truth-telling: 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.' This is the Lamb who would, I think, be found in heaven. But just as his religion there would be undogmatic, and truth would take second place to kindness, so too he would be holding himself apart from the orthodoxies of the established church. In the 'Letter of Elia to Robert Southey, Esquire' Lamb gently but firmly declined to become a member of the Church of England:

> Sir, you were pleased (you know where) to invite me to a compliance with the wholesome forms and doctrines of the Church of England. I take your advice with as much kindness, as it was meant. But I must think the invitation rather more kind than seasonable. I am a Dissenter. The last sect, with which you can remember me to have made common confession, were the Unitarians.[17]

Behind this courteous firmness was Lamb's response to Southey's obtuse and impertinent characterisation of the *Essays of Elia* as 'A book, which wants only a sounder religious feeling to be as delightful as it is original.' In his reply, Lamb identified such an attitude of mind as the consequence of narrowness:

> It is an error more particularly incident to persons of the correctest principles and habits, to seclude themselves from the rest of mankind as from another species; and form into knots and clubs. The best people, herding thus exclusively, are in danger of contracting a narrowness. . . . Instead of mixing with the infidel and the freethinker – in the room of opening a negociation, to try at least to find out at which gate the error entered – they huddle close together, in a weak fear of infection, like that pusillanimous underling in Spenser –
>
> This is the wandering wood, this Error's den;
> A monster vile, whom God and man does hate:
> Therefore, I reed, beware. Fly, fly, quoth then
> The fearful Dwarf . . .

In Lamb's heaven, there would be none of Southey's tactless proselytising; but there would be plenty of laughter, and wine that one could drink without becoming tipsy, and good food – fish

[15] Marrs i. 239.
[16] Marrs i. 240.
[17] *Prose* 299.

and brawn, and pork crackling, enough and to spare, so that Captain Jackson would not have to pretend. Once a year, about the middle of June, I think there would be a little ceremony, in which by some mysterious process all the best examination howlers of the year would be forwarded up to Bill. He would then take them along to Charles, and they would spend a happy hour going through them. Bill, as many of you will remember, had a wonderful eye for howlers, and delighted to circulate them among his friends. Charles and Bill would be delighted by these things: they provoke exactly the kind of harmless enjoyment, and the sense of fun, that Lamb would have delighted in.[18]

But, of course, there is more to it than that. Heaven is a place which, as Lamb saw, depends upon our own notions – 'The shapings of our heavens are the modifications of our constitution.' It is a place which is the opposite of another place, the idea of which also depends upon our own constitution: and I know of only one or two moments in Lamb's life in which he alludes to hell, though obliquely. One of them is, I think, very typical of Lamb: what angers him, and consigns that person to hell, is that, having had kindnesses done to him, and eaten and drunk with someone, he can nevertheless commit an act of betrayal. It comes in Hazlitt's 'Of Persons One Would Wish to have Seen' – when, after Fulke Greville and Sir Thomas Browne, Lamb named Guy Fawkes and Judas Iscariot. He would like, he said, to have seen Guy Fawkes, 'sitting pale and emaciated, surrounded by his matches and his barrels of gunpowder, and expecting the moment that was to transport him to Paradise for his heroic self-devotion;'

> And as to Judas Iscariot, my reason is different. I would fain see the face of him who, having dipped his hand in the same dish with the Son of Man, could afterwards betray Him. I have no conception of such a thing . . .[19]

'I have no conception of such a thing': not only of betrayal, but betrayal that followed a moment of good fellowship, of kindness and of love. Judas here exemplifies the reverse of everything that Lamb held dear: friendship, and loyalty, and honesty, and human attachment. It is through the opposite image of Judas's betrayal, the figure of Charity - that suffereth long, and is kind, that envieth not, that vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up - that we find the true self and soul of Charles Lamb, whose birthday we celebrate today.

University of Durham

[18] I am grateful to Bill Ruddick's former friend and colleague, Dr Bill Hutchings of the University of Manchester, for providing me with examples from the Ruddick collection of howlers, which were used at the lunch, but which are not appropriate for reproduction here.

[19] 'Of Persons One Would Wish to have Seen', Howe xvii. 133-4

Some Pseudo-Eliana

By CLAUDE A. PRANCE

CHARLES LAMB'S WRITINGS attracted enough attention in his own time and in later years to produce imitators of his style and for enthusiasts to seek for work by him hitherto unknown. In this search some have attributed to him pieces subsequently found to be by other writers. Among them are the following:

1. *A Few Words on Christmas.* William Macdonald reprints this piece from *The London Magazine* of December 1822 in Volume IV of his edition of *The Works of Charles Lamb* (1903), p. 120. However he is careful to state in a note on page 289 that he is doubtful if it is entirely by Lamb, but thinks it is by Thomas Hood with Lamb's help. Another enthusiast, the American, Thomas Nast Fairbanks reprinted this piece as by Charles Lamb in a handsome, hardbacked booklet of 16 pages in December 1911, probably as a Christmas gift for friends. It was printed in New York in an edition of 250 copies by Hal Marchbank. Walter Jerrold in his *Thomas Hood and Charles Lamb* 1930, p. 164n, expresses doubt as to Lamb's authorship of this piece, and E. V. Lucas in *Miscellaneous Prose* (1903), p. 515, thinks it is one of the best imitations of Charles Lamb. Lamb refers to this essay in his 'Appearance of the Seasons' contributed to *Hone's Day Book* in January 1826.

   The authorship seems to be settled by a reference in John Taylor's *Commonplace Book* which shows that B. W. Procter was the writer. (See Berg Collection, New York Public Library, and *Index to the London Magazine* by Frank P. Riga and Claude A. Prance (New York, 1978), p. 68.)
2. *Holiday Children.* Printed in *The Indicator* 3 January 1821. Signed 'An Old Boy'. Reprinted by Macdonald in *Essays and Sketches* (1903), p. 98, where he attributes it to Lamb on internal evidence. Reprinted by Thomas Hutchinson in *Works* (1908), ii. 818. Charles Cowden Clarke in *Recollections of Writers* (1878), p. 24, states that it was by Vincent Novello's wife, Mary Sabilla Novello. Clarke was Novello's son-in-law.
3. *On Seeing Mrs K—B —aged upwards of eighty Nurse an Infant.* Printed in *The Examiner* 18 August 1816. Signed B.F. Reprinted in *Tickler's Magazine* (1821). E. V. Lucas prints this in *Letters* (1905), ii. 996, and states James Dykes Campbell thought it might be by Lamb, and Lucas agrees. Thomas Hutchinson prints the verses in his edition of the *Works* (1924), ii. 840, on Lucas' authority.

   Edmund Blunden in his *Leigh Hunt's Examiner Examined* (1928), p. 66, indicates they are by Barron Field.
4. *The Laughing Philosopher. Being the entire Works of Momus, Jester of Olympus, Democritus . . . Ben Jonson, Butler, Swift, Gay, Joseph Miller . . . and others. Translated by John Bull.* Sherwood Jones and Co. (1825). 768 pages. Walter Jerrold in *The Cornhill Magazine* in November 1924 maintained that this book was compiled by Thomas Hood with Lamb's assistance and that Lamb wrote at least the Prologue. Other items tentatively assigned to Lamb are 'The Humorous Man', 'The Other Pig' and 'The Suicide'. None of these pieces appear to have been attributed to Lamb by later researchers, and no further evidence seems forthcoming. However the book does reprint the following pieces known to be by Lamb, although some are only extracts:
   1. Confessions of the Inconveniences of Being Hanged (583). Lamb's essay is entitled 'On the Inconveniences Resulting from Being Hanged', the reprint leaves out some paragraphs.

2. On the Custom of Hissing at the Theatre (617).
3. Character of an Undertaker (629).
4. On Burial Societies (620).

   All the above are reprinted from *The Reflector* of 1811 or the *Works* 1818.

5. The Gentle Giantess from *The London Magazine* December 1822 (197).
6. The Melancholy of Tailors (186). From *The Champion* of 1814 or the *Works* 1818.

The book also prints in part 'The Devil's Walk' by Coleridge and Southey. Another edition of the book was published in 1835 by Sherwood, Gilbert and Parker.

There are, of course, pieces written by others in imitation of Lamb's style, notably among them Horace Smith's 'Death – Posthumous Memorials – Children' in *The London Magazine*, March 1821, reprinted in his *Gaieties and Gravities* (1825), ii. 55. In 1910 E. V. Lucas included some fictitious letters he had compiled in *Mr Ingleside* supposed to be from Charles Lamb to the Burneys, reprinted in his *At the Shrine of Saint Charles* (1934). Also in 1910 Algernon Cecil has in his *Essays in Imitation* essays entitled 'Mrs Battle's Opinions on Bridge', and 'An Essay in Apology'.

Canberra

Some Books Attributed to Charles Lamb

By CLAUDE A. PRANCE

A NUMBER OF BOOKS have been attributed to Charles Lamb from time to time by booksellers and enthusiasts eager to press the claims of books in their possession. Generally these attributions rest on slight evidence and some of the books have been found to be the work of other writers.

In 1927 James Tregaskis and Sons of London issued a catalogue entitled *An Important Collection of Some of the Rarer Works of Charles Lamb together with some 'Lambiana'*. There were numerous illustations and 250 copies were printed. Prices ranged from £4 for *Poetry for Children* (1892) to £2,700 for *The King and Queen of Hearts* (1805). This was described as 'First issue of the First Edition, unrecorded, not cited in the *British Museum Catalogue, Thomson* and others'. Included were editions of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Prince Dorus*, now generally admitted to be by Charles Lamb, but several other very doubtful items, such as *Felissa, The King and Queen of Clubs* and *The King and Queen of Spades*. There are also three books from Charles Lamb's library (purchased from the Moxon sale by Francis Jackson).

Edmund Blunden prints in his bibliography of Charles Lamb in the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1940), iii. 633, the titles of seven books attributed to Charles Lamb, but adds that none of them deserve the attribution. He is probably correct. Although it adds nothing to what we know of Charles Lamb, it may be of interest to give details of some of these items.

1. *Stories of Old Daniel for the amusement of young persons* (1808). Published by the Juvenile Library, 41 Skinner Street, London. Fourteenth edition (1808) by another publisher. Listed in the old *British Museum Catalogue* as by Charles Lamb. It is by Lady Mountcashell, who quotes from Charles Lamb's Preface to *Tales from Shakespeare* in her Preface. She was the former Margaret Kingsborough, a friend of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin; see Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason* (1980), p. 214.

2. *The Hare and Many Friends* (1808). Published from the Juvenile Library. W. C. Hazlitt in *The Lambs* (1897), p. 74, mentions this book and suggests that it might be by Lamb. It had appeared in a sale catalogue of Sothebys dated 14 February 1888, but Hazlitt states he had not seen the book.

3. *The Book of the Ranks and Dignities of British Society. Chiefly intended for the instruction of Young Persons*. With twenty-four Coloured Engravings. Dedicated (by permission) to Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth (1805). Published by Tabart and Co. at the Juvenile and School Library, 157, New Bond-Street, by William Heney, Banner Street. Attributed to Charles Lamb in 1924 by Harold Halewood, a bookseller of Preston, Lancs. Republished in 1924 by Jonathan Cape with an introduction by Clement Shorter. Rejected by E. V. Lucas, E. C. Johnson in her *Lamb Always Elia* (1935), p. 221, and Carl Woodring in the *Harvard Library Bulletin*, Spring 1956, pp. 230-1. Professor Marrs agrees with this view; see *Letters* iii. 38n.

4. *Felissa or, the Life and Opinions of a Kitten of Sentiment*. Twelve Coloured Engravings. Printed for J. Harris, Corner of St Paul's Churchyard (1811). Reprinted by Methuen in 1903. Attributed to Charles Lamb in several bookseller's catalogues and by Mr Jaggard in the Index to *Book Prices Current* (1925), pp. xxxix, 523. *The Bookman* November 1932, p. 105, has an article, 'A Fairyland of Ancient Books', by George Frederic Lees which claims this for Charles Lamb on internal evidence and an illustration of the frontispiece is given on page 107. James Tregaskis offered a copy for sale for £12 in his 'An Important Collection of Some of the Rarer Works of Charles Lamb in 1927. The *Harvard Library Bulletin* 1956 rejects it.

5. *The King and Queen of Clubs.*

6. *The King and Queen of Spades.*
7. *The King and Queen of Diamonds.*

None of these are dated in Tregaskis and *CBEL*, and were published by W. Newbery of 54 Upper Marylebone Street, London. The first two are offered for sale in the Tregaskis Catalogue mentioned above, but no evidence of authorship is offered.

8. *The New Year's Feast on his coming of age* (1824). Published by J. Harris and Son, Corner of St. Paul's Churchyard, London. Printed by S. and R. Bentley, Dorset Street, Fleet Street. Walter Jerrold in his *Thomas Hood and Charles Lamb* (1930), p. 19, suggested that this might be by Lamb. It is a versifying of Lamb's essay 'Rejoicing upon the New Year's Coming of Age' from *The London Magazine* January 1823. Reprinted in the *Charles Lamb Society Monthly Bulletin* in March 1938 as a Supplement.

9. *An Unnamed Comic Opera.* This is a manuscript now in the British Library (Add.MS. 25924). It was originally in the possession of P. G. Patmore, who presented it to the Library in November 1864. He claimed that it was in Lamb's handwriting. It has been included in Thomas Purnell's edition of the *Works* (1870), iv. 155, and in Charles Kent's edition of 1889, p. 171. It has been attributed to Lamb on the strength of a letter of 10 December 1808 from Mary Lamb to Sarah Stoddart. Edmund Blunden thought that some of the names resembled Lamb's handwriting, but E. V. Lucas in his notes to this letter (ii. 61) rejected the suggestion, as does Professor Marrs in his edition of the *Letters* ii. 288.

10. *The Dissolution of the Roman Empire.* Signed John Patteshull. A Tragedy, Lucas mentions in the Introduction to *Poems and Plays* (1903), vii., that the *British Library Catalogue* of autographs attributes this manuscript to Charles Lamb, but adds tht he does not think it is by Lamb, although there is a superficial resemblance to Lamb's handwriting.

Canberra

Reviews

Tales of Terror from Blackwood's Magazine. Ed. Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick. The World's Classics. Oxford University Press, 1995. ISBN 0 19 282366 6. Pp. xxiii + 298. £5.99 paperback.

> There are but two classes of persons in the world - those who are hanged, and those who are not hanged; and it has been my lot to belong to the former.

THE UNATTRIBUTED EPIGRAPH to Henry Thomson's story *Le Revenant (Blackwood's Magazine*, April 1827) made me turn to Charles Lamb's 'On the Inconveniences Resulting from Being Hanged' (*The Reflector*, January-March 1811) – where I did not find it. (Can any reader identify it?) The editors of this collection of tales report in their 'Biographical Notes' that 'nothing is known of this contributor', and I toyed with the notion that it might be Lamb himself until I read in their 'Explanatory Notes' an extract from his letter to William Hone: 'There is in Blackwood this month an article MOST AFFECTING indeed called Le Revenant. . . I beg you read it and see if you can extract any of it. *The Trial scene in particular*.' They also record that Dickens is thought to have drawn upon this tale for the trial of Fagin, who, like Thomson's protagonist, finds his attention wandering to the behaviour of unconcerned people in court.

In their Introduction as well as their Notes the editors are unfailingly informative. They trace the early history of *Blackwood's* (founded in 1817) and vividly and economically illustrate its political and literary temper: it was 'capable of praising those whose religious and political views were diametrically opposite to its own'. They point to the distinctive characteristics of these tales, which typically involve 'a first-person narrator witnessing his own responses to extreme physical and psychological pressures'.

One might not expect the strength of such a collection as this to lie in variety, but that is the surprising fact. The editors have chosen with skill and taste. We begin with a Byronic story of incest, suicide, and madness in a picturesque Swiss setting ('The shrill whistle of the marmot was no longer heard, and the chamois had bounded to its inaccessible retreat'). From this we turn to Walter Scott's 'Narrative of a Fatal Event', namely a bathing accident in which the narrator's horror of 'the danger of the convulsive grasp of a person drowning, or *dead grip* as it is called' paralysed him when his companion was seized with cramp. This is Scott at his best. The next narrator talks with a mad murderer awaiting execution, who has drawn his own decapitated body on the table-top and who ends the interview by stabbing himself to death: John Wilson ('Christopher North') makes the madman an impassioned scanner of the ways of God. Other narrators spend a night in the catacombs, are buried alive, or are trapped beneath a clanging bell in a belfry. 'The Iron Shroud' ends with the victim crushed to death in a contracting cell; it is narrated, of necessity, in the third person.

There is similar variety in the longer tales: a racily told ghost story by James Hogg, a melodramatic tale of adultery and murder set on a floating beacon by John Howison, an ingeniously plotted thriller about a reluctant amateur executioner by the younger William Godwin, and three morbid and sententious extracts from a doctor's casebook by Samuel Warren which amount to more than one-third of the book. All give a valuable insight into the taste of the time. None was previously known to me, and I am accordingly grateful to the editors.

Durham T. W. CRAIK

Questioning Romanticism. Ed. John Beer. Baltimore, Maryland, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. Pp. xiv + 319. £40 hardback (ISBN 0 8018 5052 5); £15 paperback (ISBN 0 8018 5053 3).

ROMANTICISM IS A POETRY of questioning, from Wordsworth's self-accusatory but ultimately redemptive catechism in *The Prelude* Book I to the last line of the Shelleyan oeuvre in 'The Triumph of Life'. Similarly, amongst Romantic critics, questioning Romanticism seems to be the thing to do. Over the last two decades, critical argument about Romanticism has put its subject to question, interrogating, *inter alia*, its poetic theory, idealisms, ideology, definitional exclusions, and canonicity. The zetetic nature of contemporary Romantic studies is well illustrated in John Beer's *Questioning Romanticism*, where eleven distinguished Romanticists approach their subject from a variety of critical perspectives. This critical diversity mirrors the basic premise of the collection, which is intended, in Professor Beer's words, to foster a view of Romanticism 'which no longer expects it to be readily graspable as a defined entity but sees in it - as do the contributors to the present volume - a site of questioning'. Beer tops and tails the volume with an introduction and essay which elegantly address Romanticism, that most taxonomically challenging of cultural manifestations, as a site of fragmentation. Can we as Romanticists have any clear and univocal definition of what our subject matter is? Beer thinks not. We sink under a hermeneutical Bay of Spezia if we demand a unified definition of Romanticism. The 'urge to define romanticism' evident in the likes of Wellek is clearly analogous to the Romantic aspiration to unity; however, Beer endorses another side of Romanticism, its sensitivity to 'disparities and displacements'. Like the Lamb of 'Imperfect Sympathies', Beer is 'no systematizer', content, in the Elian manner, 'with fragments and scattered pieces of Truth'. His fine essay, 'Fragmentations and Ironies', one of the highlights of the volume, is a meditation on the ultimate paradox of Romanticism, the fact that 'Romanticism fosters within itself an impulse to unity which can never in fact be realised'.

Critics of a Caledonian disposition will cling to the notion that a working definition of Romanticism might have its uses, but Beer's approach has engendered some powerful critical responses. The contributions are divided into two sections. The first examines Romantic period literary criticism, whilst the second examines the ways in which Romanticism is applied to contemporary theoretical issues. The standard of the essays is commendably high. The variegation which Beer finds in Romanticism is well-illustrated by the essays collected here. Frederick Burwick ably discusses Romantic notions of mimesis; Philip W. Martin discusses the poetical relationship between Byron and Clare in the context of the politics of Romantic period criticism; Drummond Bone offers a short but suggestive discussion of the validity of the notion of a Europe-wide Romanticism which makes one impatient to see his fuller thoughts on the subject. Beer's own essay is well complemented by Lucy Newlyn's magnificent meditation on the connections between sublimity and indeterminacy, a *précis* of the arguments made in her recent *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*. Equally pertinent and important is Susan Wolfson's compelling examination of the way in which Romantic formalism has been read (or, more often, misread) by the various critical tribes of twentieth-century literature. Her argument that modern hermeneutics (from the New Criticism and its truculent offspring deconstruction to the New Historicism) have worked with an 'unproblematized' version of Romantic aesthetics which evades the Romantics' own awareness of the internal contradictions within their own theory and practice is detailed and convincing.

In a learned and wide-ranging review which perhaps raises more questions about Romanticism than it has space to address fully, A. C. Goodson traces the troubling 'spectre' of 'the failure of

language', from Bacon to Coleridge to post-Saussurean linguistic theory, drawing out intergenerational parallels along the way. Martin Aske contributes a thoughtful and valuable study of the way in which envy and resentment inform a 'context of antagonism' within Romantic criticism. Nigel Leask offers an original study of the aesthetics of murder in De Quincey. Devotees of Anne K. Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* will find much to admire in her contribution, whilst those who faulted the book as tendentious will have their prejudices confirmed. To my mind, her subject, Romantic period literary criticism by women, is undeniably important and it is to be hoped that Mellor's work will prompt further researches in the field.

Nearly a decade after Eaves and Fischer's *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, which also, in its editors' words, saw Romanticism as a cultural phenomenon which 'deserves credit not for answering questions but for asking them', here is another anthology which offers a snapshot of contemporary Romantic studies. And how much healthier Romantic criticism seems today. Instead of being gnarled, as Eaves and Fischer's volume was, in obstinate questionings about the merits or otherwise of one particular critical approach, this anthology shows a Romantic criticism positively o'er-brimmed with variety. The influence of post-structuralist theory survives here in the mutated – and highly acute – form evident in the work of Tilottama Rajan, even that of Newlyn and Martin, but there is a welcome diversity of focus in this collection. Though there are some well-aimed anathemas on the New Historicism here, discussion of that particular approach does not replace colloquy on deconstruction as the *ne plus ultra* of Romantic criticism. *Questioning Romanticism* is an essential volume, a critical variorum which ably displays the state of Romanticism in the mid-1990s.

University of Sunderland JOHN STRACHAN

Society Notes and News

FROM THE HON. SECRETARY

Visit to Strawberry Hill, Twickenham (14 July 1996)

After an al fresco lunch in Richmond, we drove along the Thames (past Marble Hill and the site of Pope's villa) to Horace Walpole's miniature Gothic castle. Although stripped of Walpole's amazing collection of objects and books, the house itself was preserved thanks to Countess Waldegrave. Here we detected an Elian connection – Frances Waldegrave was the daughter of John Braham (1774-1856), the tenor much admired by Charles Lamb (see Prance, p. 37). Over an hour's tour of the house was a delight, thanks to our excellent guide.

We were especially entranced to see the site of the Chinese vase commemorated in Thomas Gray's poem 'On a favourite cat drowned in a tub of goldfish' – for the celebrations in 1997 of the 250th anniversary of Walpole's aquisition of Strawberry Hill it is hoped that the original 'tub' (if not Selina the cat or the goldfish) will be on view.

The Yale edition of Walpole's letters edited by W. S. Lewis filling one and a half shelves in the Library evoked wistful thoughts of Lamb's collected letters – so far a mere three volumes.

Members unable to join us on this visit may like to know that regular tours of the house take place Sundays April to October (phone: 0181 240 4224).

No Library Should be Without One!

Penelope Hughes-Hallett – a new member – drew our attention to the fact that the prestigious London Library lacked a copy of Claude Prance's *Companion to Charles Lamb*. We were pleased

to present the London Library with a copy, and have received a grateful acknowledgement from the Librarian, Alan Bell.

Classic FM

As an occasional listener to the Saturday night music/literature quotation quiz on 1 June (prize: a magnum of champagne) I should have been quicker off the mark. The quotation (tortuously arrived at) proved to be 'The human species, according to the best theory I can form of it, is composed of two distinct races, the men who borrow, and the men who lend.'

William Hazlitt's Grave, St Anne's Church, Soho

On 26 July five members of the Charles Lamb Society were present at St Anne's, Soho, to view the restored grave at the side of the churchyard. Work on the much-eroded headstone still awaits a decision from English Heritage. The blessing of the refurbished memorials was conducted by the Rt Revd Hugh Montefiore and there was a reading from Hazlitt's 'General View of the Subject' from *Lectures on the Drama of the Age of Elizabeth* (1820) by the headstone, and later a reading from 'On the fear of death', concluding with: 'I should like to have some friendly hand to consign me to the grave. On these conditions I am ready, if not willing, to depart. I shall then write on my tomb - GRATEFUL AND CONTENTED.' At the party afterwards, we met the owner of Hazlitt's Hotel, 6 Frith Street, which contains the room where Hazlitt died on 18 September 1830.

A Lamb Quotation?

Professor Stanley Wells is preparing an anthology of Shakespeare theatre criticism for the Oxford University Press, in which he plans to include a review of F. R. Benson as Richard II by C. E. Montague, according to whom Charles Lamb said it was worthwhile to have been cheated of a legacy so as not to miss 'the idea of' the rogue who did it.Professor Wells thinks that Montague may be half-remembering, and misattributing to Lamb, a passage in Keats' letters. If you can identify this quotation (which certainly sounds Elian) please write to Professor Stanley Wells, Longmoor Farmhouse, Ebrington, Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire GL55 6NW.

FROM THE EDITOR

Lamb on the Net

The *Bulletin* and Lamb's own disembodied presence continues to extend itself across the electronic world via the internet. Besides the advertisement for the *Bulletin* on the excellent *Romanticism on the Net*, run by Michael Laplace-Sinatra (URL address: http://users.ox.ac.uk/~scat0385), mention of Lamb is to be found at the website of Louise Heite, an enthusiastic Elian. Louise has in fact constructed an entire webpage for Lamb, comprising a brief biographical sketch (including a picture of Coleridge and Lamb carousing at the Salutation and Cat) followed by the text of a work by Lamb. The text will change from time to time, providing Elians with a reason for recurrent visits. Her URL is http://www.eldhorn.is/~lheite /Lamb1/html. Elsewhere, you can find a page full of quotations from Lamb's essays, at http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/bartlett/343.html, and there is even a full-colour facsimile of one of Lamb's letters to Mrs Godwin from the Hugh Peal Collection at the University of Kentucky at http://www.uky.edu/Libraries/Special/Lamb_letter_1of2.jpeg. For anorak-wearers with nothing better to do than stare at their computer screens, further news of Elian websites will be provided in future issues.

Society Notes and News from Members

Wallace R. Nethery

We regret to announce the death, on 6 February 1996, of Wallace R. Nethery of Los Angeles, a member of the Charles Lamb Society since 1956.

Wallace Nethery was Librarian of the Hoose Library of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, until his retirement in 1976, and a celebrated editor of *Coranto*, journal of the Friends of the USC Libraries. When he became a superannuated man his old colleagues described him as 'so gifted a colleague and amiable a friend'.

Elians know him best for his numerous useful publications on Charles Lamb, many of them printed in miniature on his own private hand press. He was particularly interested in American editions of Lamb's works and American Eliana. Bibliophiles know him for the elegance of his booklets and slim volumes. A partial list appears in our member Claude A. Prance's *Companion to Charles Lamb*, 1983, but one could not praise Mr Nethery's work without a specific mention of those attractive and respectably frequent denizens of antiquarian book catalogues, *Eliana Americana* (1957), *Eliana Americana 1838-1848* (1960), *Charles Lamb in America to 1848* (1963), and *Eliana Americanna 1849-1866* (1971).

Mr Nethery underwent major surgery in September 1994 and was thereafter on crutches, though he managed to read a lot, write a bit, and even to do some printing. We send our sympathy to Mrs Corry Nethery. D. E. Wickham

We are pleased to present here Wallace Nethery's final Elian communication, kindly forwarded to the *Bulletin* by his widow. – Ed.

Diplomatic Dispatch

The following, written by a Princeton Professor of jurisprudence and political economy who would become the 28th President of the United States, first appeared as the opening paragraphs of 'On an Author's Choice of Company', *The Century Magazine*, March 1896. (That article would be reprinted in *Mere Literature*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1896, and Boston and New York, 1913.) Am I wrong in believing that the little treatise – curious for its origin if not its originality – is not widely known on either side of the Atlantic?

> Once and again, it would seem, a man is born into the world belated. Strayed out of a past age, he comes among us like an alien, lives removed and singular, and dies a stranger. There was a touch of this strangeness in Charles Lamb. Much as he was loved and befriended, he was not much understood; for he drew aloof in his studies, affected a 'self-pleasing quaintness' in his style, took no pains to hit the taste of his day, wandered at sweet liberty in an age which could scarcely have bred such another. 'Hang the age!' he cried, 'I will write for antiquity.' And he did. He wrote as if it were still Shakespeare's day; made the authors of that spacious time his constant companions and study; and deliberately became himself 'the last of the Elizabethans'. When a new book came out, he said, he always read an old one.
>
> The case ought, surely, to put us occasionally upon reflecting. May an author not, in some degree, by choosing his literary character, and so, when he comes to write, write himself back to his masters? May he not, by examining his own tastes and yielding himself obedient to his natural affinities, join what congenial group of writers he will? The question can be argued very strongly in the affirmative, and that not alone because of Charles Lamb's case. It might be said that Lamb was antique only in the forms of his speech; that he managed very cleverly to hit the taste of his age in the substance of what he wrote, for

> all the phraseology had so strong a flavour of quaintness and was not at all in the mode of the day. It would not be easy to prove that; but it really does not matter. In his tastes, certainly, Lamb was an old author, not a new one; a 'modern antique', as Hood called him. He wrote for his own age, of course, because there was no other age at hand to write for, and the age he liked best was past and gone; but he wrote what he fancied the great generations gone by would have liked, and what, as it turned out in the generosity of fortune, subsequent ages have warmly loved and reverently canonized him for writing; as if there were a casual taste that belongs to a day and generation, and also a permanent taste which is without date, and he had hit the latter. (Woodrow Wilson)

Wallace R. Nethery

Coleridge Summer Conference, 19-24 July 1996

The Fifth Coleridge Summer Conference took place at Cannington, 19-24 July 1996. The new conference director Nicholas Roe had organized what will be remembered as one of the best conferences on Coleridge's work, combining academic excellence with a convivial atmosphere.

Many aspects of Coleridge's work were discussed: James McKusick dealt with the post-colonial politics of the Pantisocracy project; Rosemary Ashton showed the importance of Coleridge's German journey on his life; Raimonda Modiano very convincingly explained the differences in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's assessment of the *Salisbury Plain* poems; Jim Mays presented us with a fascinating reading of *Lewti* as a wholly original love poem; Coleridge's *Logic* was masterfully discussed by Angela Esterhammer and Janet Land. Coleridge was also linked to other literary figures, such as Johnson (James Engell), Wakefield (Bruce Graver), Keats (Beth Lau), Clare (Alan Vardy), Blake (David Baulch), Godwin (Pamela Clemit), Poole (Reggie Watters and Jonathan Worley). His politics were discussed in Tim Fulford's engaging paper on the trial of Queen Caroline, and Michael John Kooy's 'Excuses for Coleridge's Anti-Gallicanism'; and Thomas McFarland gave us an enticing lecture on Coleridge and the mysteries of Samothrace. Our dear Charles Lamb was of course mentioned several times, most extensively by John Beer, who compared Lamb's dreaming ability with Coleridge's.

Paul Muldoon, the distinguished Irish poet author of the Pantisocratic romance *Madoc, a Mystery* (1990), read to us a selection of his poems on Saturday evening. And on the final evening we had the pleasure of listening to John Hagen, Paddy Turner and Reggie Watters reading us 'Falstaff in Miniature' – extracts from James White's *Letters of Sir John Falstaff* (1796). Lamb described the letters to Coleridge as 'without exception the best imitation I ever saw'.

Michael Laplace-Sinatra

Recognizing One's Own

The CLS Bulletin No. 200 (October 1968), page 604, prints the following extract from a bookseller's catalogue then recently received:

> LAMB (Charles and Mary) Complete Works, including Life and Letters, edited by E. V. Lucas, Library Edition, with illustrations, and EXTRA-ILLUSTRATED by the insertion of 462 portraits, views, etc. and an autograph letter of E. V. Lucas, 9 vols. 8vo, full brown morocco gilt extra, spine tooled in compartments, gilt inside borders, t.e.g. [top edges gilt] by Morrell (some pages slightly spotted), FINE SET, £225.1903-05

My mother once recognized me from the back of my neck. Neither of us expected the other to be in Blackheath in south-east London at that hour and I was, embarrassingly if not unusually, looking in a bookshop window. My father expressed astonishment that my mother could

recognize anyone from the back of the neck, whereupon she pointed out that her son was not anyone. Her son was *me*!

I felt much the same emotion on unexpectedly reading the above extract in the old *Bulletin*. Surely? Surely?? It was 4 March 1994. I was in the Old Library of Wickham Towers at the time but went through to the West Library (the New Library), pulled aside the pile of books which includes a copy of Mrs Inchbald's version of *Lovers' Vows*, probably 1808, and suitably Austenian, Blackwell's Centenary Antiquarian Catalogue, 1979, with four Lamb items, a 1968 translation of Raymond Radiguet's *The Devil in the Flesh* (now what's *that* doing there?), and the empty filing drawer which will one day be filled by something Elian, and there they were - absolutely no question. (The phrase you may be seeking, dear reader, and not dead reader as I mis-typed first, is 'an eclectic selection'.)

I remember buying the set in the Thomas Thorp bookshop at Holborn Viaduct in October 1982, a few months before the company moved to Saint Albans and when they were offering sale terms of 20% off, though from a sum greater than £225 after fourteen years in stock. That was when I also bought my copy of Charles Lamb's *Album Verses*, 1830, rebound, but it had sat waiting for me since my first sighting it there three years earlier. The shop manager assured me that, since the grangerised (extra-illustrated) set had first been offered, it had been stolen, recovered in America, and brought back to London. Each volume bears the bookplate of Arthur W. Waters with the inked-in date 1913.

Mid-1995 seemed a reasonable time for a (first? well, second) look through the volumes. Volume I, *Miscellaneous Prose 1798-1834*, is a fine example of professionally-mounted extra-illustration. First comes the Lucas letter mentioned in the advertisement, which refers in passing to his studies in B.B., doubtless Bernard Barton, then portrait after portrait, engraving, mezzotint, etching, etc. One would have to be a great amateur of this kind of work to know how far any of it is worth while but one gains a certain pleasure from the portraits of Fanny Kelly, Liston, and Munden, and from the long series of miniature reproductions of Hogarth. Among these pinpricks of recognition and happiness, there is a sudden thump at the sight of the title page and original four pages extracted from *The Gem* of 1830, the original printing of *Saturday Night*, contributed by 'Nepos' and never reprinted by Charles Lamb. There is also an early, perhaps original, engraving of the Wilkie painting which was the stimulus for the paper: Lucas discusses it all in the Notes to page 324. On the inside rear pastedown (I address the bibliophiles) are three press-cuttings of July 1938 referring to E. V. Lucas' will and all mentioning the upkeep of Charles Lamb's grave.

Volume II, *Elia and the Last Essays of Elia*, illustrates, successively and *inter multa alia*, the Old South Sea House, Beethoven, Bach, the Reverend Thomas Stackhouse, the interior of the Temple Church, Mr Palmer as Malvil [sic], some of the old actors, ephemera from the Leamington Spa Library (Elians will need no explanation), and the Colossus of Rhodes.

Volume III, *Books for Children* is less imaginatively illustrated. The Shakespeare items are of varying degrees of interest, including an example of the customary form of Hermione's statue in *The Winter's Tale* V.iii: is the stage direction that she is 'standing as a statue' original and so a defence of this Rackham/Victorian/upright or should one read more into the fact that 'the colour's not dry' and imagine a prone Elizabethan tomb-effigy? There is an *Evening Star* newspaper cutting of 2 April 1811 advertising M. J. Godwin's proposed Series of Copperplate Books 'of uncommon taste and delicacy', and R. H. Shepherd's article from *The Gentleman's Magazine* of late 1885 concerning *An Unknown Fairy-Tale in Verse by Charles Lamb*.

Volume IV, *Dramatic Specimens and the Garrick Plays*, contains a good range of portraits of dramatists, some rare, some common, Dulwich College, the Duke of Newcastle, Francis Jeffrey

and Lord Tennyson (for the Note on page 610, you see). Volume V, *Poems and Plays*, is perhaps most interesting for its portrait of a remarkably be-curled, young and romantic-looking B. R. Haydon. Some of the portraits in Volume VI, *Letters 1796-1820*, would be a fine basis for stimulating an Elian examination paper: 'Write a dozen lines on each of the following, placing them in their historical and Elian contexts: Thomas Dermody, Cowper's mother, Kosciuszko, Lord Grenville, Fenelon, Mr Cooke as Sir Archy MacSarcasm (tricky, even a trick, that one), Mrs Charlotte Smith, Mrs Bland, William Curtis, and Sir Samuel Romilly.'

From Volume VII, *Letters 1821-1834*, I would have added Mr [Edward] Irving and J. P. Harley, except that this volume contains what may be the most interesting and even the most valuable item in the accumulation. It is an original autograph letter dated 21 November 1823 and bound in at Letter 507, pages 868-9, which concerns George Dyer's handwriting. The letter is said to be in the hand of Dr Samuel Parr. Going by this virtually illegible example, he was very properly described by Charles Lamb as writing in 'mystical notations and conjuring characters'.

Volume VIII, *Life. I. 1775-1817*, includes a silhouette of Charles Lamb, more probably the product of a wet Edwardian afternoon, alas, than of a late Georgian one, and fewer than half-a-dozen interesting early nineteenth-century views of London and its inner suburbs. This may be the only volume not to include a multiplicate copy of 'David Garrick as Hamlet'. Volume IX, *Life. II. 1818-1834*, includes an undated circulation sheet from the Woodbridge Book Club, with a very questionably autograph entry against the name of Barton. One is now becoming increasingly conscious of duplicate portraits and of similarities with earlier volume: here are some more of the old actors, for example, and you might write a dozen lines on Frederick Reynolds. So, with a desert of appendices and index pages and a certain amount of scratching on the lower board (I address the bibliophiles again), the volumes come to a close.

D. E. Wickham

A Compound of Simples

Cruikshank's world persists: "we must get rid of posts that are unnecessary or worse"

The illustration on the preceding page is unsourced (splendid word!) and will look no better than its rather poor reproduction in a national newspaper, probably during 1993.

It is 11am and the clerks are reading newspapers, chatting, or sleeping. One has brought his dog to the office. The book on the left-hand desk bears the title *Joe Miller*, i.e. it is a celebrated 'jest book'.

The picture appears to show the kind of environment in which Charles Lamb worked at the East India House, six or seven men on high stools, though not as exaggeratedly high as we may sometimes suppose, with sloping desks, all in a screened-off area known as a compound. This led him to remark that a compound was 'a collection of simples'.

Lloyd's Log for August 1947 (Rich. XV. 205-6) takes the matter a little further. 'What of the human beings who preceded us on this site [i.e. in the East India House]? In their day they were very much alive. One clerk wore such wonderful "neck-cloths" that men came from all parts of East India House to look at him. Another used to take pot-shots with a pair of pistols at a mantelpiece, until the clerk who sat near the target complained and the marksman was packed off to India with a commission in a cavalry regiment. Large rooms were partitioned off into "compounds", and one form of humour was to throw a heavy ruler [perhaps one of those old-style and very solid cylindrical wooden "ink-rulers"] over a partition and slip away as it fell on the head of a clerk.'

50 Years Ago
from *CLS Bulletin* No.74 November 1946

The first branch of this Society was formed at Bradford on Saturday, 28 September 1946. Mr Wyndham T. Vint, MA, presided, and about twenty members and their friends were present. The meeting was held in the Library at Laycock's Rooms, Albion Court, Bradford [*Salve, magna parens* as Dr Johnson wrote of Lichfield]. . . . Among those present were Mr E. G. Crowsley, Hon General Secretary of the Society, and Mr H. G. Smith, one of the Society's Corresponding Secretaries, and member of the Council, himself a Yorkshire man. . . .

Mr H. G. Smith contributed two short papers, the first comprising some verses entitled *The Only One–and Which?*, being a variant on that perennial, ever-fascinating, ever-elusive problem, The Favourite Elian Essay. After staking claims for several the conclusion reached was that the only possible solution was – to keep the lot! The second paper was *The Rubaiyat of Elia Khayyam*, an Omar-esque portrayal of the main incidents in and the chief characteristics of the life of Charles Lamb and his selfless devotion to his sister Mary.

Greetings for the success of the branch were received from the Lord Mayor of Bradford, the Director of Education, Messrs. Edmund Blunden [Vice-President], J. Lewis May [Vice-President], S. L. G. Huxstep, and a telegraphic message signed Charles Lamb were read at the Meeting.

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