The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

October 1994 New Series No. 88

Contents: Wordsworth Winter School Issue

GORDON K. THOMAS: 'The Thorn' and 'the Rapture of the Hallelujah' 134

MARY WEDD: 'Tintern Abbey' Restored 150

DUNCAN WU: Looking for Johnny: Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy' 166

* * *

MICHAEL BAUMAN: Contributions Toward a Southey Bibliography 177

A Pictorial Supplement 181

Reviews

JOHN STRACHAN on *Romantic Parodies, 1797-1831* ed. David A. Kent and D. R. Ewen 183

SANDRA KNOTT on *Lower Edmonton in Pictures* compiled by Graham Dalling 186

MADELINE HUXSTEP on *A Busy Day (or An Arrival from India)* by Fanny Burney, King's Head Theatre, Islington 187

Society News and Notes from Members 188

Editorial

It is my sad duty to report the deaths of two of the Society's Vice-Presidents: John Wain and Florence Reeves. John Wain was a distinguished novelist, poet, and man of letters; his passing has been widely noticed. Florence Reeves was an active member of the Society from its foundation, and with her death we have lost one of our most important connections with the distinguished men and women who first established it. Obituaries of these distinguished Elians appear on pp. 188-90.

The first three papers in this number come from the Wordsworth Winter School, held in February. This year's theme was *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), and each of the papers addresses one of the poems in that volume. Gordon Thomas' distinctive scepticism and shrewdness takes us to the very heart of *The Thorn*, cutting through so much of the confused commentary surrounding it to reveal its originality afresh. The same virtues characterize Mary Wedd's discussion of *Tintern Abbey*, written in defiance of new historicism. My analysis of *The Idiot Boy* reveals a weakness for the transcendental, attempting to argue metaphysics even in the midst of one of Wordsworth's most playful poems.

Michael Bauman has appeared in these pages before, and we are pleased to present his bibliography of recent Southey criticism. Professor Bauman's theological expertise has given him a unique perspective from which to write on Southey, as he has been doing for a number of years. He is currently editing Southey's journal of his continental tour, 1817. We wish him well with it.

'The Thorn' and 'the Rapture of the Hallelujah'

By GORDON K. THOMAS

THE *LYRICAL BALLADS* OF 1798 originate in contrast and opposition, and in the attempt to impose a sense of balance amid contrasts. We have the opposite approaches to subject-matter and style which both Coleridge and Wordsworth describe for us, with that inherent sense of contrast which then leads to a sense of balance, with the recognition that the poems they wrote in each other's company were an 'associate . . . labour'.[1] Coleridge was not speaking wildly nor speculatively but in perfect accuracy (for once) when he called the *Lyrical Ballads*, as originally planned, '*one work* . . . as an Ode is one work', in which 'our different poems are as stanzas'.[2]

Add to this the fact that within each of the poets also - and even, often, within each of the poems - there is a further struggle to reconcile opposites, to create both a balance and a harmony out of oppositions, and we begin to understand what Wordsworth was talking about in the Preface when he speaks of 'similitude in dissimilitude'. The ability to perceive similitude in dissimilitude, he tells us there, 'is the great spring of the activity of our minds and their chief feeder.' It provides direction for 'the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it' - that is, perhaps, all emotions whatsoever. It is the 'life of our ordinary conversation'. It is the basis, too, he says, of 'our taste and our moral feelings'. Here is a powerful principle indeed![3]

Surely it is to this intent to achieve reconciliation and balance among opposing forces that Wordsworth refers in his description of his association with Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads* days, the description that he gives in *The Prelude*. It is that essential process, he says, in which he found that within him

> 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 . . . (*Prelude* xiv 293-8)

That is, the balancing of enthusiasm and joy, the 'rapture of the hallelujah' (wonderful phrase!), by what the poet calls 'pathetic truth' - that is, the truth of the emotions, and by reason, and by reverence.

But another way of perceiving this kind of balancing is to acknowledge it as poetic ambiguity, a technique very dear to Wordsworth. When he tells us in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that his purpose is to observe 'the motions'[4] of his own mind while at the same time aiming 'at setting in motion the mind of the reader, at provoking mental activity', he is telling us of the importance in his work of poetic ambiguity. When he writes to Lady Beaumont that

[1] *The Prelude* (1850) xiv 402. Quotations from *The Prelude* are taken from the 1850 text, *William Wordsworth: The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised by Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1959).

[2] *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. E. L. Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71), i. 412.

[3] *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974) (hereafter *Prose Works*), i. 148.

[4] *Prose Works* i. 138.

'There is scarcely one of my Poems which does not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment, or to some general principle, or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution',[5] he is making the same point. Indeed, for setting and keeping the mind in motion, it is hard to imagine a technique more effective than poetic ambiguity. No work of Wordsworth's plunges his readers into more unsettling ambiguity, and no work has had so subversive and revolutionary an effect on readers' expectations and poets' experiments than 'The Thorn'.

'The Thorn' is a poem of immense significance not only for what it can do for the motions of the minds of Wordsworth's readers but also for the astonishing influence it has exercised on other writers, beginning in Wordsworth's own time, in the development of fresh approaches to poetic and narrative techniques. Wordsworth always had in mind his role as teacher and exemplar to 'youthful Poets' - those who, he writes in *Michael*, would 'be my second self when I am gone' (ll. 38-9).[6] In 'The Thorn' he achieved one of his greatest successes in these terms. If you begin to suspect that in the presence of this poem I am myself about to fall into my own 'rapture of the hallelujah', you are quite right.

Dorothy Wordsworth records in her Alfoxden Journal entry for 19 March 1798, a day otherwise distinguished apparently only by 'a severe hailstorm', that on that day 'William wrote some lines describing a stunted thorn'.[7] Those lines themselves almost bury the thorn tree from the beginning:

> A summit where the stormy gale
> Sweeps through the clouds from vale to vale -
> A thorn there is which like a stone
> With jagged lychens is o'ergrown,
> A thorn that wants its thorny points,
> A toothless thorn with knotted joints,
> Not higher than a two-years' child,
> It stands upon that spot so wild;
> Of leaves it has repaired its loss
> With heavy tufts of dark green moss,
> Which from the ground in plenteous crop
> Creep[?s] upward to its very top
> To bury it for ever-more.[8]

Such is the reading of the earliest manuscript; these may be the very lines mentioned by Dorothy, little more than a descriptive notebook entry, but a foundation on which to erect better things - if, along with the tree itself, in such danger of becoming buried 'for evermore', the lines too were not to be left to a mossy inhumation.

Of course, the poet's real and eventual intent with these lines and his later adaptations of them was to *prevent* the thorn from being buried - as he told Isabella Fenwick nearly half a

[5] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years 1806-1820* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill (2 vols., Oxford, 1969-70) (hereafter *MY*), i. 148.

[6] Unless otherwise stated, quotations from Wordsworth's poetry are taken from *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford, 1940-9) (hereafter *PW*).

[7] *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* ed. Ernest de Selincourt (2 vols., London, 1941), i. 13.

[8] This transcription is taken from *William Wordsworth: Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800* ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY, 1992), p. 283.

century later: 'I said to myself, 'Cannot I by some invention do . . . much to make this Thorn . . . an impressive object . . .?'[9]

Not everybody has responded to this poem as I do with 'the rapture of the hallelujah'. The desire of the poet to keep the thorn *unburied* was not much shared by some of his most famous friends and contemporaries - with, however, one particularly notable, influential, and unexpected exception to be discussed later. Typical of many responses to Wordsworth's continuing efforts to make the poor old tree into a permanent and impressive image are the critical remarks of Robert Southey, who, in his 1798 article in the *Critical Review*, declared himself 'altogether displeased' by the poem. Coleridge, though certainly not at first, denounced in later years, in *Biographia Literaria*, nearly half of that same poetic effort as 'sudden and unpleasant sinkings'.[10] For William Hazlitt, the thorn was weighed down not by its mosses alone but with an unpleasant 'heap of recollections' - apparently a heap more than he could tolerate.[11] Writing in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1807, Francis Jeffrey, acknowledging 'pathos' and 'a strong spirit of originality', found 'The Thorn' nevertheless characterized by 'occasional vulgarity, affectation, and silliness', and a year later returned to the attack with a parody of what he called Wordsworth's 'very peculiar description'[12] - a comment which itself is a *very* peculiar description of the poem! In *The Simpliciad*, one of several (alas) meagre attempts in those years to revive the spirit of Pope's *Dunciad*, the author (apparently Bishop Richard Mant, as Wordsworth said in a letter of later years)[13] branded Wordsworth as 'the founder of the simple school' and specifically ridiculed 'Poets who'

> . . . dance with dancing laughing daffodills;
> Or measure muddy ponds from side to side,
> And find them three feet long and two feet wide . . .[14]

And Byron - well, what Lord Byron did with 'The Thorn' deserves some special attention, and I'll come to that later on.

But these negative comments I've cited in fact overstate the critical case, for Wordsworth's poem has had also its admirers - and not just recent scholars and critics - some of whom have certainly lavished both attention and acclaim on it. A sampling: Mary Jacobus discusses 'The Thorn' as a radical and successful experiment in narrative method, in 'communicating the incommunicable'; John Jordan views the poem as 'an exceedingly important moment' in Wordsworth's poetic development; Stephen Parrish's very convincing study of the *dramatic* merits of the poem calls it 'a daring and skilful experiment in a new genre'.[15] But in the early years, when the novelty of 'The Thorn' seemed particularly fresh, there was generally a bravado that accompanied any praise of the poem. Thus Thomas De Quincey, in a letter to Wordsworth dated 31 May 1803, expresses his exuberant 'admiration and love for those

[9] *PW* ii. 511.

[10] *Biographia Literaria* ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate (2 vols., Princeton, NJ, 1983) (hereafter *BL*), ii. 52.

[11] *The Works of William Hazlitt* ed. P. P. Howe (21 vols., London, 1930-4) (hereafter Howe), xi. 89.

[12] *Edinburgh Review* 11 (1807) 214; 12 (1808) 214.

[13] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years 1821-1859* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised Alan G. Hill (4 vols., Oxford, 1971-88), ii. 324.

[14] Richard Mant, *The Simpliciad* (1808), 99-101.

[15] Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, 1798* (Oxford, 1976), p. 250; John E. Jordan, *Why the Lyrical Ballads?* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 158; Stephen M. Parrish, '"The Thorn": Wordsworth's Dramatic Monologue', *English Literary History* 24 (1957) 153-63; p. 163.

delightful poems',[16] of which 'The Thorn' is one, but acknowledges 'the abject condition of worldly opinion' which seems more commonly to take the negative view, with 'no applauding coterie ever gathered about' Wordsworth and his 'Thorn'.[17] De Quincey would change his views on Wordsworth and abandon his place in his one-man 'applauding coterie', but he never changed his mind on the *Lyrical Ballads* nor 'The Thorn'.

In contrast to De Quincey's critical consistency, some of the very detractors cited above were also among the early enthusiasts for 'The Thorn'. Hazlitt, for example, recorded that when he *first* heard Coleridge read the poem, before Hazlitt even met Wordsworth, 'I felt that deeper power and pathos which have been since acknowledged, "In spite of pride, in erring reason's spite", as the characteristics of this author; and the sense of a new style and a new spirit in poetry came over me. It had to me something of the effect that arises from the turning up of the fresh soil, or of the first welcome breath of Spring, "While yet the trembling year is unconfirmed".'[18]

It is typical of admirers of 'The Thorn', like Hazlitt, early and recent, to emphasize the *originality* of the poem. It was this originality, shared in various ways by many of the original *Lyrical Ballads*, that Southey disliked in his famous denunciation published in the *Critical Review* of October 1798: 'The "experiment", we think, has failed', and as for 'The Thorn', its method of dramatic narration was particularly unpleasing: 'He who personates tiresome loquacity, becomes tiresome himself'[19] - Southey apparently forgetting for the moment a dozen or more characters of Shakespeare, Polonius perhaps the chief among them, whose memorable delightfulness rests almost wholly on the very characteristic here denounced as inartistic. At least Southey was, on this subject, consistent, for 14 years later he was still telling De Quincey 'that he considered Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, and still more his principles as to the selection of subjects, and as to what constituted a poetic treatment, as founded in error'.[20]

Southey's great brother-in-law Coleridge lacked this consistency in his responses to 'The Thorn'. He was one of the most fervent, indeed most dogmatic, of the poem's early admirers. It was, in its earliest years, 'an object of unqualified panegyric with him'.[21] This fact we learn not from Coleridge, who was later to speak quite otherwise about 'The Thorn', but from John Thelwall's marginal note on Coleridge's later negative comments on the poem in *Biographia Literaria* (a marginal note hidden in the recesses of the library of New York University until Norman Fruman discovered and published it). The better-known *public* statements of Coleridge on 'The Thorn' all come from *Biographia Literaria*, especially Chapter 17, in which Coleridge gives the poem more attention, more detailed criticism, and a more general rejection of Wordsworth's aims and claims for it than he gives to any other work. 'Had Mr. Wordsworth's poems', writes Coleridge in Chapter 14 of *Biographia Literara*, 'been the silly, the childish things, which they were for a long time described as being . . . they must have sunk at once, a dead weight, into the slough of oblivion'. But instead, he says, those poems have long been treasured by people 'of strong sensibility and meditative minds'.[22] Well, yes and no. But 'The Thorn' at least has not fared particularly

[16] *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets* ed. David Wright (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 385.
[17] *Recollections*, pp. 311, 368.
[18] 'My First Acquaintance With Poets', *The Liberal* ii (1823) 23-46; p. 39.
[19] *Critical Review* 24 (1798) 197-204, pp. 204, 200.
[20] De Quincey, *Recollections* 246.
[21] Norman Fruman, *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (New York, 1971), p. 197.
[22] *BL* ii. 9.

well with many readers, even many 'of strong sensibility and meditative minds' - including, in fact, Coleridge, who (in Chapter 17) attacks nearly half the poem as the sort of writing which 'unprejudiced and unsophisticated hearts'[23] - like his own, no doubt - can easily recognize as 'sudden and unpleasant sinkings'.

These unpleasant 'sinkings', according Coleridge, amount to expressions of one of what he calls, in Chapter 22, the characteristic defects of Wordsworth's poetry - namely 'an undue predilection for the dramatic form', which, Coleridge claims, results inevitably in at least one of two 'evils': either 'an incongruity of style' or 'a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, while in truth one man only speaks.'[24] Apparently Coleridge found both these evils in 'The Thorn'. He banished as incongruous the last two lines of the third stanza, the last seven of the tenth stanza, and all of stanzas 11 through 15 except for what he called 'the four admirable lines at the commencement of the fourteenth'.[25] Four acceptable lines out of a passage 62 lines long: this seems to take damning with faint praise to its extreme! Coleridge insists, despite Wordsworth's claims to the contrary, beginning with the 'Advertisement' to the original volume of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, that 'The Thorn' is a lyric poem, not a dramatic poem, conceding that different rules must apply to a lyric poem, and echoing Southey's criticism of 19 years earlier: 'it is not possible', writes Coleridge, 'to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects of dulness and garrulity'.[26]

Coleridge's easy dismissal in 1817 of Wordsworth's *dramatic* claims for the poem is particularly striking in view of his obvious understanding and approval of those claims in 1798. Thelwall's marginal note to this discussion in his copy of *Biographia Literaria* makes clear the contrast. Thelwall (not an admirer of 'The Thorn') writes: 'I am amused with these concessions. Some years ago, when C[oleridge] & I had much talk about this poem in particular I could not wring from him any accordance with me upon the subject'.[27] That is, Wordsworth was totally convincing to Coleridge in 1798; totally unconvincing in 1817. If Coleridge was being pulled both ways for nearly two decades in a critical tug of war between Southey (and Thelwall and Jeffrey) on one side, and Wordsworth on the other, Southey's side eventually won him over. But it is odd to find Coleridge in such company in the *Biographia* - odd especially that it should be he who gave this final pronouncement against Wordsworth's supposed ventriloquism; odd to find in Coleridge's words such strong echoes from the hostile critics of past years (equally as hostile to Coleridge as to Wordsworth), like Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* of April 1808, who wrote: 'In the story of 'The Thorn', with all the attention we have been able to bestow, we have been utterly unable to detect any characteristic traits, either of a seaman, an annuitant, or a stranger in a country town. It is a style, on the contrary, which we should ascribe without hesitation to a certain poetical fraternity in the West of England, and which we verily believe, never was, and never will be, used by any one out of that fraternity'.[28] The fraternity to which Jeffrey assigned Coleridge as well as Wordsworth, and to which Coleridge had certainly belonged in his own days as a great poet, the days of *Lyrical Ballads* - that fraternity Coleridge abandoned by the time he

[23] *BL* ii. 51-2.
[24] *BL* ii. 135.
[25] *BL* ii. 50-1.
[26] *BL* ii. 49.
[27] Fruman 197.
[28] *Edinburgh Review* 12 (1808) 137.

compiled *Biographia Literaria.* And not only did he abandon it, but he sided with those who all along had declared themselves its enemies.

I mention all this so as to encourage you to decide for yourself whether 'The Thorn' is a false, insincere, silly and ventriloquistic poem, or whether it justifies in its readers the 'rapture of the hallelujah' that I have admitted to feeling about it. I have to say that I can only wonder, and then wonder some more, at Coleridge's motives. For me, there is no defect in 'The Thorn' to justify the change in Coleridge's words and actions. I think we have to look elsewhere - in political and social motives - to explain his attacks of later years on the poem he once admired and loved.

Coleridge was not the only one to change. Wordsworth himself made a number of revisions over the years in 'The Thorn', both in the sections attacked by Coleridge and in the rest of the poem. Ernest de Selincourt claims that those revisions 'were occasioned by Coleridge's criticism' rather than by Wordsworth's own growing poetic sense, but the claim is certainly questionable, as is de Selincourt's insistence that most of the alterations are 'unfortunate' (see *PW* ii. 513).

This brings us to that always vexed question which arises every time we find Wordsworth making revisions. Was the poet always at his best when his inspiration was freshest? Or did his own growing sense of his art lead him to make not just changes but improvements over the years? Critics and scholars of high repute line up very solidly on both sides of this question - and then throw insults at each other - a very entertaining activity, I gather, by its popularity.

If Wordsworth deleted or changed some passages in 'The Thorn' which Coleridge had attacked, he also stuck to other attacked passages without change. And a number of his changes have nothing at all to do with Coleridge's comments. Whatever Coleridge's influence on the revisions may in fact have been, Wordsworth made his own changes for his own reasons, and they are consistent with his original aims. Thomas Hutchinson, in the notes to his 1920 edition of Wordsworth's poems, claims that the changes ruined the dramatic verisimilitude of 'The Thorn' - the very quality which Southey and Coleridge insisted was never present anyway. It is difficult to agree with Hutchinson, just as I find it impossible, on the other side, to agree with Southey and Coleridge. Who can discern anything unfortunate, for example, in the following change, with its elimination of what had been slightly silly feminine rhymes:

1798-1805:
It dried her body like a cinder,
And almost turn'd her brain to tinder.

1815 onwards:
A fire was kindled in her breast,
Which might not burn itself to rest. (*PW* ii. 244 and n)

The fact that the cinder/tinder rhyme is used in William Taylor's translation of Bürger's 'Lenora' was perhaps reason enough for Wordsworth to reject it.

And what about this, with its similar increase in impact?

1798-1815:
Oh me! ten thousand times I'd rather
That he had died, that cruel father!

1820 onwards:
O guilty Father - would that death
Had saved him from that breach of faith! (*PW* ii. 245 and n)

Or this change, which acknowledges the unified power and statement force of a single line and replaces tautology with striking description of action?

1798:
I've heard, the scarlet moss is red.

1800 onwards:
I've heard, the moss is spotted red. (*PW* ii. 247 and n)

The unfortunate fact is that Wordsworth's efforts in 'The Thorn' have been, early and late, both in the original poem and in later revisions, treated with a good deal of unjust disdain.

But such contradictions, in fact, lie at the very heart of the poem. Let's look at the 1798 text, starting from the very beginning, to see the wide swings of ambivalence with which the poem is brimming. 'There is a thorn; it looks so old':[29] I call your attention to the two verbs of the first line, and how each of them undercuts the other. 'There *is* a thorn' - pure affirmation, a clear assertion of existence; 'it *looks* so old' - subjectivity, impressionism. There *is* a thorn, but is it *really* old? This contrast, set up in the two halves of the first line, each its own brief clause, is the contrast that runs throughout the whole poem. What is certain in this poem? What is merely conjectured, or suggested, or supposed?

Let's go on with that first stanza and see how the process works, noting the contrasting words as we go:

There *is* a thorn; it *looks* so old,
In *truth* you'd find it *hard to say*,
How it could ever have been *young*,
It looks so *old* and grey. (ll. 1-4)

Grey is an interesting word here. Some trees do have a greyish quality to them, but it has nothing to do with their age. 'Old and grey' is a human description, not a botanical one. And when we realize *that*, we begin to wonder if the initial assertion is valid. *Is* there a thorn? Or is this object some human thing? The next line does not add to our certainty: 'Not higher than a two-years' child'. But lest we allow our imaginations to decide that this is *more* than a tree, the speaker now insists that it is, for sure, something rather *less* than a tree:

No leaves it has, no thorny points;
It is a mass of knotted joints,
A wretched thing forlorn.
It stands erect, and like a *stone*
With lichens it is overgrown.
Like *rock* or *stone*, it is o'ergrown
With lichens to very top . . . (ll. 7-13)

[29] Quotations from *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) are from Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798* ed. W. J. B. Owen (2nd ed., Oxford, 1969) (hereafter Owen).

Well, I think you get the idea. There is controversy here, in what seems at first to be rather straightforward description, and the controversy is over that most basic of all questions - What *is*? And what *isn't*?

Essential to being a tree is having leaves. But this poor tree, 'No leaves it has'. Essential to being a *thorn* tree is having thorns. But this poor thorn has 'no thorny points'. And lest we think that those minimal qualifications for its existence as a thorn tree are somehow supplied by a kind and compensating nature in the form of lichens and mosses, such sentimental imaginings are wiped away by the vision of enmity between tree and mosses that we are given:

> Up from the earth these mosses creep,
> And this poor thorn they clasp it round
> So close, you'd say that they were bent
> With plain and manifest intent,
> To drag it to the ground;
> And all had joined in one endeavour
> To bury this poor thorn for ever. (ll. 16-22)

More interesting to me than this apparent hostility between the tree and the other elements of nature which surround it, with their 'plain and manifest' destructive intent, is the personality already apparent, even in these opening lines of description, of the speaker - that speaker so memorably denounced and rejected by Southey, Jeffrey and Coleridge. 'It is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser without repeating the effects of dulness and garrulity', Coleridge was to write in 1817.[30] And 'He who personates tiresome loquacity, becomes tiresome himself', Southey had said, in 1798. But Wordsworth himself had never presented his narrator as dull or tiresome. He called the narrator 'loquacious' in the 1798 Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads*, and in 1800 added a longer note, describing the narrator as 'credulous and talkative from indolence', and 'superstitious' with 'slow faculties and deep feelings', with a mind 'not loose but adhesive', with 'a reasonable share of imagination', meaning 'the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements'.[31] None of this sounds dull or tiresome, and certainly neither Southey nor Coleridge was ever personally in a position to insist that being talky is equivalent to being dull!

What we have in this narrator is a character very much aware of his audience and quite capable of at least attempting to manipulate that audience. If you only were to see this thorn, he tells his listener, 'you'd find it hard to say, / How it could ever have been young'. But if you were to see the mosses, 'you'd say that they were bent / With plain and manifest intent, / To drag it to the ground'. This I call manipulation - telling us how to respond to a thing before we have even seen it, and telling us what we will, or won't, say about it. Manipulative, imaginative, talkative, yes - but not dull or tiresome. A master of suspense is what he is.

Because this narrator, of course, is not really telling his listener about the thorn-tree at all, except that it marks the spot of something far more interesting - the spot where, 22 years ago, a young woman named Martha Ray, seduced and abandoned by Stephen Hill, found herself pregnant by him, went mad, gave birth to a child whom she then murdered, either by hanging

[30] *BL* ii. 49.
[31] Owen 139.

or drowning, and buried the infant body under the thorn tree, to which ever since, at all times of the day and night, at all seasons of the year, she constantly repairs, dressed in a scarlet cloak, to cry to herself, 'Oh misery! oh misery! / Oh woe is me! oh misery!'

Dull and tiresome? Well, hardly. Certainly not for its time. It sounds a lot like any one of seven or eight television dramas you or I could have watched just last week, or what we like to consider the 'real-life' dramas of newspaper front pages or television newscasts. Maybe we're bored with this grisly story by now, having watched it and read it hundreds of times a year for too many years. No, I don't think, after all the seductions and infanticides that life and fiction have splashed before our eyes we are even yet *bored*. Jaded, probably. Not bored! But in 1798, Wordsworth's benighted audience did not enjoy our blessing of instant and constant gore, and nobody, not anybody, would have found the tale of Martha Ray dull and tiresome.

But there are certainly some problems with the grim and miserable story of Martha Ray. For one thing, it sounds an awful lot like the 'frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse' which Wordsworth would come to denounce in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. In fact, it sounds a lot like Bürger's sickly, stupid, and German ballad 'Des Pfarrers Tochter von Taubenheim'. The poems Wordsworth wrote for the *Lyrical Ballads* collection, he would claim in the Preface, were designed to 'counteract' what he called 'this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation', this mind-numbing lust for depictions of sex and violence, preferably combined. It hardly sounds as if Wordsworth wanted to add to what he calls 'the magnitude of the general evil'.[32]

The even bigger problem with the miserable tale of Martha Ray and her lover and her baby is that there is not, after all, any reason to believe it ever took place at all. Here, of course, far more than with the opening description of the tree, the poem forces us to confront that most basic of questions yet further: What *is*? What *isn't*? What really happened? Do we *know*? And if we think we know, *how* do we know? We have only the narrator to depend on, and he, of course, a stranger to the country, has learned the story he tells, if he hasn't invented the whole thing, from local gossip. And what a batch of mutually exclusive contradictions he presents! He gives us all kinds of eye-witness reports of Martha Ray and her behavior at the thorn tree, at all hours of night and day, at all seasons of the year, but adds that he has 'never heard of such as dare / Approach the spot when she is there' (ll. 98-9), and warns his listener against attempting even this one elementary bit of verification. 'All and each agree, / The little babe was buried there, / Beneath that hill of moss so fair', he insists (ll. 219-20). But 'what became of this poor child / There's none that ever knew; / And if a child was born or no, / There's no one that could ever tell; / And if 'twas born alive or dead, / There's no one knows' (ll. 157-62). 'This will never do', as Francis Jeffrey might have said about such a narration, if only he had thought of it soon enough. You can't have Martha Ray universally convicted of murdering her own infant when absolutely nobody even knows if there *was* a baby. The narrator even tells of witnesses who have seen the corpse, or is it the ghost, of the baby looking up at them from the little pond: 'Whene'er you look on it, 'tis plain / The baby looks at you again' (ll. 230-1). But he says so in the same breath and same stanza in which he himself - but from what knowledge? - testifies, 'But kill a new-born infant thus! / I do not think she could' (ll. 223-4).

[32] *Prose Works* i. 128-30.

Clearly, lack of knowledge does not deter this narrator from telling his story, nor from including in that story the testimonies of others who also lack knowledge:

> Last Christmas when we talked of this,
> Old Farmer Simpson did maintain,
> That in her womb the infant wrought
> About its mother's heart, and brought
> Her senses back again. (ll. 148-52)

What does old Farmer Simpson[33] know about what may or may not have happened to Martha's internal organs over 20 years ago? But what good is such a narrator? And of what use is such a narration, which seems, at first fast reading so sensational and juicy and looks, the more notice we take of it, like less and less, or practically nothing, or absolutely nothing? Was there a murder? Everybody thinks so, but nobody knows. Was there even a baby? Oh yes, all agree that there was, except that no one ever knew if a baby was really born. Is Martha Ray a reality? Well, the narrator says he is certain of that, though the first time he saw her, he says, he mistook her for a 'jutting crag' on the mountain peak (l. 193). But he also tells us we most definitely must not look for her. Is Wordsworth just teasing us with all these contradictions?

I was fascinated by all this years ago, long before modern critical theory finally began to catch up with some of what Wordsworth is up to. In his note on 'The Thorn' added to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, he warns us readers of the necessity to 'enter into the spirit of the Poem'. It is typical of him to leave it at that, and to let us muddle around trying to figure out just what that spirit is, and how we best can 'enter into' it.

But as I say, modern critics have begun to provide some help. A number of them are facinated by what they call not narration but *anti*-narration. Robert Scholes, for example, writes: 'Traditional narrative structures are perceived as part of a system of psycho-social dependencies that inhibit both individual human growth and significant social change.'[34] That is, standard, straightforward, non-self-contradictory narrations have the effect, by their rigidity and trustworthiness, of stopping thought, not provoking it, of inhibiting both individual and social growth. Such inhibition does not sound like Wordsworth, the poet of mental *motion*. I think, for example, in this connection of his letter to Lady Beaumont in 1807, in which he insists that his poems, certainly including 'The Thorn', 'aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment, or to some general principle, or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution' (*MY* i. 148). Scholes writes that 'to challenge and lay bare these [traditional straightforward narrative] structures' - as Wordsworth certainly challenges and lays them bare in 'The Thorn' - 'is thus a necessary prelude to any improvement in the human situation' (*ibid.*, 212). Wordsworth himself describes his purpose in the Preface in similar terms: he wants to write poetry, he says, such that 'the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified'.[35]

[33] Incidentally, his name was changed for the 1820 edition - by the poet, presumably (but everything begins to get so uncertain here that I hesitate to assert *anything*) - to 'grey-haired Wilfred of the glen', and the narrator's conversation with him is moved from Christmas to Christmas Eve (*PW* ii. 245, 137-8). Why such changes? I find myself increasingly like the narrator, who responds to questions by exclaiming, 'No more I know, I wish I did, / And I would tell it all to you' (ll. 155-6).

[34] Robert Scholes, 'Language, Narrative, and Anti-Narrative', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980) 204-12, p. 212.

[35] *Prose Works* i. 127.

These are high aspirations - to produce sensitivity of mind, enlightenment of understanding, purifying of affections, and all based on the truthfulness and realism of utterance, of language. The function of the poet and his poetic tools, says Robert Scholes, is to participate in 'the perpetual motion of . . . language. In this function they keep language open to life'.[36]

Criticism, even very enlightened and liberated criticism of the sort I have been citing, does not produce great literature; it merely describes. It is no wonder, then, that great poets and writers have been far ahead of great critics in recognizing Wordsworth's achievement in 'The Thorn' and in making use of it for their own good purposes. What might be surprising, though, is the name of the poet who seems to have been the first to recognize what 'The Thorn' offers to the artist and into what new directions the realm of English poetry and literature could expand, using this crucial poem as a foundation.

Art makes strange bedfellows. A lot of Wordsworthians generally think of Lord Byron, when they think of him at all, with some annoyance and regretful irony at his frequent unfriendly and unkind references to their poet in both his public poems and his private letters. As early as the 1809 publication of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, Byron was aiming potshots at 'vulgar Wordsworth' or 'simple Wordsworth' with 'his childish verse' (l. 917),[37]

> Next comes the dull disciple of thy school,
> That mild apostate from poetic rule,
> The simple WORDSWORTH, framer of a lay
> As soft as evening in his favourite May;
> Who warns his friend 'to shake off toil and trouble,
> And quit his books, for fear of growing double';
> Who, both by precept and example, shows
> That prose is verse, and verse is merely prose,
> Convincing all by demonstration plain,
> Poetic souls delight in prose insane;
> And Christmas stories tortured into rhyme,
> Contain the essence of the true sublime . . . (ll. 235-46)

This may be witty, but it is certainly not accurate criticism. And such insults, even in fun, do not look like a very sound basis for much of a relationship between Byron and Wordsworth, either personal or artistic. But the truth is that both kinds of relationships developed between them. On their personal relationship, we can thank the Wordsworth Trust for the publication of Beth Darlington's edition of the Wordsworths' love letters, for William wrote to Mary from London in 1812 about his meeting Byron there - 'A Man who is now the rage in London, in consequence of his Late Poem Childe Haroldes pilgrimage'.[38] Whatever personal relationship the two poets developed - and it was certainly brief - it included the cordial note of Lord Byron's franking Wordsworth's letters to save him the postage charge. And, in a similarly cordial vein, Wordsworth dismissed and forgave the insults of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*: 'He wrote a satire some time since in which Coleridge and I were abused, but these are little thought of'.[39] And if Wordsworth upon reading *Childe*

[36] Scholes, p. 209.

[37] Quotations from Byron's poetry are from *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works* ed. Jerome J. McGann (7 vols., Oxford, 1980-93) (hereafter *Byron PW*).

[38] *The Love Letters of William and Mary Wordsworth* ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca, NY, 1981), p. 147.

[39] *Ibid.*, 147.

Harold's Pilgrimage pronounced it 'not destitute of merit; though ill-planned, and often unpleasing in the sentiments, and almost always perplexed in the construction',[40] he was only anticipating Byron's own objections to the same poem, raising a voice of critical candour at a time of nearly total adulation which Byron himself found excessive and ill founded.

If only Wordsworth could have foreseen what poetic achievements Byron's journey to Iberia, which by then had produced only the beginning of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, would eventually produce! That is, the journey which Byron began in the summer of 1809, when Wordsworth's head too was full of Iberian matters following the Convention of Cintra. That journey laid the foundation for the great achievement of Byron's later poetic career, and in that foundation 'The Thorn' would form an important part.

The evidence is good that it was on that journey across Iberia, in fact on the road running south from the mountain town of Monesterio toward Seville, there occurred the conception of Byron's masterpiece, *Don Juan*, which would begin to appear in print only a full ten years later, and in whose technique Wordsworth and 'The Thorn' were to be so greatly involved. The evidence, of course, is that which Byron himself supplied in the prose Preface to *Don Juan*, probably written in 1818. That Preface was withdrawn from publication along with the notoriously funny verse dedication of *Don Juan* to Southey when Byron and his publisher agreed to publish the first two cantos of the poem anonymously; consequently the Preface remained unpublished till the twentieth century. Its suppression must have cost Byron a pang, for the Preface wonderfully recreates the exotic setting of the Sierra Morena, through which the poet was then passing:

> . . . the following epic narrative is told by a Spanish Gentleman in a village in the Sierra Morena on the road between Monasterio and Seville - sitting at the door of a posada with the curate of the hamlet on his right hand, a segar in his mouth, a jug of Malaga or perhaps 'right Sherris' before him on a small table containing the relics of an olla podrida - the time sunset; - at some distance a groupe of black-eyed peasantry are dancing to the sound of the flute of a Portugese servant belonging to two foreign travellers . . . watching the beautiful movements of a tall peasant girl whose whole soul is in her eyes and her heart in the dance . . .[41]

The description is detailed and delightful and vivid. But why does Byron go to such lengths to make this evocatively atmospheric Preface also a parody of Wordsworth's prefatory note to 'The Thorn'? Byron's own Preface begins:

> In a note or preface (I forgot which) by Mr. W. Wordsworth to a poem - the subject of which, as far as it is intelligible, is the remorse of an unnatural mother for the destruction of a natural child - the courteous Reader is desired to extend his usual courtesy so far as to suppose that the narrative is narrated by 'the Captain of a Merchantman or small trading vessel lately retired upon a small annuity to some inland town - &c. &c'[42]

Parody, of course, can be either attack or praise; perhaps most often it is both at once. Byron's attacks were rarely restrained, and two paragraphs of the Preface express disgust at

[40] *Ibid.*, 160.
[41] *Byron PW* v. 82-3.
[42] *Byron PW* v. 81.

Wordsworth for abandoning 'a mind capable of better things to the production of . . . trash',[43] and at the 'discerning British Public' for allowing Wordsworth to supersede Alexander Pope in its esteem. That the disagreement with Wordsworth is primarily political in its basis Byron freely admits; the elder poet had in recent years, so Byron believed, lent his name to the Tory cause - 'purchased Talent' and 'self-degradation' are typical terms of the denunciation.

Additionally, though, Byron also makes a point of linking the manner and method of *Don Juan* to that employed by Wordsworth in 'The Thorn': 'The Reader', writes Byron, 'who has acquiesced in Mr. W. Wordsworth's supposition' about the narrator of his poem 'is requested to suppose by a like exertion of Imagination'[44] that the whole of Don Juan issues from the mouth of a gentleman narrator at sunset in the Sierra Morena. We are left to wonder: Is there parody of Wordsworth in all this? Yes, unquestionably. Is there disgust for talent that Byron thought wasted and sold-out? Yes, again. Is there also a strong element of laughter, particularly that kind of laughter that, as Byron himself says, 'Leaves us so doubly serious shortly after' (*Beppo* 632). Yes, of course. Is there anything else? Yes! It is this: Byron's *literary*, as distinct from personal and political, relationships with Wordsworth, and Wordsworth's importance for the English Romantic movement and for the development of poetic and narrative art ever since.

We know how snide Byron could be on the subject of Wordsworth, but for all the numerous and often nasty gibes, in public as well as in private, and despite all the hardening of their supposedly opposing political positions in later years, there remained also in Byron an admiration for Wordsworth's abilities and for many of Wordsworth's writings. Byron published only one review in a critical journal, and it was a critique of Wordsworth - in 1807, in a journal called *Monthly Literary Recreations*. It is a review heavy with praise:

> The . . . *Lyrical Ballads* [are] a collection which has not undeservedly met with a considerable share of public applause. The characteristics of Mr. W's muse are simple and flowing, though occasionally inharmonious verse, strong, and sometimes irresistible appeals to the feelings, with unexceptionable sentiments. . . . many of the poems possess a native elegance, natural and unaffected, totally devoid of the tinsel embellishments and abstract hyperboles of several cotemporary [sic] sonneteers.[45]

And Byron cites passages from Wordsworth to demonstrate, as he says, that 'the force and expression is that of a genuine poet'. Scarcely any professional reviewer of Wordsworth was writing this much sense in those early years; just compare the young Byron here with Southey or Jeffrey. In this review, then, Byron found the early poems of Wordsworth, including 'The Thorn', possessed of 'a native elegance', a naturalness, a welcome lack of false ornament, above all 'irresistible appeals to the feelings'. In the 1818 Preface to *Don Juan*, however, Byron found (or said he found) 'The Thorn' unpoetic and unintelligible. There is more to these differing judgments than changes in taste or even than growing awareness of supposed political differences. In short, as the great Byronist of our time, Leslie Marchand, has accurately summarized, when Byron 'was not immediately irritated by provocation or controversy, he could pronounce balanced' and indeed sincerely appreciative critical judgments on Wordsworth; the hostility we find so often in Byron's comments on

[43] *Byron PW* v. 82.
[44] *Byron PW* v. 82.
[45] *Monthly Literary Recreations* 3 (1807) 65.

Wordsworth is 'by no means his most complete and genuine attitude'.[46] And the easy dismissal in the Preface to *Don Juan* of Wordsworth's 'The Thorn' is made highly questionable by Byron's contrary and much more numerous expressions elsewhere in praise and admiration for that poem and its companion pieces in the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Why then *pretend* to attack in 1818, in the Preface to *Don Juan*, a poem which Byron, unlike Jeffrey, Southey, Coleridge, Hazlitt, and others by that time, really seems to have admired? The question can be answered in part by a closer examination of the details of the supposed attack. Byron claims to 'quote from memory' in his references to 'The Thorn'. But curiously, he quotes very badly. The poem of Wordsworth, never mentioned by its title, says Byron, 'is that which begins with - "There is a thorn - it is so old"'.[47] Of course there is no such poem. I've already referred to that crucial tension in the first line - the tension between the two verbs *is* and *looks*: 'There is a thorn; it looks so old'. It is precisely the sort of tension Byron himself loved to create in *his* poetry, and he would never have missed it in 'The Thorn'. His pretending it doesn't exist has the ironic effect of emphasizing the tension for his readers. Byron's Preface next refers us to Wordsworth's note on the poem that requests the reader to imagine 'that the narrative is narrated by "the Captain of a Merchantman or small trading vessel lately retired upon a small annuity to some inland town"' (*Byron PW* v. 81). But in the note to which our attention is called, Wordsworth, as Byron certainly knows, writes something quite different about the narrator of 'The Thorn', for he says nothing of any 'Merchantman' here and no 'inland town'. (Wordsworth's poem in fact states the opposite; the narrator climbs the hill 'To view the ocean wide and bright' [l. 82]); there is not in Wordsworth's note even a definite claim that the narrator is a retired seaman, but only that a retired seaman could serve as an example to convey a 'general notion' of the type.

There *is*, however, something of much greater significance to an understanding of Wordsworth's poem and purpose, and also Byron's poem and purpose. Clearly Wordsworth intended 'The Thorn' to be not about a thorn tree, and also not about what befell a young woman, pregnant and abandoned, and the child to whom, maybe, she eventually gave birth. We have seen already how troubled and self-subversive a narration the poem presents on these matters. No, the poem, Wordsworth's note clearly informs us, is *about the narrator*. The poet asks us to attend primarily not to the story, which turns out to be full of deliberate contradictions and incompletenesses anyway, but to the *storyteller*. All of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth writes in the 1800 Preface, aim at tracing 'the primary laws of our nature'.[48] 'The Thorn', one of the most weighty of the original *Lyrical Ballads*, is aimed, in this sense, at exhibiting some of the general and primary laws of our nature 'by which superstition acts upon the mind'.[49] It does so by requiring us to keep our watchful eye on the narrator, the retired sea captain or whomever, the Wordsworthian version not of a supernatural but a common-day ancient mariner. Yet Byron's Preface to *Don Juan* insists that 'the subject' of Wordsworth's poem 'is the remorse of an unnatural mother for the destruction of a natural child' - exactly what Wordsworth's note, to which Byron has called our attention, says is *not* the subject of the poem.

[46] *Byron's Letters and Journals* ed. Leslie A. Marchand (12 vols., London, 1973-82) (hereafter *BLJ*), i. 14.
[47] *Byron PW* v. 81.
[48] *Prose Works* i. 122.
[49] Owen 139.

Byron, like all readers, could have his critical blind spots, but he could also, like few men, be extraordinarily perceptive critically. Here it seems to me certain that Byron wanted to turn a key for the reader of *Don Juan*, that his Preface to *Don Juan* was intended, beyond parody and facetiousness, to be helpful to readers entering his vast comic epic. For both poems, *Don Juan* and 'The Thorn', are *about* their narrators, and about the narrators' difficulties in narration. Whether Wordsworth's narrator is a retired sea captain or some other kind of man he never tells us, and for the poet's real purpose it does not matter at all. Whether Byron's narrator was an Englishman who spoke Spanish or a Spaniard who had travelled in England, or a Byron who was neither of these, is incidental, as the Preface to *Don Juan* makes plain. But in both poems the centrality of these narrator-characters is crucial.

Just what Wordsworth and Byron accomplish by putting their narrators in the centre of their poems is only partially seen in the poems themselves. We are ever confronted by the truth that Wordsworth intentionally blurs the identity of the narrator and the facts of his tale and that, along with very similar kinds of intentional blurring and ambiguity, Byron's poem offers at least one additional difficulty - for *Don Juan* remains unfinished, a fragment. The purpose here could never be to try to make plain just what happened to Martha Ray, or her baby, or the townspeople, nor precisely how much the possible retired sea captain really knows and really tells. Nor is there any reason to try to summarize what Byron took over 16 Cantos to *begin*. My main intention here is clarify and underscore that Byron planned to offer us help in his Preface for our reading of *Don Juan* and that much of that help consisted in a defense of Wordsworth's poem and of Wordsworth's dramatic method, and its lasting significance in 'The Thorn' - a defence especially timely in 1818 because of the then recent critical denunciation of poem and method in *Biographia Literaria*. We know that Byron was offended not only by Coleridge's turgidity in the *Biographia* but perhaps even more by Coleridge's disloyalty; Byron summarizes the *Biographia* as neither 'grateful nor graceful'.[50] I am suggesting that, among other motives here, Byron is making the *public* retort to Coleridge that he knows Wordsworth should, but cannot, make.

How very important, then, is Wordsworth's originality in *structuring* 'The Thorn'. I don't want to overstate that originality, however. The primacy of what Byron calls 'Our friend the story-*teller*',[51] over the *story*, is of course not an invention of any English Romantic poet. A great deal of the meaning of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, for example, lies in that poet's use of similar devices. And Sterne's full-scale employment of the anti-narrator/persona in *Tristram Shandy* is very correctly recognized as the same kind of 'wanton and wilful revolt' against the traditional rules of telling a story. But only Byron among the great Romantics seems to have perceived the important and successful innovations in narrative technique which Wordsworth employs in several of the poems of the Lyrical Ballads - but best of all in 'The Thorn'. Byron knew that 'The Thorn', as he writes in his 1807 review, had 'not undeservedly met with a considerable share of public applause', but the reason for the poem's greatness, and for its lasting impact, only Byron, and Wordsworth, of course, seem to have understood in their time.

Everyone who came in later times to understand this revolution in narrative technique seems to have been as excited as those two great pillars of Romanticism. For example, exactly a century after Byron wrote his Preface, Virginia Woolf stumbled on the secret and, linking Wordsworth and Byron in her own thoughts, wrote of this form of narrative, or anti-

[50] *BLJ* v. 267.
[51] *Byron PW* v. 83.

narrative, structure: 'This method is a discovery by itself. It's what one has looked for in vain - an elastic shape which will hold whatever you choose to put into it'. But her admiration was tempered by a humbling awareness of the difficulty, as she recorded in her diary: 'I maintain that these illicit kinds of books are far more interesting than the proper books which respect illusions devoutly all the time. Still, it doesn't seem an easy example to follow; and indeed like all free and easy things, only the skilled and mature really bring them off successfully'.[52]

With similar insight, but far less appreciation, William Hazlitt, though he did not by then much appreciate 'The Thorn', wrote in 1825 that *Don Juan* 'is . . . a poem written about itself'.[53] This famous remark goes to the heart of *both Don Juan* and 'The Thorn', poems above all about poetry, about narration, about *telling*. This reflective and introspective technique was then, and, remarkably, still is, both novel and important - is, in fact, genuinely revolutionary as part of the reorientation which is at the core of the *Lyrical Ballads* and of the whole English Romantic movement and of its lasting effects.

Such is the importance of Wordsworth's experiment in 'The Thorn' - a new and lastingly significant way of examining the dramatic *inner* workings of narration and narrators. It was too important a literary view, as Byron sensed, to be lost amid the blindness of the traditional critics of Wordsworth's own day or the even less responsible assaults of others like Southey or the later Coleridge who could and should have recognized its value. And so we have Byron's doubly ironic rescue mission of Wordsworth's achievement, announced in the Preface to *Don Juan* and exemplified throughout the poem:

> When Southey's read, and Wordsworth understood,
> I can't help putting in my claim to praise . . . (*Don Juan* i. 1773-4)

One final, and additionally ironic, curiosity: Wordsworth wrote Crabb Robinson in the winter of 1820, when Byron's newly appearing mock epic was causing a great sensation: 'I am persuaded that Don Juan will do more harm to the English character, than anything of our time'.[54] With this appraisal no doubt Byron himself would have agreed - and would have insisted, as he had already acknowledged privately, that such poetic subversion was just what he wanted, just what English poetry and narrative art could best use, and, further, that both the revolutionary poetic intent and the narrative technique underlying it he learned from 'The Thorn'.

This artistic subversion, and self-subversion, this wiping the social and poetic slate clean, aims to provide opportunity for new and more honest uses of language, a new way of finding, examining, and ordering truth from within, free of the gossip, mental clutter, false tradition and superstition which Wordsworth intentionally allows to block and finally destroy the surface narration of 'The Thorn'. It is exactly what English poetry and narrative art most needed in 1798. (By the way, we still need it!) It was the basis for Wordsworth's greatest poetry, including *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, for Byron's, and also, for that matter, for the best writing of Coleridge and Southey too, and Shelley, and Keats, and Hazlitt, and Virginia Woolf and all those 'second selves' in whom Wordsworth placed his hopes for a better future. No wonder I feel 'the rapture of the hallelujah' in the presence of 'The Thorn'.

Jerusalem

[52] *A Writer's Diary* ed. Leonard Woolf (New York, 1954), pp. 3-4.
[53] Howe xi. 75.
[54] *MY* ii. 579.

'Tintern Abbey' Restored

By MARY WEDD

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I HAVE LIVED a long time; and in that time I have witnessed, alongside the work of many *brilliant* critics who inspire and illuminate, a series of curious crazes and fashions in literary criticism, after which academic sheep follow until turned back in disarray to chase another way. Don't be alarmed, I am not going to run through them all. Just a selective sketch will do. My memory may be partial, in both senses, but I do not think that, as undergraduates at Oxford before the war, we were much affected by such things. We just got on with acquiring a wide knowledge of literature. At any rate, my first collision with one of them was during the war when I discovered that it was *not done* to admire Milton. Fortunately, both at school, and in preparation for a whole paper on Spenser and Milton at University, I had become hooked before ever seeing Eliot's 1936 essay. I remember having a fierce argument with a contemporary wartime poet, in which I am glad to recall that I stuck my neck out to defend Milton - but I was made to feel *very* small. As Hazlitt said, 'It requires some fortitude to oppose one's opinion, however right, to that of all the world besides; none at all to agree with it, however wrong'.[1] Eliot himself recanted in 1947.[2]

My next discovery was that we must *never* bring any extraneous knowledge to our reading of a poem - for example, about the period when it was written or the circumstances of the poet. One was only allowed to consider 'the poem on the page'. An emphasis on close criticism of literary work seemed to me to be wholly admirable, but why exclude anything that might enrich one's appreciation? As an undergraduate I had attended a splendid series of lectures by C. S. Lewis called 'Prolegomena to the Study of Mediaeval Literature', which I would not have missed for the world, both because without it I should have understood much less about Chaucer, for example, and also because it was immensely entertaining. (In case any of you are unfamiliar with the word, Prolegomena simply means preliminary matter to a literary work.) Why deny oneself such help and pleasure? For many years, I did intercollegiate examining of Practical Criticism papers, which is a sure way to discover the usefulness of a word of explanation here and there. I think of a student who imagined a stonechat was a gossip over a garden wall, and another who called Beckett's Molloy 'she' throughout the passage, presumbly mistaking him for a parlourmaid. Incidentally, I think our pains were better spent on learning Anglo-Saxon and Middle English than on the pseudo-languages of today's critical theory. Which brings me back to those fashions. After a long period in which half of English Literature was thrown out as either not belonging to 'The Great Tradition' or not being 'relevant', a new menace appeared on the horizon.

Years ago there was a young family friend, who was in the sixth form of our local grammar school. He used to ring me in the holidays and say, 'Can I come and talk about *The Waste Land*?' or whatever his passion was at that moment. We spent many happy hours poring over poems and discussing the varied thoughts and feelings they raised in us. When he went to university I thought maybe he would not come any more. But in the vacations his motorbike could still be heard pop-popping its way to my front door. Before long,

[1] William Hazlitt, *Works* ed. P. P. Howe (21 vols., London, 1930-4), vii. 137.

[2] T. S. Eliot, 'Milton I' (first pub. *Essays and Studies* 1936), and 'Milton II' (Henrietta Hertz lecture, delivered to the British Academy, 26 March 1947); both in *Selected Prose* ed. John Hayward (London, 1963).

however, he did not come to talk about poetry but to *inform* me about the excitements of structuralism. It became clear to me very soon that he did not understand what he was talking about and was in a rare muddle. That in itself did not matter too much but what did matter was that theory had displaced and destroyed his wonderful love and feeling for literature. I cannot think that it is wise to teach critical theory to undergraduates in the first year. As you know, this was the signal for a long succession of '-isms' that have plagued us ever since. I have not found them life-enhancing or even very plausible. Would you buy a used car from a deconstructionist? I have long thought that if you take the 'con' from Deconstruction you are left with Destruction. One would think that if one espoused a philosopy of nihilism, one would seize all the more eagerly on the pleasure and consolation to be found at least in the *appearances* of meaning, as in poetry. One can only suppose they *want* to be miserable.

When New Historicism was heralded I had great hopes that we should get back to Prolegomena and be allowed to let our knowledge of history illuminate literature. No such thing. Though they do use history, the New Historicists use it for what seems to me to be a variety of perverse ends. Another bit of autobiography will perhaps illustrate. One year a flood of undergraduates besieged my study. 'Please will you go over *King Lear* with us? We don't understand it'. It had been presented to them as a Marxist play. Instead of 'The Elizabethan World Picture', they were given modern dogma.

It does seem increasingly that if you want to get published today, achieve tenure, and make a name for yourself, you must think up some new theory. As a certain Professor, who shall be nameless lest I harm his career, said to me, 'And the balmier the better'. One would have no objection to people enjoying these intellectual games among themselves if they prefer them to Bridge or the *Times* Crossword, which would be my preference, were it not for the damage they do to others' joy in literature. You may put it down to *second* childhood if you like, but I am not afraid to assert that in the last fifty years I have observed a procession of Emperors strutting about in new clothes which I never had any difficulty in seeing through.

'Tintern Abbey' has not been immune to ravishment. (Ah, we wondered when she would get round to 'Tintern Abbey', I hear you saying.) Well, when I chose as my title '"Tintern Abbey" Restored' it was not with the intention of tarting up the ruins with twentieth-century architecture to bring it up to date, as is often disastrously done in productions of Shakespeare. No. I use the word 'restored' in the sense of giving back the poem to readers. In my small way, I should like to look at it unencumbered and uninhibited by the distortions or restrictions of critical fashion and rejoice in it once more as a great triumph of the human spirit. For relevance - that awful word that for a time banished most of pre-twentieth-century literature from syllabuses - is not primarily a matter of period. For 'we have all of us one human heart'. So let us see what 'Tintern Abbey' has to say to us.

Shall we be devils and allow ourselves some brief but perhaps useful Prolegomena before looking at the poem on the page? What, for example, was happening to Wordsworth in the England of 1793, five years before, when he first visited the Wye Valley? In 1792 he had been in France, inspired by the Revolution. His friend Beaupuy's reaction to the sight of a half-starved girl - ''Tis against *that* / Which we are fighting' - deeply impressed Wordsworth, and led him to hope 'that poverty / At least like this, would in a little time / Be found no

more . . .'[3] He had also been in that magic state of early love when 'all paradise / Could by the simple opening of a door / Let itself in upon him' (ix 590-2). In late December Wordsworth returned to England. He had run out of money and the need to provide for a wife and child forced him to decide, as Stephen Gill says, 'to take up William Cookson's offer of a curacy', but this clerical uncle was so scandalized by Wordsworth's behaviour that he would have no more to do with him.[4] Moreover, in February 1793 England declared war on France - thus, as Wordsworth saw it, putting herself on the side of oppression against the forces of freedom and hope. This bitter medicine was reinforced by the repressive legislation and persecution of reformers at home. The war also separated Wordsworth from Annette for years. Staying with his brother Richard in London, William was close to breakdown. From the city he escaped in early July 1793, with his friend William Calvert, first to the Isle of Wight, where he saw the fleet gathering and heard the sunset cannon signalling 'woes to come, / And sorrow for mankind, and pain of heart' (*Prelude* x 306-7). Then they made their way towards Salisbury, when their carriage was overturned, and Calvert took the horse and Wordsworth went on alone on foot across dreary Salisbury Plain and eventually to his friend Robert Jones in Wales. On the way he went past Tintern Abbey and up the valley of the Wye.

> Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
> Of five long winters!

The poem stands perfectly well on its own, but surely the extraneous knowledge of Wordsworth's situation helps us to understand it more fully. During those five years Wordsworth had been obliged to pull himself up out of the Slough of Despond. I doubt if there is any one of us who has not shared this experience or who doubts its timeless and universal relevance. The repetition and dragging rhythm of the words, and the suggestion of a period of years without sunshine, convey what a long slow recovery it had been. But with the help of Dorothy and, later, Coleridge, Wordsworth had come through, as he goes on to show. It is surely legitimate to celebrate a personal deliverance, even if it has not proved possible to reform the world.

This does not mean that he had ceased to care for the fate of the poor and underprivileged. Though the story of Goody Blake and Harry Gill comes from Erasmus Darwin, the poverty it describes was observed by William and Dorothy near Racedown. Both before and after 'Tintern Abbey' Wordsworth wrote with deep feeling about the outcasts of society and with indignation about the well-to-do who grudge them, for example, the cost of essential domestic fuel. As we saw two years ago, Wordsworth vividly draws a picture of the poor and exploited in *The Excursion* published in 1814 and makes his indignation abundantly clear. How, then, can the New Historicist critic Marjorie Levinson accuse him of 'erasing' 'those sociopolitical themes which had occupied' him 'less than a decade before'?[5] She is cross with him for not mentioning the beggars who haunted the ruins of Tintern - which brings us to the title of the poem. The lines were *not*, strictly speaking, '*Composed* a few miles above Tintern Abbey' but were completed, as he tells us, on the journey back to Bristol. What *is* conveyed by the title is the scene he is remembering and which he wishes us to see, that

[3] *Thirteen-Book Prelude* ix 518-19, 521-3; quotations from this poem taken from *William Wordsworth: The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, revised by Helen Darbishire (2nd ed., Oxford, 1959) (hereafter De Selincourt *Prelude*).

[4] Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford, 1989), p. 68

[5] Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* (Cambridge, 1986) (hereafter Levinson), pp. 4-5.

indeed on which the poem is based, and that *was* a few miles up the river from the Abbey, as the details show. So, on a purely practical level he could not see the building or its beggars from there. When he says 'above' Tintern, he does not mean that he was on a hill looking down on it, but on the riverbank upstream: he is merely using the well-known tourist attraction to indicate the area as on a map.

Yet Marjorie Levinson says the Abbey's absence from the poem 'looks uncomfortably like a suppression'.[6] I should have thought that to judge literature not by what is there on the page but by what is not is self-evidently absurd. At the opposite extreme from allowing no extraneous information, this makes it possible to regard it as legitimate to drag in any old thing, as Alan Liu acknowledges, 'seemingly by accident, off any hook, at any angle', making by the juxtaposition 'a connection of pure nothing'.[7] I do not want to waste too much time on this pretentious nonsense, but it has had an enormous vogue. A splendid riposte to Levinson can be found in Thomas McFarland's *William Wordsworth: Intensity and Achievement* (Oxford, 1992). But, unfortunately, he too has a 'King Charles's head'. Levinson sees the *hedgerows* in the poem as symbols of the enclosure of common lands. Elsewhere Wordsworth does deplore enclosure but here I think nothing is further from his mind. Let her make what she likes of the fact. McFarland, on the other hand, can't abide the 'hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines / Of sportive wood run wild'[8] - but for another reason: he thinks they are an interruption to the flow of the poem. He just does not believe in them, calling the description 'fanciful imprecision'[9] and affirming that, 'no matter how long one looks at hedgerows, they never in fact *are* seen as little lines of sportive wood run wild'.[10] Well, I have news for him: they jolly well *are*. Years ago I tried to explain to him that, when I worked on the land during the war, I was taught how to do hedging. In those days the machines which now massacre the hedges into uniformity were not invented. One took a stick in one hand and a bill-hook in the other and cut carefully, leaving any saplings *un*cut to grow into trees. Thus the hedgerows did look like 'little lines / Of sportive wood run wild', and Wordsworth was describing *exactly what he saw*.

Perhaps the need to find a hiccough somewhere in the poem is influenced by the fashionable sport of hunting fractures - though why anybody should wish to find one I can't imagine. I recently discovered a fracture unintentionally and I don't recommend it! What I think is meant is a moment when language suddenly falls into an abyss, like the floor opening up beneath one. The deconstructionists carry this to such an extreme that they regard every text as having within it the seeds of its own destruction, as it 'turns back on itself in a manner that puts the authority of its own affirmations in doubt'.[11] If any sets of words inevitably undermine their own meaning, the logical conclusion is that we are faced with what Piglet called Winnie the Pooh when he mistook him for a Heffalump - 'an enormous big nothing'. (Pooh had a jar over his head at the time.) Whether, with a New Historicist 'connection of pure nothing', or a deconstructionist text that will automatically self-destruct, logic ceases to apply, 'Nothing will come of nothing', and we might as well all pack up and go home.

[6] Levinson 15.

[7] Alan Liu, 'The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism', *English Literary History* 56 (1989) 722, 743.

[8] Quotations from 'Tintern Abbey' are from *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford, 1940-9) (hereafter *PW*), ii. 259-63.

[9] McFarland 48.

[10] McFarland 52.

[11] Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, Conn., 1979), pp. 26-7.

But don't let's. Let us ask ourselves what Wordsworth himself thought he was doing in 'Tintern Abbey'. Oh dear! I forgot to mention that we are not allowed to do *that*, either. It's called 'the Intentional Fallacy'. Oh bother! Can you understand now why I feel that the poor poem needs to be liberated and restored to us once again? Certainly all communication is a hit-and-miss affair, a co-operation between speakers or between writer and reader - which is why it is useful to put a literary work in the context of its time and its author's circumstances to avoid misunderstanding. But it is more constructive to open oneself to the work of art than to concentrate on fractures in it. Until very recently, all the pundits from Aristotle onwards have agreed that the function of poetry is to give pleasure by the stirring and healing of emotion, not primarily by evoking intellectual gymnastics. As Dr Johnson said, 'The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life or better to endure it'.[12]

So blow the Intentional Fallacy! Wordsworth has given us some indications, both in the title and in his comments on the poem, of the way he regarded it. The very specific date in the title (five years since Wordsworth's last visit), Marjorie Levinson also uses as a stick to beat him with, blaming him for not stressing other anniversaries such as the fall of the Bastille or the murder of Marat. Certainly these events had contributed to his past and present states of mind, but it is these which are his subject here. Does it follow that to write for once about 'apolitical' matters implies, as she says, 'a negative ideal: the escape from cultural values'?[13]

The wonderful Alfoxden year was over, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) was in the press, and William and Dorothy were on a walking tour up the Wye Valley. There was just time on their return to Bristol for 'Tintern Abbey' to be included as the last poem in the volume. 'No poem of mine', says Wordsworth, 'was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this'.[14] The form he used had been pioneered by Coleridge in his Conversation Poems. The loco-descriptive and the pastoral poetry of earlier times had been transformed into something new. Strictly, 'Tintern Abbey' was nothing like a conventional ode, but, says Wordsworth, 'it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification, would be found the principal requisites of that species of composition'.[15] Would it then have been appropriate here for him to go into a long disquisition about the destruction of the monasteries, a subject touched on in *The Prelude* (ix 470 ff.) and *Descriptive Sketches* (ll. 53 ff.) or to tell us about such signs of industry as the barges carrying coal and timber on the river or the ironworks nearby, as he does in *The Excursion*? Levinson reproaches him for these omissions as signs of his culpable rejection of his former humanitarian concerns and talks of a 'selective blindness'.[16]

But the answer to her criticisms is a simple one. On this occasion he is not writing that kind of poem. Does he have to every time?

Nor do I agree with those critics who find his natural description vague and unreal. Certainly he does not often provide the detailed observations of particular aspects of natural history that John Clare does, but his landscapes are real. I have many times visited the Wye Valley and I recognize it. For this poem he prefers 'the great and permanent forms of Nature' to transient political concerns. For his landscapes are their realistic selves but can

[12] Johnson's review of Soame Jenyns, *The Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil.*
[13] Levinson 16.
[14] *PW* ii. 517.
[15] *PW* ii. 517.
[16] Levinson 24.

also be more than themselves. Here he is writing about the restoration of a stricken soul and the part nature as well as human love plays in that recovery. Let us see how he does it and how he uses those 'transitions' and that 'impassioned music of the versification' which gives the poem some of the qualities of an ode. I do not think that we can pin down, as Marjorie Levinson tries to do, the different sections of the poem into the strophe, anti-strophe and epode of a formal ode.[17] Nor do I think Wordsworth meant this by his note. Hartman is nearer the mark when he says, 'it must mean that Wordsworth is distilling from the versification itself, and probably from the informal transitions of one verse paragraph to another, an emotional analogue to the *turn* and *counterturn* of the traditional Sublime Ode'.[18] But I do not think the transitions are confined to the ends of paragraphs. For example, after the elegiac start,

> Five years have past; five summers, with the length
> Of five long winters!

with all its undertones of grief and disillusionment, the poet revisits the place - but with what different eyes! He describes the scene he wants us to see and, incidentally, his note ('The river is not affected by the tides a few miles above Tintern') confirms where that scene was. Gilpin, whose guide-book Wordsworth may well have had with him, emphasizes the difference between upstream ('Hitherto the river had been clear, and splendid') and downstream: 'But its water now became ouzy, and discoloured. Sludgy shores too appeared, on each side, and other symptoms, which discovered the influence of a tide.'[19] So Wordsworth also indicates that he is upstream when he says,

> again I hear
> These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
> With a soft inland murmur.

The repetition of the word 'again' emphasizes that he is now seeing the landscape through the modifying glass of memory and the passage of time, and the second 'again', by the break immediately before it and the pause after it for the end of the line, is made to stand out.

> Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> That on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

Gilpin writes of the smoke from the charcoal-burning 'seen issuing from the sides of the hills', which 'beautifully breaks their lines and unites them with the sky' - a concept which Wordsworth uses and echoes in these and following lines. But see what he does with it. Notice how his own experience purveyed through his senses - 'I hear . . . I behold . . . I again repose . . . I see' - modulates into a deeper and more universal picture. The 'steep and lofty cliffs' suggest not only consolation ('I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help'),[20] but also human aspiration. The seclusion of the scene serves to

[17] Levinson 47.

[18] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* (New Haven, Conn., 1964) (hereafter Hartman), p. 27.

[19] Quoted Levinson 31.

[20] Psalm 121:1.

'impress' - a powerful word - thoughts of a more than physical seclusion, as in spiritual meditation in which the earthly is united with the heavenly.

The landscape he describes is real and, when I was last there, only a few years ago, had changed surprisingly little. I assure you that even the hedgerows were exactly like that, a beautiful and familiar aspect of the English countryside. Like them, 'these pastoral farms, / Green to the very door' do not, as Levinson supposes, primarily suggest the wickedness of enclosures. What they cannot help bringing to mind is 'green pastures' and, linked with 'These waters . . . / With a soft inland murmur', recall Psalm 23. Nowadays this would not, perhaps, occur to Levinson's pupils, 'whose intelligence', she says, 'had a decidedly practical, empiricist cast', and 'whose interests were more worldly than mine'.[21] But *this* is where history comes in. To Wordsworth and his contemporaries, as to older people still, the Bible words would leap to mind: 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters';[22] and, in the Prayerbook version, 'He shall feed me in a green pasture: and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort'.

Unfashionable though it may be, a spiritual dimension *will* obtrude itself upon the social criticism in Wordsworth's poetry. He does not evade the thought of human deprivation. The hermit living alone is not just a picturesque prop. His solitude is the positive contrast to the isolation of the vagrants. Though the 'wreaths of smoke / Sent up, in silence, from among the trees' may symbolize on one level an ascent towards spiritual insight, Wordsworth knows perfectly well that the 'vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods' are charcoal-burners, and that, as Levinson puts it, 'hermits choose their poverty: vagrants suffer it.'[23] Who has given better evidence of concern for suffering mankind, including a variety of tramps and beggars, than Wordsworth? If there were any doubt here, the echo from *King Lear* would settle it.

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your *houseless* heads and unfed sides,
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? (III iv 28-32)

But this poem is about winning a more constructive state than despair. The refreshment of 'mountain-springs' and the greenness everywhere herald new life, and the landscape as a whole demonstrates the co-operation between man and nature, man working *with* the natural world rather than attempting to subdue it. The overall picture is of 'cosmic unity', as Gérard puts it, taking in man, nature and the spiritual world.[24] Geoffrey Durrant calls it an Eden but acknowledges that we are also reminded 'of the loneliness and shapelessness that surrounds it at a distance'.[25] I do not think that Wordsworth can reproach himself with 'O I have ta'en / Too little care of this'. It is partly his sense of the failure of the French Revolution to put these things right that brought him to despair five years before, and gave him the need for consolation. Later in the poem he tells us of the difference in himself now, but first he meditates on what the memory of this place has meant to him in the intervening time.

[21] Levinson ix.
[22] Psalm 23:2.
[23] Levinson 43.
[24] Albert Gérard, 'Exploring "Tintern Abbey"', *Critics on Wordsworth* ed. Raymond Cowell (London, 1973).
[25] *William Wordsworth* (Cambridge, 1969) (hereafter Durrant), p. 35.

The poem's second paragraph illustrates 'the impassioned music of the versification' which Wordsworth cites. Douglas Kneale says that 'language cannot go beyond language',[26] but I think that Wordsworth can make it do exactly that. We are not left with an 'abyss' or a 'fracture', but with a window through which we can glimpse another sphere. In a way, one does not want to comment on these lines but simply to read them. To read and re-read literature may be better than to read or write any criticism. However, we may without sacrilege follow the sequence along which he leads us.

With the brilliant image, 'As is a landscape to a blind man's eye', Wordsworth conveys that 'These beauteous forms' have not ceased to exist for him during his 'long absence', but have often flashed 'upon that *inward* eye', bringing with them 'tranquil restoration' even in the contrasting 'din / Of towns and cities'. He has been indebted to them (the word 'owed' is used twice) when downcast 'In hours of weariness', for beneficent influence on all aspects of his being: the sensory ('sensations sweet') as well as the psychological ('feelings too / Of unremembered pleasure' - those moments when the heart lifts suddenly, cheered by something, but what?).

How marvellously evocative that is! In reading 'felt along the heart' one is reminded of De Quincey's comment on the phrase, 'far into his heart', in 'There was a boy'. The word 'far', he says, 'by which space and its infinities are attributed to the human heart, and to its capacities of re-echoing the sublimities of nature, has always struck me as with a flash of sublime revelation'.[27] From the heart, almost as though along the bloodstream, the influence passes into his 'purer *mind*', and then affects his moral or ethical being. Anyone who has been closely associated with a person, all of whose large actions are high-principled and right, but whose day-to-day behaviour is selfish, irritable and petty, knows which seem the more important. How excellent is Wordsworth's insight when he speaks of

> that best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
> Of kindness and of love.

Where thoughtfulness for others becomes so automatic that it does not register as memorable we recognize a good man. So I do not find that these lines seem, as Jonathan Wordsworth warns us that they may, 'unacceptably priggish'.[28] In spite of such small differences between us, I find that his book, *The Borders of Vision*, shows deeper understanding than any other I know, of 'Wordsworth's sense of man as a borderer, firmly based in an actual world, yet reaching out in aspiration beyond the limits of normal human experience' - the central core of his work and of this poem. As Jonathan Wordsworth wisely says, 'It is interesting to ask how much this mystical experience depends upon Nature, and how much upon the mind'.[29]

I can quite understand Levinson's pupils in a materialist and urban society having difficulty with these next lines, but one cannot evade their significance by diverting attention to social history. When I first started teaching Wordsworth to students I realized that nearly all of them had been brought up in towns and I wondered how they could relate to him. I said

[26] *Monumental Writing* (Nebraska, 1988), p. 185.

[27] *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets* ed. David Wright (Harmondsworth, 1970) (hereafter *Recollections*), p. 161.

[28] *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford, 1982) (hereafter *Borders of Vision*), p. 180.

[29] *Borders of Vision* 181.

something like, 'You may not have had this experience from the natural world but maybe you have from something else, such as music'. But I found to my surprise, as time went on, that this was not really necessary. I even remember some American students who were in my group putting their heads round my study-door one Friday in November and saying, 'We're off to the Lake District for the weekend' - and you would be astonished how many Wordsworthian places they managed to see. But, after all, the experience of the transcendent does not depend on a particular time or place. At a very primitive and uninspiring Meeting House, a Quaker lady once said to me about the silence in Meeting, 'I hear the clock ticking and then I *don't* hear it'. So Wordsworth was right to be tentative: 'Nor less, I *trust*, to them I *may* have owed another gift . . .' So he may, and almost certainly did, but the experience he describes is not confined to such antecedents. Though those of us who have shared his feeling for the countryside since childhood may be more immediately in tune with him, 'that serene and blessed mood' can be recognized by many others.

> Nor less, I trust,
> To them I may have owed another gift,
> Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened: - that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on, -
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

The impact of this passage depends not only on its content but on 'the impassioned music of the versification', the consummate skill of its blank verse. The whole poem makes telling use of repetition and apposition, here, 'that blessed mood . . . that serene and blessed mood', or 'In which the burthen of the mystery, / In which the heavy and the weary weight . . .' In that line the onomatopoeia (if one can call it that) of 'heavy' and 'weary', the alliteration, and, in the next line, the wonderful placing of 'unintelligible' before the final thumping monosyllable, convey the feeling familiar to us all of total despondency at not being able to make sense of a world of futility, tragedy and disaster. As M. H. Abrams says, 'A critic's charge that Romantic writers neglected the problem of evil is probably only a way of saying that he does not approve of their solution to the problem. These Romantic affirmations do not eliminate nor, taken in their full context, do they minimize the agony and the strife of human hearts'.[30] He says that Wordsworth's poems about 'what it means to grow to maturity', of which 'Tintern Abbey' is one, 'resound with a Virgilian sense of *lacrimae rerum*'.[31]

> . . . the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world . . .

[30] *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York, 1971), p. 444.
[31] Abrams 445.

There it is. We cannot comprehend it. We do not know how to cure it. So do we compound it by falling into despair and staying there? No. We woo and are grateful for 'that blessed mood' in which this intolerable burden is lightened and for the means to it, whether through nature, art or humanity. Notice the pronounced pause after 'is lightened', providing emphasis and relief. Then,

> that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on . . .

Note how the subordinate clause here almost has the effect of a parenthesis.

> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended . . .

Another seeming parenthesis, though really both are part of a progression, combines here with three run-on lines to give the sense of letting go, to what elsewhere Wordsworth calls 'a wise passiveness' until 'we are laid asleep / In body [*pause*], and become a living soul'. As the body relaxes its tension, loses those hurrying anxious thoughts, and reaches, for the moment, a state of serenity, the soul, which is its companion, comes alive.

> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

Or think we do. At least we are aware of another dimension and ponder that, though we are not capable in our incarnate state and with our finite minds of understanding it, perhaps there is another reality to which the soul can sometimes relate.

Wordsworth's tentativeness is renewed in the transition at the beginning of the next paragraph: 'If this / Be but a vain belief . . .' Jonathan Wordsworth in his book calls this 'a sudden paltry taking into account of other people's views'.[32] I don't see it like that. To me it is an indication of honest doubt, which I find admirable. In any case, Wordsworth says, whether or not he is deceived in the picture he has just drawn of the connection between the landscape and direct contact with a spiritual world, what cannot be denied is the comfort he has received from the memory of this scene. He has a wonderful ability to evoke in a few words the dreariness of life: 'darkness' is yoked with 'joyless daylight', so that what should be a contrast between dark and brightness becomes a community of black and grey. The choice of 'fretful' and 'stir' suggest a littleness of activity, a worthless and ill-tempered bustle about nothing. 'The fretful stir' is followed by a pause for the end of the line emphasizing 'Unprofitable' at the beginning of the next, the fricatives in the three words contributing to the effect. Then it is companioned by 'the fever of the world' with its sense of frenetic stress. How well we recognize these things in modern life! No wonder Wordsworth says they have 'hung upon the beatings of my heart' - 'hung', like De Quincey's 'far', is inspirational. In his 1815 Preface Wordsworth uses 'hangs' as an example of how the imagination can transform a word from its literal meaning to an image 'of higher import' by quoting Milton:

> As when far off at sea a fleet descried

[32] *Borders of Vision* 25.

Hangs in the clouds . . . (*Paradise Lost* ii 636-7)[33]

His own use of 'hung' here would have been another excellent example, reinforcing as it does, in this case, the imagery of intolerable dragging weight.

Again he uses repetition and between 'how oft' and 'How oft, in spirit', the intervening lines again have the effect of parenthesis but this time serving to draw out the contrast between the weariness and the refreshment. From 'life's fitful fever', or the 'weary, stale, flat and unprofitable . . . uses of this world'[34] - subliminal echoes perhaps - he returns to the remembered scene.

How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

The next paragraph begins with doubt again, but, as David Ferry says, it is 'hard not to mistake for a confusion of feeling what may be a complexity of feeling, a contemplated and contained ambivalence'.[35]

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again . . .

There are several layers of meaning here. Firstly, there is what de Selincourt calls 'his moral sufferings'[36] - disappointment in the Revolution, and bewilderment as to what can take its place. Hartman says, 'It is sometimes forgotten that Wordsworth's poetry looks back in order to look forward the better. The poet's great hope lies in unviolent regeneration'.[37] The only way this can be achieved is by an aggregation of regenerate individuals, so that personal restoration is not, after all, socially irrelevant. Secondly, Wordsworth is feeling back to his first reaction to this landscape five years before and meditating in a puzzled way on the changes in his feelings about Nature set against the sameness of the actual scene. Jonathan Wordsworth points out that 'sad' at that time meant 'grave', 'serious', 'as well as unhappy'.[38] So here is another transition within the verse paragraph, reinforcing the ebb and flow on which the poem is built, 'a contemplated and contained ambivalence'. What he clings to is the belief that the 'picture' before him can not only give immediate pleasure but can be stored up in what Christopher Salvesen calls 'memory-landscapes'.[39] Coleridge expresses a similar feeling in 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' (ll. 2-5). No doubt the friends had often discussed the phenomenon while in Somerset; again Wordsworth admits his tentativeness - 'I dare to hope'.

Then he describes three stages in his view of Nature. The first he explores is that of his first visit to the Wye Valley five years before, when, as we saw in our Prolegomena, he was

[33] Milton is quoted from the text provided in Wordsworth's 1815 Preface; see *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974), iii. 31.

[34] *Macbeth* III ii 23; *Hamlet* I ii 133.

[35] *The Limits of Mortality* (New York, 1959), pp. 110-11.

[36] De Selincourt *Prelude* 611.

[37] Hartman 29-30.

[38] *Borders of Vision* 181.

[39] *The Landscape of Memory* (London, 1965), p. 65.

in a state of despair. As a patient in severe physical suffering grasps at pain-killing drugs in a kind of panic, so Wordsworth, searching for relief from his psychic distress, had grabbed at nature,

> more like a man
> Flying from something that he dreads than one
> Who sought the thing he loved.

In parenthesis again, he goes back briefly to an even earlier time, in boyhood, when like a young animal his relationship with Nature was mainly one of healthy physical activity. But on his last visit here he was a kind of drug-addict, unable to see anything but the need to feed his habit: 'For nature then . . . To me was all in all'.

> I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth talks of the tyranny of the eye - 'The most despotic of our senses' (xi 174) - and the presumptuousness of picturesque judgments. But in 'Tintern Abbey' I do not think he has the picturesque chiefly in mind. Rather, it is a kind of greed in seeing - what my mother used to call 'the lust of the eye', what Wordsworth calls 'an appetite'. There is a wonderful intensity in this experience, and part of him regrets its passing.

> That time is past,
> And all its aching joys are now no more,
> And all its dizzy raptures.

But it had been an intensity born of desperation. What had been missing then, he reiterates, was thought. The 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' must come from a man who has 'also thought long and deeply'. That earlier state had 'no need of a remoter charm / By thought supplied', but now he is no longer 'as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth'. He has pondered and learnt to assimilate the place of *human* nature. His ambivalence is still evident, 'I would believe' - 'a contemplated and contained ambivalence' - but, despite what is lost, more is gained. A mature understanding has taken the place of the young man's passion. A typical and effective Wordsworthian use of the negative, 'Not for this . . . nor mourn nor murmur', leads in to the positive 'Abundant recompense'.

> For I have learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity . . .

Levinson says that 'the "still, sad music of humanity" drowns out the noise produced by real people in real distress'.[40] This comment seems to me quite incomprehensible. For me that wonderful phrase *contains* the suffering and distress of real people, which Wordsworth shows us in all its reality elsewhere. It contains their pain, as well as their fortitude under it, their tenderness and their grandeur. This poem demands that the reader does his part, is receptive and sensitive and can assimilate its undertones. Yes, language *is* a hit-and-miss affair but communication depends on the reader as well as the writer. As Durrant says, this passage proclaims 'that the poet now sees the world in its relationship to human needs'. He goes on to assert that 'this is possible ... because he now has attained to a sense of the ultimate unity of the universe, and of the one life that interpenetrates all things and all beings'.[41] Wordsworth is obviously at this time deeply influenced by Coleridge's belief in 'the One Life'.

Jonathan Wordsworth sums it up beautifully by quoting from 'Religious Musings' - ''tis God / Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole' (ll. 139-40) - and then saying,

> For Wordsworth in *The Pedlar* and *Tintern Abbey* man's highest achievement had been 'see[ing] into the life of things', seeing that things *had* life, seeing that the life they had was God, seeing that one was oneself a part of it all.[42]

I am deeply suspicious of labels such as 'pantheism' - perhaps a prejudice from hearing students throw them about with glorious abandon without a clue as to their meaning. Because of my background it is easier for me to think of it as 'God immanent', something akin to the Quakers' 'inner light', the presence of the Holy Spirit in every person and every thing, despite the evil in the world. But one of the best aspects of the poem is that it is not sectarian and cannot be pinned down. Durrant is quite right to mention that Wordsworth would have been aware of the concept of 'one life' from his reading of Virgil long before he met Coleridge. I have mentioned at a previous Winter School Anchises' speech in *Aeneid* vi 726 which provides a pre-Christian 'spirit within' which sustains and pervades everything. That Wordsworth now sees man as well as nature included in this is emphasized by the fact that he ends the list 'and *in* the mind of man'.

I have no time to go into detail but you will appreciate that, like the second paragraph, this section is a sample of what Wordsworth calls the 'impassioned music of the versification' and the beauty and skill of his management of the blank verse is dazzling. Again he uses apposition and repetition, lines that are broken by internal pauses and lines that run on, to create the 'music' he refers to, as well as to emphasize the sense. The effect of that repeated 'all' is deeply impressive. There is a correspondence, too between the second paragraph and this one. Each describes successive stages but the fourth starts earlier in time and development and ends later. As Gérard says, 'the repetition is incremental: the ascending movement, we might say, takes us up higher in stanza IV than in stanza II . . . man is included in his vision and the life of things is seen to reside in an all-pervading presence . . .'[43] As in the earlier passage, all aspects of human nature are affected, 'sense', 'thoughts', 'heart', 'soul' and 'moral being'. Moreover, there is an interplay between Nature and the human mind:

[40] Levinson 45.
[41] Durrant 41.
[42] *Borders of Vision* 82.
[43] Gérard 63.

of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, - both what they half create,
And what perceive . . .

Wordsworth's note refers us to a line from Young's *Night Thoughts*, 'And half-create the wondrous world they see', apparently stressing the separation or even the conflict (of which Hartman makes much) between the perception of nature and the creative imagination. To quote Jonathan Wordsworth again: 'Wordsworth is fully aware of a logical opposition between the two, and yet seems to feel from the first that the contradiction is unreal'.[44] Hartman is a fine critic but I do not for a minute think that Wordsworth ever felt that he had to choose between Nature and the Imagination, or that the Imagination was 'death-dealing'.[45] It seems to me quite clear that he thought of them as interdependent, neither complete without the other. Coleridge expresses the same feeling poignantly in 'Dejection'.

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, - both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

After this glorious affirmation, the final paragraph again opens with tentativeness.

Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay . . .

'Genial' means 'vital', and Wordsworth is remembering *Samson Agonistes*: 'So much I feel my genial spirits droop / My hopes all flat' (ll. 594-5). The parallel between Wordsworth after the failure of the French Revolution and Milton after the Restoration is suggested by the Miltonic allusions in this poem. But what if he were also deprived of his consolation? Suppose he were cut off from the lessons brought by 'nature and the language of the sense'; suppose he lost his vision and 'these beauteous forms' did become 'As is a landscape to a blind man's eye'; suppose he had to say, as Coleridge came to do, 'I see, not feel, how

[44] *Borders of Vision* 321.
[45] Hartman 230, 310.

beautiful they are' - what then? He turns to Dorothy, who represents not only human affection but also that stage in himself that Wordsworth already remembers with a sense of loss. She feels the intensity without the desperation. As McFarland suggests, De Quincey helps us to understand what Wordsworth meant by 'the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes'.[46] De Quincey says, 'she was all fire and . . . ardour' and 'this ardour looked out in every gleam of her wild eyes'. Later he says, 'she was the very wildest (in the sense of the most *natural*) person I have ever known'.[47] So she is more like a wild plant (though a very lively and glancing one) than a wild beast.

> Oh! yet a little while
> May I behold in thee what I was once,
> My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
> Knowing that Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her . . .

Do you sense in those lines a kind of phantom transition again to doubt? Do you feel, as I do, that 'Hoping' would be truer than 'Knowing'? Does the poet protest too much? If so, he quickly covers up. If Dorothy in the future follows Wordsworth's progress, Nature will lead her 'from joy to joy', for the loss of 'aching joys' and 'dizzy raptures', 'other gifts' will follow, 'abundant recompense'. For Nature

> can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings.

As in the third paragraph, Wordsworth conjures up in few words all the dreariness of life. The 'evil tongues' come from *Paradise Lost* vii 25-6, where Milton says that he continues to sing,

> though fall'n on evil dayes,
> On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues . . .
> and with dangers compast round.

Though not in the kind of peril that Milton was after the Restoration, Wordsworth too had just been subject of a secret service enquiry and had failed to get his lease of Alfoxden House renewed. These lines come just before the one Wordsworth quotes in the *Prospectus to The Recluse*, 'fit audience let me find though few'. Young poets do go through a phase of imitation. Like children, it is how they learn, but they grow up. Surely the mature Wordsworth is a one-man refutation of Eliot's apparent belief in 1936 that 'Milton's poetry

[46] McFarland 26.
[47] *Recollections* 188 and 201.

could only be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatsoever'.[48] Allusion enriches without slavishness. Wordsworth's blank verse in 'Tintern Abbey' is original and his own, but I doubt if he could have written it if he had not measured himself against Milton. Which, you may remember, is where I came in.

I confess, in my old age, to being shocked by the cynicism and destructiveness of the prevalent tone of conversation, for example on radio or television. One recognizes at once those 'evil tongues', 'rash judgments' and 'sneers' against any positive values there, and some of the newspapers are even worse. But more telling than all those are the 'greetings where no kindness is'. One does need 'a chearful faith' to counterbalance them.

When Dorothy arrives at the stage that Wordsworth has now reached,

> When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
> Into a sober pleasure

- then, like him, she will fall back on 'memory-landscapes' and beauties of all kinds stored up within. And if, as he did, she has to contend with 'solitude, or fear, or pain or grief', she will draw upon the past experience both of this place and of his love. If by reason of separation or death their companionship should be broken she will remember this day and his 'exhortations' about the power of Nature to heal. Again, I feel a sense of whistling in the dark in his claim to have come now 'With warmer love, oh! with far deeper zeal / Of holier love'. I think those critics are right who detect an awareness of loss and a fear of even greater loss in this passage, so that, as in the first lines an elegiac note leads in to consolation, so the poem's end returns to its beginning, like the snake with its tail in its mouth, the down-to-earth reality of the countryside wedded to the symbolism of refreshment and aspiration, but with the added element of human love.

> Nor wilt thou then forget,
> That after many wanderings, many years
> Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
> And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
> More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

It is a paradox that, just as 'The darkness declares the glory of light', so if there were no doubt there could be no honest certainty. Hence what Gérard calls 'the dialectical oscillation'[49] on which the poem is built.

I hope I have quoted at random from enough fine critics to demonstrate that it is not necessary to espouse way-out theories, and I hope I may have helped in a small way to restore this superbly beautiful poem to its appreciative readers so that they are not afraid to read it with what Wordsworth calls 'holy joy' (*Prelude* iii 397). May I end with his letter to his nephew Christopher, congratulating him on his academic success, and apply it to the excesses of today's literary critics.

> I should detest your honours if I thought they would cause you to love classical Literature less for its own sake when the stimulus of reading for distinction is withdrawn.[50]

Sevenoaks

[48] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Prose* (London, 1963), p. 116.

[49] Gérard 68.

[50] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* ed. E. de Selincourt, *The Later Years: 1821-53* rev. Alan G. Hill (4 vols., Oxford, 1978-88), ii. 215.

Looking for Johnny: Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy'

By DUNCAN WU

WHEN WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE heard that Southey was to be one of the first reviewers of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), they had cause for relief, if not celebration. In touch with both authors during much of the previous year, Southey might have been expected to understand the volume's aims. Unfortunately, his critical sympathies were not always reliable; 30 years later, he was to advise the young Charlotte Brontë to abandon her literary career on the grounds that 'Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be'.[1] His account of *Lyrical Ballads*, published in the *Critical Review* for October 1798, could hardly have helped such sales as there were. Admittedly, he praises (albeit faintly) 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', 'The Dungeon', 'Lines Left Upon a Yew-Tree Seat', 'The Female Vagrant' and 'Tintern Abbey', but begins with strong criticism of 'The Thorn', 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', and, first and foremost, 'The Idiot Boy':

> The majority of these poems, we are informed in the Advertisement, are to be considered as 'experiments': 'They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure'.
>
> Of these 'experimental' poems, the most important is 'The Idiot Boy', the story of which is simply this: Betty Foy's neighbour Susan Gale is indisposed, and no-one can be conveniently sent for the doctor but Betty's idiot boy. She therefore puts him upon her pony at eight o'clock in the evening, gives him proper directions, and returns to take care of her sick neighbour. Johnny is expected with the doctor by eleven, but the clock strikes eleven, and twelve, and one, without the appearance either of Johnny or the doctor. Betty's restless fears become insupportable and she now leaves her friend to look for her idiot son. She goes to the doctor's house but hears nothing of Johnny. About five o'clock, however, she finds him sitting quietly upon his feeding pony. As they go home they meet old Susan, whose apprehensions have cured her, and brought her out to seek them. And they all return merrily together. Upon this subject the author has written nearly five hundred lines. With what spirit the story is told, our extract will evince. [Southey then quotes *Idiot Boy* 322-401.]
>
> No tale less deserved the labour that appears to have been bestowed upon this. It resembles a Flemish picture in the worthlessness of its design and the excellence of its execution. From Flemish artists we are satisfied with such pieces; who would not have lamented if Corregio or Raphael had wasted their talents in painting Dutch boors or the humours of a Flemish wake?[2]

His suggestion that the 'experiment' is misguided allows Southey to acknowledge the authors' abilities while dismissing their work - a tactic he employs throughout. Wordsworth and Coleridge are the Correggio and Raphael of the modern age, who devote themselves to subjects undeserving of their attentions. This was an ingenious line of attack that, unfortunately, provided a model for Wordsworth's future critics. It was reiterated by John

[1] British Library Add. MS 44355, f.236. I am grateful to the British Library for permission to quote.

[2] Unless otherwise stated, all texts are from *Romanticism: An Anthology* ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford, 1994) (hereafter Wu).

Wilson, who criticized 'The Idiot Boy' in a letter to Wordsworth of 1802, and recurred in variant forms throughout Wordsworth's career - most famously when Francis Jeffrey attacked him for making the protagonist of *The Excursion* 'a person accustomed to higgle about tape, or brass sleeve-buttons'. But why did Southey attack 'The Idiot Boy', and devote so much space to demonstrating its failure? According to him, 'The Idiot Boy' is the most 'important' of the experimental poems in the volume, but why he considers it more significant than 'Simon Lee', 'The Last of the Flock' or 'The Thorn' is not explained. My guess is that he felt peculiarly threatened by it because he recognized its superiority over verses he had penned on the same subject. On 30 June 1798, a couple of months prior to publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Southey's 'The Idiot' appeared in *The Morning Post*, a newspaper to which Wordsworth and Coleridge also contributed. It was never reprinted under his name, and was attributed to him only in 1957. Here it is:

The Idiot

The circumstance related in the following ballad happened some years since in Herefordshire.

It had pleased God to form poor Ned
  A thing of idiot mind,
Yet to the poor unreas'ning man
  God had not been unkind;

Old Sarah loved her helpless child
  Whom helplessness made dear,
And life was happiness to him
  Who had no hope nor fear.

She knew his wants, she understood
  Each half-artic'late call,
And he was ev'rything to her
  And she to him was all.

And so for many a year they dwelt
  Nor knew a wish beside,
But age at length on Sarah came,
  And she fell sick and died.

He tried in vain to waken her,
  And called her o'er and o'er;
They told him she was dead - the sound
  To him no import bore.

They closed her eyes and shrouded her,
  And he stood wond'ring by;
And when they bore her to the grave
  He followed silently.

They laid her in the narrow house,
  They sung the fun'ral stave,
But when the fun'ral train dispersed
  He loitered by the grave.

The rabble boys who used to jeer
  Whene'er they saw poor Ned
Now stood and watched him at the grave,
  And not a word they said.

They came and went and came again
  Till night at last came on,
And still he loitered by the grave
  Till all to rest were gone.

And when he found himself alone
  He swift removed the clay,
And raised the coffin up in haste
  And bore it swift away.

And when he reached his hut he laid
  The coffin on the floor,
And with the eagerness of joy
  He barred the cottage door.

And out he took his mother's corpse
  And placed it in her chair,
And then he heaped the hearth and blew
  The kindling fire with care.

He placed his mother in her chair
  And in her wonted place,
And blew the kindling fire that shone
  Reflected on her face.

And pausing now, her hand would feel,
  And now her face behold -
'Why, mother, do you look so pale
  And why are you so cold?'

It had pleased God from the poor wretch
  His only friend to call,
But God was kind to him and soon
  In death restored him all.

The literary judgements that count are made not by reviewers but by readers over long periods of time. Two hundred years have seen to it that while 'The Idiot Boy' continues to be reprinted and newly edited, 'The Idiot' remains buried in the files of *The Morning Post*, unlikely to acquire even a cult following. I'm not saying that Southey's poem is bad; in its own terms, it is a success. And, as Roger Robinson points out to me, it does rather effectively dramatize two pieces of psychology that are very real to families with mentally handicapped young people: that the greatest fear of parents is for the care of the child when they are gone, and that such children have great difficulty understanding the concept of death.

My point is that we can't fully appreciate the strangeness of 'The Idiot Boy', at least to its earliest readers, unless we first understand why, in Southey's mind (and those of his contemporaries), his own 'The Idiot' was the superior poem.

A simplified view of Southey's poetic career would indicate that it followed two divergent courses during Wordsworth's annus mirabilis of 1797-8. On one hand he was composing Wordsworth-inspired blank verse concentrating on emotional states, as in 'Hannah' and 'The Ruined Cottage'; on the other, there were works such as 'The Idiot' - grotesque or sensational pieces, usually in stanzaic form, which operated primarily, if not exclusively, on the level of narrative. Coleridge realized as early as April 1797 that Southey tended increasingly to the latter: 'I am fearful', Coleridge told Joseph Cottle, 'that [Southey] will begin to rely too much on story and event in his poems, to the neglect of those lofty imaginings that are peculiar to, and definitive of, the poet'.[3]

And with that important statement, Coleridge sets out, in remarkably succinct terms, the differences that existed not merely between him and Southey, but between the authors of *Lyrical Ballads* and the rest of the literary world. As far as the poetry reading public was concerned, popular verse operated in the same manner as the newspaper articles beside which they were printed. Designed to satisfy the appetite for story and event, they were essentially versified reports in which the emotional drama was either suppressed or predigested. 'The Idiot' epitomizes such poems, down to its claim that 'The circumstance related in the following ballad happened some years since in Herefordshire'. Admittedly, factual veracity is also a feature of some of the lyrical ballads, such as 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill'. Had Wordsworth and Coleridge seen it, they would have noticed immediately that Ned's idiocy and his love of Sarah are meaningful only insofar as they explain the poem's events. Psychology is, in other words, subordinate to narrative. By making their characters' interior lives the subject of their writing, Wordsworth and Coleridge revolutionized the aesthetics of the popular ballad. For them, the purpose of a literary work was not to relate some bizarre event, but to compel its reader to enter another psychological realm and thus become aware of a common humanity; in fact, they saw the popularity of poems like 'The Idiot' as evidence of increasing emotional atrophy among the public. As Wordsworth put it in the 1800 Preface:

> . . . a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers (I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton) are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.[4]

The project of *Lyrical Ballads* was impossibly grandiose; a sensitive analysis of its contents would amount, in effect, to a self-administered programme of intellectual re-education. Instead of craving the resolution of 'idle and extravagant stories', the reader would train himself to empathize with the emotional states arising from poverty, hardship, and other social ills. From Southey's account of 'The Idiot Boy' you'd never guess that such high-minded aims underlay the poem, part of the trouble being that he goes out of his way to read it only

[3] *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. E. L. Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71), i. 320.
[4] Wu 254.

as a story, and a failed one at that: 'No *tale* [note his use of that word] less deserved the labour that appears to have been bestowed upon this'.

You might argue that Southey had a point. 'The Idiot Boy' isn't completely satisfying to those interested only in what happens; there are too many loose ends. The same might be said of 'The Thorn' which, through its dependence on an unreliable narrator, challenges the very concept of a coherent storyline. What did Wordsworth think he was doing? He realized that the only way to sharpen the blunted sensibilities of his readers was to force them to revise their understanding of the function and purpose of the popular ballad. In place of the momentary frisson they experienced at such poems as 'The Idiot', Wordsworth wished them to be changed - and not in any superficial way. He believed in the power of poetry to challenge assumptions and to affect the reader's deepest emotions. Defending 'The Idiot Boy' in his letter to John Wilson of 1802, Wordsworth insisted that a great poet ought 'to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane, pure, and permanent; in short, more consonant to nature - that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things'. One means of doing this was to leave important narrative questions unresolved, forcing the reader to engage with the emotions raised. Who is Martha Ray and what did she really do to her infant child? What *is* the matter with Harry Gill? What is the explanation for the little maid's insistence that 'We are seven', or the boy's claim to prefer Liswyn to Kilve for its weathercock? In each case, Wordsworth poses the question but refuses to answer it; in each case, the answer, or likely answer, will complete our understanding of the poem; in each case, the answer grows out of our emotional involvement with each poem's characters and situations. The reader is made to become a partner in the act of composition. Thus 'Simon Lee' takes its meaning not so much from the protagonist's biography as from our ability to understand Simon's tearful gratitude when the narrator severs the tangled root that has defeated him: 'It is no tale; but should you think, / Perhaps a tale you'll make it'.

As in the case of 'The Thorn', the reader of 'The Idiot Boy' has to think very hard indeed. Take, for instance, Wordsworth's first description of Johnny Foy on his pony:

> There is no need of boot or spur,
> There is no need of whip or wand,
> For Johnny has his holly-bough,
> And with a hurly-burly now
> He shakes the green bough in his hand.

That 'green bough' of holly is one of the those properties that defies precise translation into words, like the branch of wilding held by Matthew in 'The Two April Mornings'. Perhaps its purpose is akin to the golden bough which protected Aeneas on his journey to the underworld. In purely dramatic terms, it is expressive of Johnny's excitement, his 'hurly-burly': Wordsworth is trying to describe the inner world of an idiot, and the holly bough is a kind of bridge between him and us.

The moment at which Betty sends him into the night is a crucial one in terms of the poem's drama.

> And Betty's most especial charge
> Was, 'Johnny, Johnny! Mind that you
> Come home again, nor stop at all,
> Come home again whate'er befall -
> My Johnny do, I pray you do.'

To this did Johnny answer make
Both with his head and with his hand,
And proudly shook the bridle too,
And then! his words were not a few,
Which Betty well could understand.

And now that Johnny is just going,
Though Betty's in a mighty flurry,
She gently pats the pony's side
On which her idiot boy must ride,
And seems no longer in a hurry.

But when the pony moved his legs -
Oh then for the poor idiot boy!
For joy he cannot hold the bridle,
For joy his head and heels are idle,
He's idle all for very joy.

And while the pony moves his legs,
In Johnny's left hand you may see
The green bough's motionless and dead;
The moon that shines above his head
Is not more still and mute than he.

The close relationship between mother and son is confirmed by their faultless inter-communication. Johnny understands spoken English, and though his speech is limited by his disabilities, he is perfectly comprehensible to those close to him: 'And then! his words were not a few, / Which Betty well could understand.' 'Words' is, of course, a euphemism; Johnny's articulation may not be perfect. The point is that the noises made by Johnny have the sophistication of spoken English - they constitute, in fact, a language of their own, which Betty has learnt to construe. Southey obscures this in his summary of the poem's plot: '[Betty] therefore puts him upon her pony at eight o'clock in the evening, gives him proper directions, and returns to take care of her sick neighbour.' Johnny is silenced because, to Southey, he is entirely passive, devoid of psychological complexity.

This misreading takes us to the heart of the problem - one that has dogged 'The Idiot Boy' since its first publication. The poem comes unstuck if you regard Betty Foy as its only thinking character: Wordsworth grants the experiences of the idiot the same complexity and intensity as those of his mother. In doing so, he was aware that he was challenging some deeply ingrained attitudes and prejudices. John Wilson, one of his earliest admirers, wrote to Wordsworth on this very point, saying:

> The object of her affection is indeed her son, and in that relation much consists, but then he is represented as totally destitute of any attachment towards her; the state of his mind is represented as perfectly deplorable, and, in short, to me it appears almost unnatural that a person in a state of complete idiotism should excite the warmest feelings of attachment in the breast even of his mother. This much I know, that among all the people ever I knew to have read this poem, I never met one who did not rise rather

> displeased from the perusal of it, and the only cause I could assign for it was the one now mentioned.[5]

But Wordsworth nowhere describes Johnny in the terms used by Wilson; in fact, they are a product of Wilson's preconceived notions. That is what Wordsworth meant when he replied to Wilson, saying that 'the loathing and disgust which many people have at the sight of an Idiot, is . . . owing, in a great measure to a false delicacy, and, if I [may] say it without rudeness, a certain want of comprehensiveness of think[ing] and feeling.'[6] A central aim of 'The Idiot Boy' - and of the other poems in the volume - is to break through that want, in order to demonstrate that country people, beggars and vagrants are no less human than the upper orders. As Wordsworth remarked of *The Brothers* and *Michael*, 'the two poems . . . were written with a view to shew that men who do not wear fine cloaths can feel deeply'.[7]

Southey was no reactionary - at least not in 1798 - but he overlooked the point of the poem's opening scene:

> But when the pony moved his legs -
> Oh then for the poor idiot boy!
> For joy he cannot hold the bridle,
> For joy his head and heels are idle,
> He's idle all for very joy.
>
> And while the pony moves his legs,
> In Johnny's left hand you may see
> The green bough's motionless and dead;
> The moon that shines above his head
> Is not more still and mute than he.

The simplicity of the verse is evidence of Wordsworth's formal mastery, but it shouldn't beguile us into neglecting the audacity of his claim. The full significance of these stanzas emerges only when we read them in the context of the Lyrical Ballads as a whole. For instance, in 'Lines written at a small distance from my house', the poet exhorts Dorothy to join him in Holford Dell, 'for this one day / We'll give to idleness'. In place of the moral overtones normally associated with it, Wordsworth makes idleness the prerequisite for the exalted state in which one experiences the love which flows 'From earth to man, from man to earth'. Idleness is a codeword for the inward suspension that precedes a heightened vision of the natural world. But there is another word in these stanzas from 'The Idiot Boy' which Wordsworth emphasizes: 'For joy he cannot hold the bridle, / For joy his head and heels are idle'. On the simplest level, 'joy' denotes Johnny's happiness at the prospect of unrestrained freedom. But as with 'idleness', other usages in the poetry of 1798 lend the word new shades of meaning. That February, Wordsworth had written that the Pedlar 'saw one life, and felt that it was *joy*' - connecting the emotion firmly with an enhanced, pantheistic vision of nature. This is best elucidated by *Tintern Abbey*, in which Wordsworth describes

> the *joy*
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime

[5] *'Christopher North': A Memoir of John Wilson* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1862), i. 46.

[6] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* ed. E. de Selincourt, *The Early Years: 1787-1805* rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967) (hereafter *EY*), p. 356.

[7] *EY* 315.

Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

To Wordsworth and Coleridge, the pantheist vision here described was an inexorable force for moral and political improvement. It was to eradicate social injustice, and create a universal brotherhood that would culminate with the millennium. So convinced was Coleridge of this that he virtually gave up writing poetry, while Wordsworth spent most of his creative life waiting for the millennial heaven on earth and trying to compose the epic that would precipitate it. Nor were they alone: Blake and Shelley had similar beliefs.

In the light of these specific redefinitions provided by other works in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), let's take another look at 'The Idiot Boy':

But when the pony moved his legs -
Oh then for the poor idiot boy!
For joy he cannot hold the bridle,
For joy his head and heels are idle,
He's idle all for very joy.

And while the pony moves his legs,
In Johnny's left hand you may see
The green bough's motionless and dead;
The moon that shines above his head
Is not more still and mute than he.

The idleness and joy experienced by Johnny as he moves out of the poem and into the night indicate that he is enjoying nothing less than a pantheist apprehension of the natural world. This is confirmed by the holly-bough, the stillness of which indicates Johnny's admission to a mystic realm beyond the purely physical. He is, in fact, one of the few visionaries of *Lyrical Ballads* capable of perceiving the unified, idealized reality inherent in nature. It may be just as well that none of Wordsworth's early critics seem to have realized what is actually going on here; the audacity of his claim would have rendered the poem even more unfit for eighteenth-century tastes than it was thought to be.

To summarize my argument thus far: Southey's assessment of 'The Idiot Boy' concentrates on its story, but the point about the Lyrical Ballads is that Wordsworth and Coleridge set out to wean readers away from popular ballads such as 'The Idiot' in which the emotional content was predigested. Instead, they wanted to test our imaginative involvement in the inner worlds of their poems, and to that end engineered hiatuses within the narrative. In the case of 'The Idiot Boy' I've already given one or two examples: what does the holly bough signify? And, most importantly, what is it that Johnny feels as he rides into the night? The poem derives its enduring power partly from the fact that Wordsworth refuses to answer these questions for us, preferring instead to leave readers to determine the answers for themselves.

Wordsworth's remarkable qualities as a story-teller are confirmed by the fact that he uses these unanswered questions not to mystify us, but to give the poem its narrative impetus. The central narrative gap of 'The Thorn' - what did Martha Ray really do to her baby? - compels

us to read to the end, even though the answer is never stated. The burning question of 'The Idiot Boy' is perhaps best put by Betty Foy.

> 'Oh saints! what is become of him?
> Perhaps he's climbed into an oak
> Where he will stay till he is dead;
> Or sadly he has been misled
> And joined the wandering gipsy-folk.
>
> Or him that wicked pony's carried
> To the dark cave, the goblins' hall,
> Or in the castle he's pursuing,
> Among the ghosts, his own undoing,
> Or playing with the waterfall.'

This array of narrative possibilities treads a fine line between tragedy and absurdity. As Betty embarks on her own voyage of imaginary realms, the reader might well find its ports of call - goblins, ghosts, caves and castles - amusing, and therefore reassuring. After all, they're the stuff of fairy tales, too playful to sustain fears for Johnny's well-being. And yet, finely understated though it is, it's not sufficient merely to describe these stanzas as a form of irony. For Betty's thoughts are inspired by the deep and powerful fear of losing her son. As Wordsworth announced in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), this poem follows 'the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature. . . by tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings'.[8]

But this is not the whole story. Admittedly, the poem does trace Betty's shifting emotions in the face of loss, and to that extent is concerned with the 'fluxes and refluxes of the mind'. But its perspectives extend further. The narrative possibilities in the stanzas just quoted are more plausible if we accept that Johnny is bonded in some metaphysical way with the immaterial workings of nature. If, as seems likely, Betty does unconsciously perceive her son's close relation to the natural world, he might really be in the trees and waterfalls, among the ghosts, goblins, gipsies, caves and castles of an imaginary world - especially if we think of him as part of the pantheist life-force. In this light, perhaps, the question of Johnny's whereabouts becomes clearer.

On the surface, Wordsworth makes no bones about his inability to resolve it - that failure is, in fact, the subject of the poem's finest verses. Which may seem perverse. After all, what popular storyteller in their right minds would celebrate their own incompetence?

> Oh reader, now that I might tell
> What Johnny and his horse are doing,
> What they've been doing all this time -
> Oh could I put it into rhyme,
> A most delightful tale pursuing!
>
> Perhaps (and no unlikely thought)
> He with his pony now doth roam
> The cliffs and peaks so high that are,

[8] Wu 253.

To lay his hands upon a star
And in his pocket bring it home.

Perhaps he's turned himself about,
His face unto his horse's tail,
And still and mute, in wonder lost,
All like a silent horseman-ghost
He travels on along the vale.

And now, perhaps, he's hunting sheep,
A fierce and dreadful hunter he!
Yon valley that's so trim and green,
In five months' time, should he be seen,
A desert wilderness will be.

Perhaps, with head and heels on fire,
And like the very soul of evil,
He's galloping away, away,
And so he'll gallop on for aye,
The bane of all that dread the devil.

I to the muses have been bound
These fourteen years by strong indentures;
Oh gentle muses, let me tell
But half of what to him befell,
For sure he met with strange adventures.

Oh gentle muses, is this kind?
Why will ye thus my suit repel?
Why of your further aid bereave me?
And can ye thus unfriended leave me,
Ye muses, whom I love so well?

We would be ill-advised to regard Wordsworth's proclaimed incompetence as anything but strategic - he doth protest too much. Who are these muses, anyway? Their convenience as objects of blame lies mainly in the fact that they do not exist. Wordsworth uses a similar technique in 'The Thorn', written supposedly in the persona of a retired sea-captain with an unhealthy interest in other peoples' private lives. He, too, fails to relate a coherent story, although his excuse is different. He's obtuse - he sees, but doesn't understand, what is before him. The narrator of 'The Idiot Boy' both sees and understands, but lacks the technical skill for the job. The effect is the same in both cases, however: the narrator's inability to make sense of the story shifts that responsibility to you and me, his audience.

The question of Johnny's whereabouts may be resolved by reference to Wordsworth's other poems of 1798, and to the poetry he might have known. Johnny's journey into outer space, and successive transformations into spectral horseman and sheep-hunter, encourage this kind of speculation, as they draw on the oft-noted echo of Don Quixote as a means of affirming their underlying humour. At the same time, as befits their mock-heroic tone, there is a lurking seriousness of purpose. For Johnny to have laid his hands upon a star is, we know, impossible, except insofar as intensely spiritual experiences are described in similar terms. Take, for instance, the opening stanzas of Henry Vaughan's 'The Night':

Through that pure Virgin shrine,
That sacred veil drawn o'er thy glorious noon
That men might look and live as glow-worms shine,
And face the moon:
Wise Nicodemus saw such light
As made him know his God by night.

Most blessed believer he!
Who in that land of darkness and blind eyes
Thy long expected healing wings could see,
When thou didst rise,
And what can never more be done,
Did at midnight speak with the sun!

Johnny doesn't exactly speak with the sun, but the possibility of his laying hold of a star and slipping it into his pocket reworks, in a playful manner, the kind of encounter described by Vaughan. There's no hard evidence that Wordsworth had read 'The Night' by the time he composed 'The Idiot Boy', but it is striking how Johnny's final speech - which is a response to Betty's enquiry about where he has been all night - evokes the imagery of Vaughan's poem: 'The cocks did crow to-whoo to-whoo, / And the sun did shine so cold.' That last line neatly picks up the paradoxical interplay between sun and moon, heat and cold, darkness and light, so central to the encounter described by Vaughan. By the same token, Johnny's words, which seem like nonsense, may be understood as an attempt to articulate his sense of the sublime. That mystic sensibility is confirmed by his 'joy' as he sets off at the beginning of the poem - a term that, at the time this poem was written in spring 1798, had specifically pantheist associations for both Wordsworth and Coleridge. This is further supported by Wordsworth's comment to John Wilson: 'I have often applied to Idiots, in my own mind, that sublime expression of scripture that, "*their life is hidden with God.*" They are worshipped, probably from a feeling of this sort, in several parts of the East.'[9]

If, during his absence, Johnny experienced an ecstasy of some kind, Wordsworth had good reason not to be too explicit about it. Besides his readers' prejudices, there was the matter of literary taste. In 1798, it would have been in questionable taste for a poet writing in the ballad form to have described a quasi-religious event, let alone one attributed to an idiot. No poet, however skilled, could have carried it off without offending late eighteenth-century sensibilities. Wordsworth was at the peak of his powers, but his declared inability to do justice to Johnny's experience may not be entirely feigned.

When Southey wrote his review of *Lyrical Ballads*, probably some time in August 1798, he perceived none of this. And who knows? Perhaps it's all a figment of my imagination. But that, as Wordsworth would have been the first to agree, is the point.

'It is no tale; but should you think, / Perhaps a tale you'll make it'. For Wordsworth, the reader is a partner in the act of composition. Only by involving ourselves imaginatively can we turn the fragmented narrative into a coherent one. And in that respect at least, Southey was correct: 'The Idiot Boy' is certainly one of the most important of the experimental poems in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).

St Catherine's College, Oxford

[9] *EY* 357.

Contributions Toward a Southey Bibliography

By MICHAEL BAUMAN

STUDENTS OF ENGLISH ROMANTIC LITERATURE have long been indebted to Kenneth Curry for his numerous contributions to Romantic studies in general, and to Southey scholarship in particular - not least of which is his eminently useful *Robert Southey: A Reference Guide* (Boston, 1977). The present annotated bibliography is but a necessarily incomplete supplement and update to Curry's book. Unlike Curry's, however, this bibliography is arranged alphabetically rather than chronologically. For the sake of brevity, book reviews, review articles, and the numerous short entries in *Notes and Queries* are not included.

AHMAD, Munir. 'From China to Peru: The Origin and Development of Southey's Mythological Poems'. *Aligarh Journal of English Studies* 12 (1987) 179-202. Places Southey's mythological poems in the context of the eighteenth century's increasing acquaintance with non-European cultures. Ahmad identifies many of Southey's sources and traces his pertinent intellectual development.

ALBRECHT, W. P. 'A Letter from Southey to Maria Gowen Brooks'. *English Language Notes* 15 (1978) 192-7. Publishes for the first time, with historical introduction and annotation, Southey's letter to Brooks, also known as Maria del Occidente, the subject of Ruth Shephard Granniss's *An American Friend of Southey* (1913).

BAUMAN, Michael. 'Southey's "Apostasy": Its Origin and Early Content'. *Evangelical Journal* 6 (1988) 13-26. Describes Southey's initial steps toward theological and political conservatism and the events in 1795 that prompted them.

--. 'The Historicity of the Trial Scene in Southey's *Joan of Arc*'. *Charles Lamb Bulletin* 79 (1992) 254-5. Briefly identifies allusions to three medieval theologians in Southey's poem.

BERNHARDT-KABISCH, Ernest. *Robert Southey* (Boston, 1977). A biographical survey of the Southey corpus, focusing on the major poetry, such as *Joan of Arc*, *Thalaba*, *Kehama*, *Madoc*, and *Roderick*. The final chapter deals briefly with several of Southey's prose works.

CURRY, Kenneth (ed.). *The Contributions of Robert Southey to the Morning Post* (n.p., University of Alabama Press, 1984). Contains, in addition to Southey's works (both those that are certain and those of questionable attribution), an introduction by Curry, a chronological list of poems, and an annotated bibliography.

--. 'Robert Southey's Contributions to *The Monthly Magazine* and *The Athenaeum*'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 11 (1980) 215-18. Identifies 24 contributions by Southey to *The Monthly Magazine* and another 23 to *The Athenaeum*. Accompanied by several helpful explanatory annotations.

--. 'The Text of Robert Southey's Published Correspondence: Misdated Letters and Missing Names'. *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 75 (1981) 127-46. In an article growing out of the compilation of his *New Letters of Robert Southey* (1965), Curry corrects the misdating of nearly one hundred letters in the nineteenth-century collections by C. C. Southey and J. W. Warter. Curry also supplies many of the names excised from the letters by the editors.

EASTWOOD, David. 'Patriotism Personified: Robert Southey's *Life of Nelson* Reconsidered'. *The Mariner's Mirror* 77 (1991) 143-9. Argues lucidly and cogently that, on the one hand, Southey's readable and immensely popular biography was intentionally

geared toward politically rehabilitating Nelson as an establishment figure and that, on the other hand, it was to be 'a patriotic manual for young sailors.'

--. 'Robert Southey and the Intellectual Origins of Romantic Conservatism'. *English Historical Review* 104 (1989) 308-31. Argues that Southey, like many other romantic conservatives, stubbornly resists standard political categorization. In delineating the shape and content of Southey's political views, Eastwood demonstrates the similarities between Southey's ideas and those of such widely varying thinkers as Eldon, Cobbett, Peel, Owen, Burke, and Carlyle, among others.

GOOD, James M. 'William Taylor, Robert Southey, and the word "Autobiography"'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 12 (1981) 125-7. By citing both William Taylor's use of the word in 1797 and Southey's use of it in 1805, Good overturns the common assertion, enshrined in the *OED*, that Southey seemed to coin the term 'autobiography' in 1809.

HARRIS, R. W. 'Robert Southey: Toryism and the Social Question', in his *Romanticism and the Social Order* (London, 1969). An examination of Southey's Toryesque proposals for social reform.

HILL, Alan J. 'Three 'Visions' of Judgement: Southey, Byron, and Newman'. *Review of English Studies* 41 (1990) 334-50. Carefully scrutinizes both the style and theology of Southey's and Byron's poems after the death of George III (poems characterized as presumptuous and flippant, respectively), and Newman's own vision of judgement years later, *The Dream of Gerontius*.

HOFFPAUIR, Richard. 'The Thematic Structure of Southey's Epic Poetry: Part II'. *The Wordsworth Circle*, 7 (1976) 109-16. Continuing the insightful analysis begun in *TWC* 6 (1975) 240-8, Hoffpauir examines Southey's *Joan of Arc*, *Madoc*, *The Curse of Kehama*, and *Roderick, the Last of the Goths*.

JOUKOVSKY, Nicholas A. 'Southey on Landor: An Unpublished Letter'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 7 (1976) 13-16. Publishes and introduces Southey's 1811 letter to Hugh Standert, in which Southey remarks on Landor's *Count Julian* and on Dobrizhoffer, Klopstock, and Montgomery.

LEFEBURE, Molly. 'The Imagination of Mrs Samuel Taylor Coleridge: unknown inspiration of an unknown tongue' in Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlin, and Nicholas Roe (eds.) *Coleridge's Imagination* (Cambridge, 1985) pp. 79-87. Plausibly ties Mrs. Coleridge's nonsensical *Lingo Grande* to some of Southey's writings, most especially scattered portions of *The Doctor* and Southey's lengthy letter to Grosvenor Bedford, 14 September 1821.

MALHOTRA, Om Parkash. *Romantic Encounter with Hinduism: Southey*. Ph.D. Diss. SUNY Binghamton, 1981. Examines the influence of Indian ideas and culture on the Romantics, in general, and Southey, in particular, especially *The Curse of Kehama*, which Malhotra characterizes as both beautiful and positive. Malhotra also argues that the poem should be read not as a work of Christian morality, but as a traditional Hindu work depicting the Law of Karma.

MANOGUE, Ralph Anthony. 'Southey and William Winterbotham: New Light on an Old Controversy'. *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* NS 38 (1982) 105-14. A detailed account of the unauthorized publication of Southey's notorious *Wat Tyler*. Special attention is given to biographical details concerning Winterbotham and to relevant court affidavits.

MEACHEN, Edward W. 'From an Historical Religion to a Religion of History: Robert Southey and the Heroic in History'. *Clio* 9 (1980) 229-52. By comparing Southey's historiographical principles (and their attendant theological implications) to the historical

works of Turner, Carlyle and Lecky, Meachen shows how Southey 'sought to return religion to history without making history subservient to religion.' Meachen also focuses carefully on Southey's understanding of heroism, especially as revealed in Southey's work as a biographer.

--. 'History and Transcendence in Southey's Epic Poems'. *Studies in English Literature* 19 (1979) 589-608. Argues that Southey's epics are 'unified and explicated by two questions: what constitutes reform and how can it be achieved? Southey answers these questions in each epic through the use of a universal moral concept and a theme of spiral historical progress'.

MENDILOW, Jonathan. 'Robert Southey and the Communal Value of Politics,' in his *The Romantic Tradition in British Political Thought* (Totowa, 1986). Studies the somewhat Burkean shape of Southey's political thought as it appears in his articles in the *Quarterly Review*.

MURPHY, G. Martin. *Blanco White: Self-banished Spaniard* (New Haven, 1989). A biography of Southey's friend. Of special interest to students of Southey are pp. 75-7, 82-4, 129-31, and 134-5.

--, and Pons, André. 'Further Letters of Blanco White to Robert Southey'. *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 62 (1985) 357-72. Publishes for the first time, with helpful historical introductions, nine letters (1811-26) from White to Southey now on deposit in the Bodleian and Taylorian libraries of Oxford and the National Library of Scotland, letters that reveal White's growing political conservatism.

MURPHY, Peter. 'Visions of success: Byron and Southey'. *Studies in Romanticism* 24 (1985) 355-73. An impressively executed analysis. More heavily concerned with Byron's success than with Southey's mediocrity.

NOORDEGRAAF, J. 'Wieland en Southey? Een Kanttekening bij Zijderveld'. *Spiegel der Letteren* 23 (1981) 54-6. Not seen.

POLLIN, Burton R. 'Southey's *Curse of Kehama* in Poe's City in the Sea'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 7 (1976) 101-6. After establishing Poe's high regard for Southey as a poet, Pollin delineates 'the considerable influence of *The Curse of Kehama* upon Poe's major and early poem'.

PRIESTLEY, Mary Ellen. 'The Southey Collection in the Fitz Park Museum, Keswick, Cumbria'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 11 (1980) 43-64. An invaluable descriptive checklist of the nearly 600 items in the Southey Collection, categorized as works by Southey, Southey association items, and the Southey circle.

PYM, David. 'Robert Southey: Bulwark of Victorian Faith'. *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* NS 60 (1987) 131-40. A highly insightful study of the shape and influence of Southey's courteous and liberal Anglicanism.

RAIMOND, Jean. 'Southey's Early Writings and the Revolution'. *The Yearbook of English Studies* 19 (1989) 181-96. A lucid, dependable, and biographically grounded guide to the revolutionary dimensions of Southey's early political thought.

RAMOS, Charles (ed.). *The Letters of Robert Southey to John May: 1797 to 1838* (Austin, 1976). The published version of Ramos's University of Texas dissertation in 1965, mentioned by Curry (p. 86).

RUNYON, William Ronald. 'Bob Southey's Diabolical Doggerel: Its Influence on Shelley and Byron'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 6 (1975) 249-54. A detailed description of Southey's and Coleridge's joint effort (in 1799) in imitation of Johann Heinrich's 'Der bezauberte Teufel', (a translation of which was sent them in 1798 by William Taylor, of Norwich) and

of the more liberal and more radical modifications made to it by Byron and by Shelley, respectively. Attention is given also to E. H. Coleridge's subsequent expansion.

--. 'Bob Southey's Diabolical Doggerel, Part II: Source and Authorship'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 7 (1976) 59-62. A continuation of the article above, focusing briefly on Southey's own 1827 revision of 'The Devil's Walk' and on the controversy surrounding Richard Porson's alleged authorship of the poem.

SEEHASE, Georg. *'The Fall of Robespierre* (1794) von Coleridge/Southey - ein antijakobinisches Geschichtsdrama'. *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Americanistik* 37 (1989) 206-12. Not seen.

SOUTHEY, Caroline. *Chapters on Churchyards* (New York, 1842). By Southey's second wife, the former Caroline Bowles, to whom Southey dedicated his *All for Love* in 1829, a fact recorded in this volume's epigraph.

SOUTHEY, Robert. *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Southey* (New York, 1851). The first complete American edition of Southey's poetical works. Contains Southey's 'Oliver Newman, A New England Tale' (pp. 811-34), which was prepared for posthumous publication by Herbert Hill and dedicated to William and Mary Wordsworth. Also includes seven rare minor poems (pp. 835-41), including the fragment on Muhammad, dated 1799.

--. *The Life of the Rev. Andrew Bell* (London, 1844). The first of the three posthumously published volumes was written by Southey himself and edited by his wife. The final two volumes are by the Revd. C. C. Southey, the poet's son. Each volume ends with a copious collection of Bell's correspondence, much of which relates closely to the wider Southey circle.

-- (ed.). *Literary Gems* (London, 1832). As the subtitle explains, 'a selection of humorous, gay, sentimental, and pathetic morceaux; for the amusement and instruction of those who in journeying through life like to be enlived by the way.' Apparently spurious; not mentioned in any of Southey's published letters or in any of the several biographies.

STANTON, Michael N. '"A Scourge for the Laureate": William Benbow vs. Robert Southey'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 19 (1988) 45-9. A careful yet concise overview of the quarrel between Southey and a little known radical publisher, William Benbow. Special attention is given to the hard-to-get biographical details concerning Benbow and to his serious misreading of Southey's reply in the *Courier* to Thomas Medwin's *Conversations of Lord Byron.*

SULTANA, Fehmida. *Romantic Orientalism and Islam: Southey, Shelley, Moore, and Byron.* Ph.D. Diss., Tufts University, 1989. Argues that the four writers mentioned in the subtitle continued to misconstrue Islam because they accepted and perpetuated old myths and conventions, which they combined with their own 'private fantasies' and 'emotional needs', thus producing in their literature an Orient out of touch with historical reality.

SWARTZ, Virginia, M. 'Xanadu on the Susquehanna - Almost: The Pantisocracy of Coleridge and Southey'. *Pennsylvania English* 12 (1986) 19-29. A basic introduction to the pantisocratic scheme, with photographs of its originators and of its intended venue.

TILNEY, Chrystal. 'A Compleat Trial of Principle: Southey, Wellington and *The Quarterly Review*'. *National Library of Wales Journal* 20 (1978) 377-86. Carefully describes the controversy surrounding the Duke of Wellington's attempt to alter Southey's account of the Battle of Waterloo in *The Quarterly Review*, as well as publishing several lengthy pertinent passages excised from previously published letters by Southey on the incident.

WELLENS, Oskar. 'Robert Southey, *Critical* Reviewer: Some New Attributions'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 15 (1984) 68-71. Argues that 'Southey's correspondence furnishes conclusive evidence, overlooked by Zeitlin and Curry, for assigning to him with certainty five articles.'

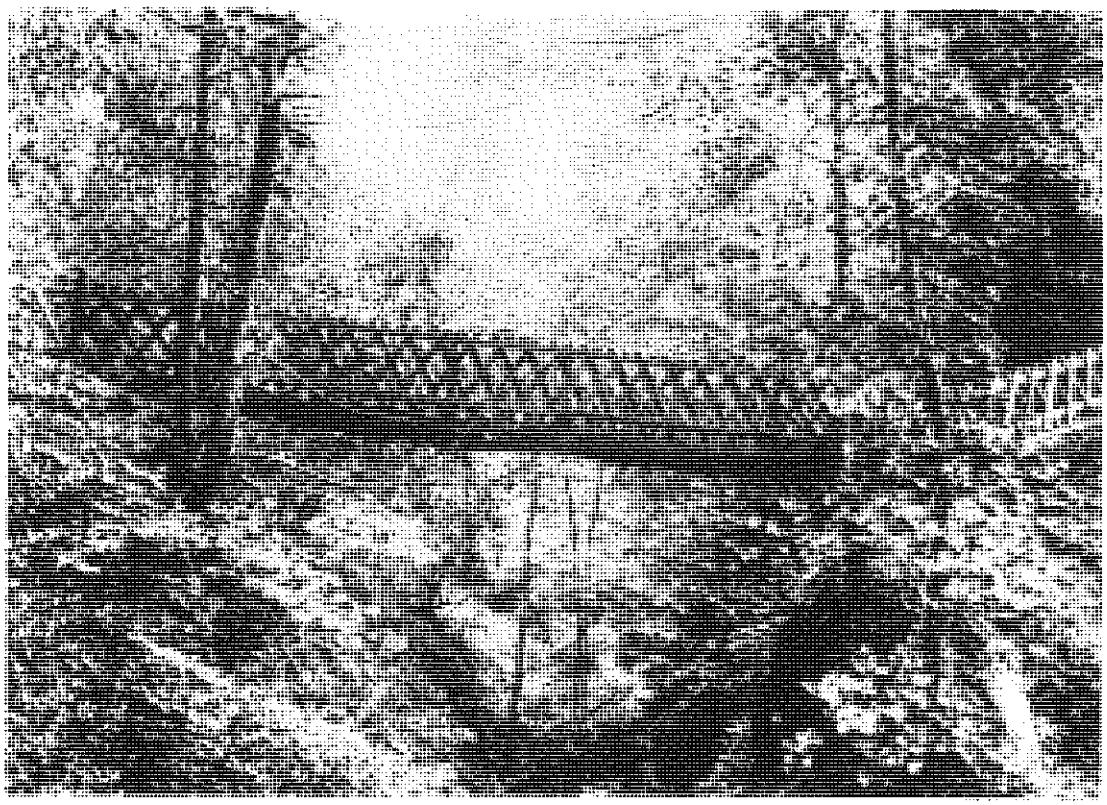
WOODRING, Carl. 'Three Poets on Waterloo'. *The Wordsworth Circle* 18 (1987) 54-7. A fine descriptive comparison of 'Walter Scott's *The Field of Waterloo*, Robert Southey's . . . *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo*, and Byron's stanzas on Waterloo in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.' Each poet tried to anchor his poetry in the eyewitness accounts of others, in his own personal examination of tbe field of battle, and in relevent artifacts, all in an effort to capture something of the 'cosmic myth' each had recognized in the great battle.

Hillsdale College, Michigan

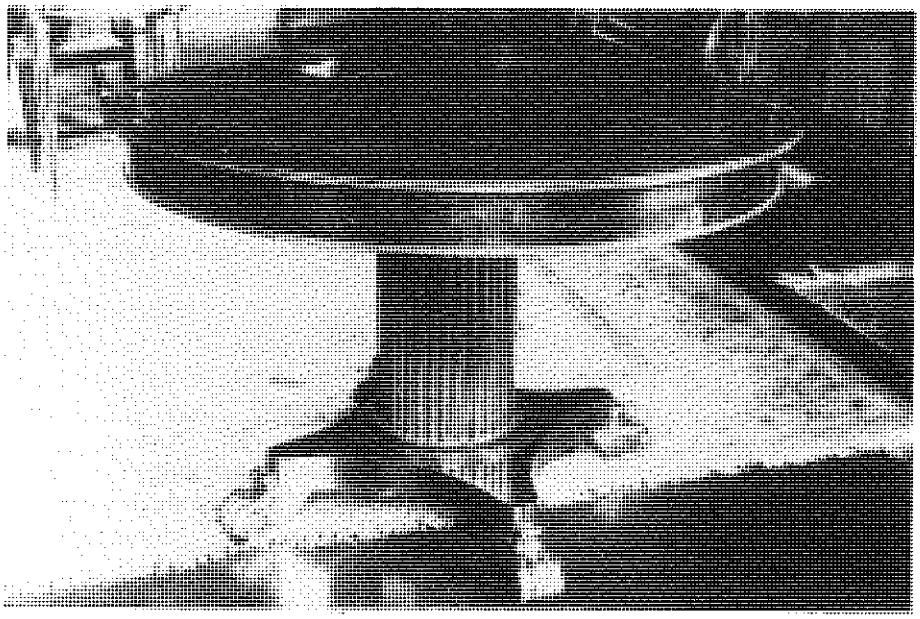
A Pictorial Supplement

A PECULIAR AND UNFORTUNATE CONCATENATION of events unfortunately prevented the following illustrations from being published alongside the articles they were intended to accompany in recent *Bulletin*s. The editor hopes that readers will welcome their appearance here, and tenders his apologies to the authors concerned for the regrettable delay.

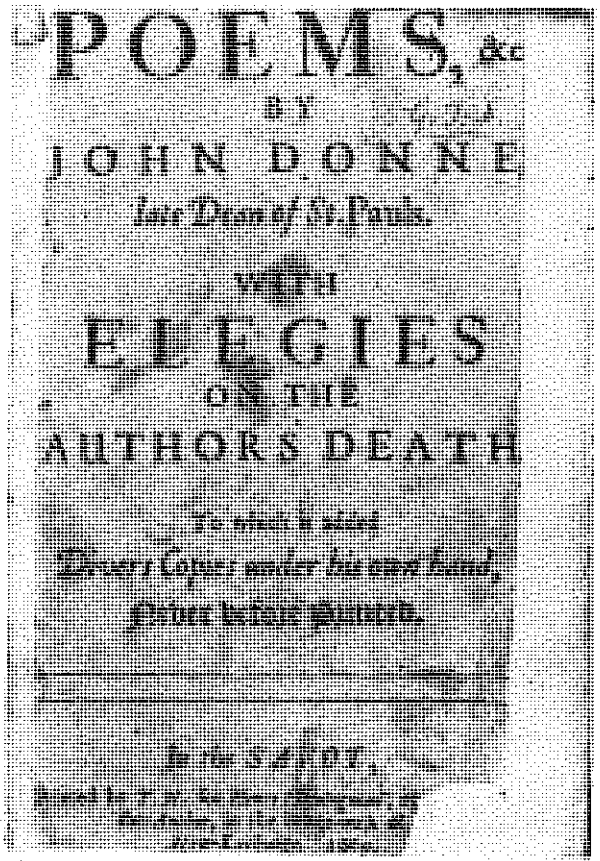
1. Berta Lawrence, 'Wordsworth's Last Visit to Somerset', *CLB* NS 85 (1994) 25-7. In her article Mrs Lawrence discussed the bridge in the dell of Holford Glen, close to Alfoxden House, where the Wordsworths often walked during their residence there, 1797-8. On page 27 she added that a photograph of about 1904 shows the stream in the Glen spanned by a flimsy, pretty trelliswork bridge. It is reproduced here by permission of Frith.



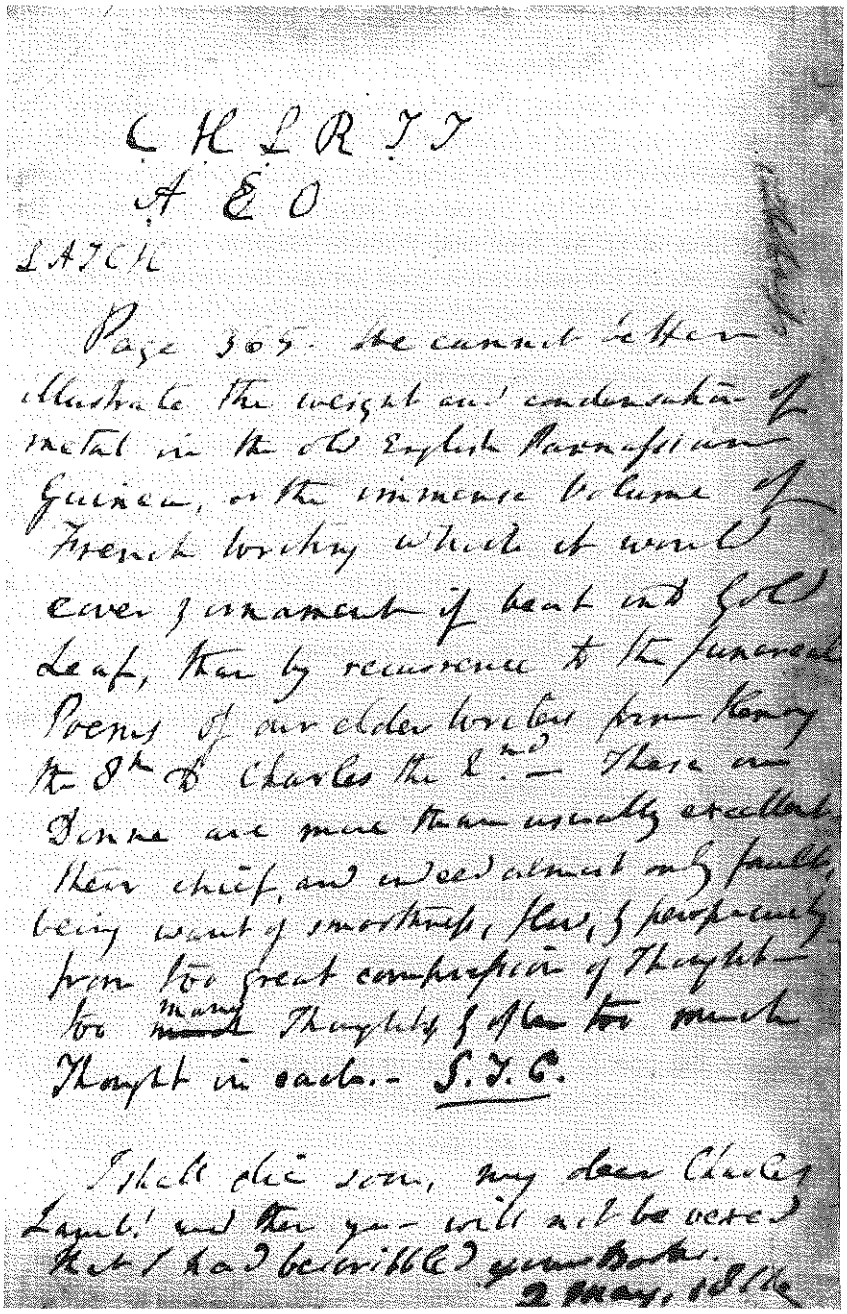
2. D. E. Wickham, 'An Unpublished Westwood Relic', *CLB* NS 85 (1994) 39. The relic in question is a photograph of a mahogany table, reproduced below.



3. Joseph Rosenblum, 'Lost Lambs; or, The Dispersal of Charles Lamb's Library: An Essay in Reconstruction', *CLB* NS 86 (1994) 47-55. At the bottom of page 50, Professor Rosenblum mentioned Lamb's copy of Donne's *Poems* (1669); the title-page of this volume is reproduced below, by kind permission of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.


POEMS, &c.
BY
JOHN DONNE
Late Dean of St. Paul's.
WITH
ELEGIES
ON THE
AUTHORS DEATH

4. On page 50 of his article, Professor Rosenblum also quotes an annotation by Coleridge in the endpaper of Lamb's copy of Donne's *Poems* (1669). This annotation is reproduced in full in facsimile below, by kind permission of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. A transcription of these marginalia is available in S. T. Coleridge, *Marginalia II: Camden to Hutton* ed. George Whalley (London, 1984), pp. 238, 242-3.



Book Reviews

Romantic Parodies, 1797-1831. Ed. DAVID A. KENT AND D. R. EWEN. Pp. 409. £45.00 hardback. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1992. ISBN 0 8386 3458 3.

THOUGH THE PERIOD of British Romanticism is not generally addressed in terms of the quality of its parodic writing, there was, if we take Robert Southey's word for it, a 'swarm of imitative poets in this age'. Almost all of the best-known poets of the Romantic period, from Southey himself to Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats, produced poetic parodies. The exception, somewhat inevitably, being Wordsworth, whose jaundiced opinion of parody - at least of parodies of himself - is apparent from his 1820 sonnet 'On the Detraction which followed the Publication of a certain Poem'. Journals from the *Anti-Jacobin* to *Blackwood's* enthusiastically printed parodic writings and the most successful collection of verse parodies of the age, James and Horace Smith's *Rejected Addresses* (1812) went into eighteen editions by 1833. *Romantic Parodies, 1797-1831* is a judicious mixture of the known and the obscure, reprinting notable parodies by Shelley, Byron and Hogg as well as resurrecting fine examples of the genre by the likes of D. M. Moir and William Maginn. David A. Kent and D. R. Ewen have done students of Romanticism a great service by registering the importance of Romantic parody and an even greater service in rescuing many fine examples of that parody from an ill-deserved oblivion.

The editors locate their anthology within recent theoretical work on parody, notably that of Margaret Rose and Linda Hutcheon (who contributes a foreword to the book). These theorists attempt to rescue parody from the charge that it is an intrinsically reactionary genre, a 'conservative force used to ridicule and thus control innovation' as Hutcheon puts it. Hutcheon argues that parody can be an equally powerful 'form of oppositionalist discourse against a dominant cultural, social or political force'. Both of these forms of parody are represented here, from the radical firebrand Shelley to the fire-breathing reactionary Maginn. (It has to be said, incidentally, that Maginn's parody of Wordsworth, 'Don Juan Unread', (1819) is much funnier than *Peter Bell the Third.*) However, neither Hutcheon nor Rose has studied Romantic parody in any depth and it is to be hoped that Kent and Ewen's pioneering volume will prompt a reconsideration of the importance of parodic treatments of the Romantic poets.

Inevitably, the volume's chief whipping boy is Wordsworth. John Clare once said that 'WW.'s nursery rhymes are ridiculous so much that reading them gives me the itch of parody which I cannot resist'. This itch seems to have been a widespread complaint during Wordsworth's lifetime. Over half of the parodies collected here take aim at Wordsworth. The editors maintain in their introduction that 'At their best . . . Romantic parodies provide us with contemporary critical responses to the major writers; and one of the fascinating things about this anthology is that it becomes possible to trace within it an alternative reception history of Wordsworth's poetry. Byron's criticism of the *Poems, in Two Volumes* as 'language not simple, but puerile' is rehearsed in contemporary parody. 'The Bards of the Lakes' (1809) offers the following piece of 'original simplicity':

> A hermit walk'd forth from his cell one day,
> And he met a snail across his way,
> And thus to the snail did the hermit say,
> 'Silly snail'.

James and Horace Smith make the same point in their 'Baby's Debut' from the *Rejected Addresses*. The other main contemporary critical commonplace about the 1807 collection was that Wordsworth, as the *Annual Review* put it, 'attaches exquisite emotions to objects which excite none in any other human breast'. The finest parodic example of this sentiment in this volume is Hogg's justly famous 'James Rigg'. Here is its depiction of Rigg's ass:

> And lo! A vision bright and beautiful
> Sheds a refulgent glory o'er the sand,
> The sand and gravel of my avenue!
> For, standing silent by the kitchen-door,
> Tinged by the morning sun, and in its own
> Brown natural hide most lovely, two long ears
> Upstretching perpendicularly, then
> With the horizon levell'd - to my gaze
> Superb as horn of fabled Unicorn,
> Each in its own proportions grander far
> Than the frontal glory of that wandering beast,
> Child of the Desart! Lo! a beauteous Ass,
> With panniers hanging silent at each side!

As Reynolds' parody *Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad* puts it, 'Out of sparrows' eggs have I hatched great truths, and with sextons' barrows have I wheeled into human hearts, piles of the weightiest philosophy'.

The 'Preface' to Reynolds' poem introduces another parodic counterpart to an early nineteenth century critical conceit, the idea of Wordsworth's 'egotistical sublime'. Here is Reynolds' Wordsworthian persona; 'I love to read my own poetry: it does my heart good. . . . N.B. The novel of Rob Roy is not so good as my poem on the same subject'. Maria Edgeworth once wrote of Wordsworth's 'proud-humility tone . . . as if he were always speaking *ex cathedra* for the instruction of the rising generation and never forgetting that he is MR. WORDSWORTH - the author and one of the poets of the lake'. Taking this to extremes, Reynolds' Wordsworth proclaims; 'My Ballads are the noblest pieces of verse in the whole range of English poetry: and I take this opportunity of telling the world I am a great man. Mr. Milton was also a great man. Ossian was a blind old fool. Copies of my previous works may be had in any numbers, by application at my publisher'.

After the publication of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth is mocked for the obscurity as opposed to the simplicity of his verse. The poet becomes the great mystical poet, characterized by an opaque obscurity. As Hartley Coleridge puts it:

> Behind a cloud his mystic sense,
> Deep-hidden, who can spy?
> Bright as the night, when not a star
> Is shining in the sky.

The main drawback of this very useful collection is that the volume is sloppily edited; perhaps a forgivable matter in a critical monograph, but very annoying in an edition such as this. Attributions are sometimes wrong and sometimes highly speculative, the proof-reading is at times lamentable, quotations are often misreferenced and secondary sources are sometimes given incorrect titles. For example, the very first items are selections from the *Anti-Jacobin*. These are all attributed to Hookham Frere and Canning, including 'The

Soldier's Wife', which is by Gifford. The first page of the notes renders *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey* (1837-8) as *The Works of Robert Southey* and the quotation from that edition is incorrectly given as being from volume 10, page 221 (it is from page 250). And so it goes on. Hogg is said to have included only two parodies of Wordsworth in *The Poetic Mirror*. Shelley is said to have written *The Masque of Anarchy* and *Peter Bell III*.

The first epigram from Wordsworth's *Peter Bell* (a poem which came in for some rough parodic treatment from Shelley and Reynolds) comes from *Romeo and Juliet*; 'What's in a name?'. 'Not very much' would seem to be Ewen and Kent's answer on the evidence of some of the editing here. We come across 'Wiliam' Wordsworth, for example. But apart from such forgivable proof-reading lapses, there are several odd editorial decisions and errors of a more substantial kind. Titles are truncated to the detriment of their parodic force. Reynolds' *Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad* (1819) becomes simply *Peter Bell*. Its epigram 'I do affirm that I am the REAL Simon Pure' is simply left out. Reynolds is granted authorship of *The Dead Asses* (1819) when its authorship remains to be established. Another parody of Wordsworth from 1819, *Benjamin the Waggoner, a Ryghte merrie and conceitede Tale in Verse. A Fragment* is rendered *Benjamin the Waggoner*, when the full title, with its archaisms, is making a significant point about the literary habits of the Lake School. Furthermore, in labelling the poem 'A Fragment', the author of the poem might be said to be registering what Thomas McFarland has called the 'fragmented modalities; of Romantic poetry. Even more worryingly, authorship of this poem (which has not yet been satisfactorily established) is attributed to the previously unheard of 'John Wilson Lockhart', a hybrid personage who sounds like a parody of a contributor to Blackwood's; half Christopher North, half Sir Walter Scott's biographer. Such slapdash editing tends to detract from the great enjoyment to be had from reading this book. Kent and Ewen have had a marvellous idea; it is a pity that their execution of that idea is so faulty.

University of Sunderland JOHN STRACHAN

Lower Edmonton in Pictures compiled by GRAHAM DALLING (London: London Borough of Enfield, 1994), £2.75. Copies available from Peter Brown, Edmonton Group Librarian, Edmonton Green Library, 36-44 South Mall, Edmonton N9 0NX.

IF CHARLES LAMB were to return to the area of his last home, how much of the local neighbourhood would he recognize? As this book illustrates, very little, unfortunately. In common with many urban areas, the demands of transport, housing and modern retailing have resulted in enormous changes.

Within 15 years of his death, a low level railway provided a connection with trains to London, although its inconvenient route offered little threat to the regular horse bus service Lamb would have known. It was another 20 years before a fast direst line connected Lower Edmonton to London. Trams, trolleybusses and cars all contributed to the widening and straightening of roads, rebuilding of bridges and demolition of older properties.

However, it is only since the 1960s that many, including older residents, have found little to recognize from the area of their childhood. Massive redevelopment of a run-down area known as The Green with its obliteration of the existing layout of small roads and lanes, terraces of Victorian houses, high streets and arcades of shops and public houses has resulted in the persistent image of the area today; high-rise flats, unused car parks, a draughty covered market, tracts of undeveloped land. Subsequent demolition or closure of the remaining quality Victorian public buildings and neglect in favour of the more fashionable areas of the

London Borough of Enfield has left a local sensitivity to its neglected heritage which in a renewed spirit of community focus Enfield is attempting to redress. This booklet represents one aspect of that action.

Commissioned as part of three local heritage projects and compiled by the Local History Officer, it contains 50 photographs of the streets and buildings of Lower Edmonton mostly as they looked between the 1880s and early 1900s with a few later views. An attempt has been made to include a photograph of each major area or street. The pictures are attractively reproduced in sepia with a brief but informative note giving identification, location, dates and additional information. A short introduction gives a history of the development of the area.

Any attempt to celebrate the rich cultural, historic and architectural heritage of this area should be applauded and valued. However, a few criticisms seem appropriate. The sepia finish, whilst attractive, appears to sacrifice some definition that for those of us who take a magnifying glass to identify a detail find frustrating. However, this does assume a quality in the original prints that may not have been present. The criteria for selection, not at first apparent nor stated (the compiler offers no personal note), appears to have been a record of each major road and location. A few simple street plans covering different periods would have greatly enhanced the value of this approach. It also suggests that compilations based on alternative criteria might provide the contents of other booklets assuming the sources are available.

Elians will notice the omission of any picture of Bay Tree Cottage although the gravestone is shown and mention made of the house. This seems particularly slighting when one reads that the Society helped fund the publication of the booklet! However, as Lamb is the only eminent resident mentioned perhaps we should take this as redress.

Obviously there is the opportunity here both to draw local attention to former famous residents (including Keats and the architect McMurdo) and perhaps consider a publication on 'Lamb's Edmonton' as part of this or a separate project. In the meantime, the pictures of unsanitary cottages, family-owned shops, thriving public houses, rural lanes and horse-drawn traffic would all have been familiar to Charles Lamb during his time in Edmonton and may interest fellow Elians.

Lamb's Cottage, Edmonton SANDRA KNOTT

Theatre Review

A Busy Day (or An Arrival from India) by FANNY BURNEY. King's Head Theatre, Islington, Summer 1994

FANNY BURNEY WROTE EIGHT PLAYS (not many people know this!), none of which was published in her lifetime, as her father, Dr Charles Burney, disapproved of her writing for the stage. Her verse play, *Edwy and Elgiva*, survived only one performance at Drury Lane. Today her fame rests on her novels, diaries and letters. We owe it to Alan Coveney, Director of the Show of Strength Theatre Company, that, chancing on a copy of *A Busy Day* in a remainder bookship in Bristol (published as an academic paperback by an American University Press), he recognized its potential.

We are presented with a wonderful cast of characters. Wealthy Eliza Watts, newly returned from a long sojourn in India, loves the well-connected but impecunious Cleveland. Cleveland's uncle, the purse-proud Sir Marmaduke Tylney, and his aunt, the class-conscious Lady Wilhelmina, plan an advantageous match for him. Eliza is reunited with her parents - Mr Watts (a sympathetic nouveau riche who has made a fortune in the City) and Mrs Watts

(illiterate and overwhelmed at their new-found wealth) - and with her sister Peg, who aspires to gentility ('Call me Margarella!'). Cleveland's equally impecunious brother Frank schemes to repair his fortunes with marriage to an heiress (any heiress) reluctantly aided by his friend Lord John Dervis, who is otherwise sadly devoid of any occupation. Miss Percival the heiress, originally intended for Cleveland, contributes her own schemes to the general imbroglio. After many twists and turns all ends happily with Cleveland betrothed to Eliza and Frank to Miss Percival.

Fanny Burney brilliantly makes fun of the snobbery of Lady Tylney, horrified at having 'a young woman of the City' as niece by marriage; the pretensions of Peg, whose costume in Act II is completely over the top; the hard-headedness of Sir Marmaduke representing the landed gentry, whose main concern is which of the suitors will pay off his mortgage. Much of the plot hinges on the effects of money on the various characters: 'What is there melancholy in £20,000?!' Every scene produces new pleasures: Lady Tylney, enunciating in tones reminiscent of Lady Bracknell, 'They met in Kensington Gardens!'; Miss Percival, temporarily disappointed in love, wails, 'There are no convents nowadays!'; Mr Watts, to his commonsensical cousin Joel Tibbs, 'It is a very troublesome thing having daughters.'

The play ends with a vindication of Business and a paean of praise for the British Empire (received with somewhat ironical applause). In such an excellent production it is invidious to single out individuals but especially enjoyable were Ian Kelly's portrayal of Frank, never at a loss but turning every setback to advantage, and Juliette Grassby's frenetic Miss Percival, going into well-simulated hysterics at the sight of a wig.

A full house at the King's Head, Islington, on 5 July, warmly applauded the production. Working in the confines of a small stage the cast were not hampered by elaborate scenery - two garden seats indicated Kensington Gardens and a chaise longue Miss Percival's drawing room. The cast worked excellently together and were invariably audible - a rare event in the theatre nowadays. The programme was informative about Fanny Burney's background and the London of her day, and even the actors she hoped would play the parts (including several known to Lamb). Charles Lamb entered the service of the East India Company in 1792 so perhaps the muslins brought back from Calcutta by Eliza in 1800 may have been among the cargoes he recorded! (Peg, incidentally, expresses amazement that muslins were manufactured in India, thinking 'they are all savages there'.) Lamb, of course, had many links with the Burney family, especially Martin, nephew of Fanny.

MADELINE HUXSTEP

Society News and Notes From Members

Obituary: Florence Reeves

The sad death of one of our longest-serving, and most distinguished Elians, Florence Reeves, is the occasion for two tributes - both of which, I hope readers will agree, are complementary: the first is Madeline Huxstep, the second by Winifred Courtney.

Madeline Huxstep:

We mourn the death in her ninetieth year of Florence Reeves who was the Society's Membership Secretary for an incredible 39 years. This statistic does scant justice to the extent of her services to the Society and the memory of Charles Lamb. Joining the Society in 1938 soon after its foundation, she became a key figure in the team assembled by our first General Secretary, Ernest Crowsley, which led us through the vicissitudes of wartime and the subsequent years of consolidation.

A glance through the minute books of earlier days gives some indication of her involvement in every facet of our activities. Apart from meticulously keeping our membership records, for many years she organized the annual Birthday Celebration; prepared Council Minutes and Annual Reports; maintained an extensive correspondence with members worldwide (which often blossomed into firm friendships); was the link with Button Snap and its tenants; gave lectures both to the Society and outside bodies; was an active member of the former Dramatic Group . . . the list is endless. Above all, she was an unfailing source of information about events and people in the Society's history. All this she managed to combine with her professional life as Headmistress.

Those who climbed the stairs to her top-floor flat in Hampstead were welcomed in an atmosphere steeped in Eliana: pictures, photographs, books, files of correspondence and issues of the *Bulletin* ready for dispatch to enquirers.

In 1985 Florence was Guest of Honour at the Birthday Celebration Luncheon at Frederick's in Camden Passage and delighted us with her reminiscences of the Society. In 1986 she resigned as Membership Secretary and was elected a Vice-President as a tribute to her unparalleled years of service. In May 1990 she retired from the Council but continued to attend meetings when her health permitted.

We should not fail to mention her love of music and her gift for singing. A letter to her from Basil Francis (28.2.1959) may evoke memories of occasions when she enriched our meetings with song: 'I wish I could express adequately my gratitude for "Home, Sweet Home" last night. Your singing, I am sure, made the audience overlook the shortcomings of my talk and they will certainly remember the song - and the singer - long after they have forgotten anything in my talk.' We, too, shall long remember with gratitude the singer, the lover of Charles and Mary Lamb, the quietly efficient colleague and the loyal friend who devoted so much of her life to the prosperity of the Charles Lamb Society.

Winifred Courtney:

1993-4 has been a sad year for us all, with the departure of so many we knew and valued. My husband and I had no sooner returned to the U.S. from England in mid-July this year (a mainly family visit, but with brief London visits to Mary Wedd and to Molly Lefebure and her husband John Gerrish) than a letter from Florence's god-daughter, Sheila Burchett, told us in kind detail, and even before some of her friends in England had heard, of Florence's passing in June, to our great sorrow.

We first met her, Denis and I, I think in 1973, when she was Membership Secretary, and an excellent one, of tbe Charles Lamb Society, which I had joined not long before. I had been deeply interested in the English Romantics since adolescence, and having resigned from my last job, with my husband still at work, determined to do a book about Charles Lamb's early life as one of the most attractive of that crew, and rather less 'biographied' of recent years than most. Also, since we have close family ties to England, we would be visiting England often.

So it was Florence we first met, and Florence (soon together with Basil Savage, then attracting first-rate scholars to the *Bulletin* as editor of its new series) whose many kindnesses and careful information did so much to encourage and make the book (*Young Charles Lamb* [New York and London, 1982]) possible. She spent several day with us, particularly in '73 and '75, first taking us to most of the Lamb dwellings outside of central London (always by public transport, for she did not own a car): Islington, where we were able to go inside the Lamb house; Enfield; and Edmonton - his and Mary's graves and the house in which he died, also shown us by its owner. Having found the way there, I was later able to spend several

weeks in the (then Edmonton) Lamb Library, doing my research and lunching from brown paper by the Lamb grave (the only 'rural' spot close by).

In 1975 she took us to Kenwood and Hampstead Heath (we already knew the Keats house - but perhaps that too), and in the same year Don Reiman, ever helpful in New York, suggested I visit the Wordsworth Summer Conference in Ambleside (later Grasmere), where I met more Lamb-Coleridge-Wordsworth scholars, and, from what turned out to be many Wordsworth Summer Conferences over the years, vastly extended my knowledge of Romantics generally and produced warm friendships which still persist.

All this from Florence's willing offer of help! Thereafter we visited with her regularly on our English sojourns, first in her pretty house, then in her flat (or flats? - the last, in her early eighties, was up two flights!). Very often she would meet us at the tube station and walk with us to her house - she was wonderfully sturdy. We had lunches out, or her teas with homemade cakes (at least once she visited our daughter's house, then in Clapham). There was always so much to say - about the Society (whose meetings never coincided with our visits until 1993!), about Charles Lamb himself, about her singing and church work. We loved her dearly from the start.

She had already retired from many years of teaching when we first knew her (what a wonderful teacher she must have been), so children and their ways were another inexhaustible topic. (I was both parent and, briefly, teacher, too.) We admired the way she made a life for herself, we read her in the *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, and we rejoiced with her, as the years flew by, that *younger* folk were at last becoming involved in Lamb studies and the Society. Between visits we corresponded three or four times a year.

Florence to me was the epitome of what a single person with great gifts and warm interest in others can be, an *important* person who made herself a scholar and friend of scholars, the altogether hard worker, so rare in this world, on whom others can always depend - so modest, gentle, neat, and soft-spoken (one could always say *anything* to her; infinitely receptive, she would always understand) and yet so strong in making the life she set for herself and in her own integrity and Christian convictions, so gracefully joining with others in their common causes.

'She was really ready to go', says Sheila. 'She often said to me [after a series of falls and other troubles] she wished God would take her. . . . He granted her wish in the end and I know she is now at peace.' Her devoted god-daughter's observation makes a fitting end to this brief memoir.

Obituary: Professor John Wain, C.B.E.

John Wain, a Vice-President of the Society and distinguished as novelist, poet, and critic, died on 25 May 1994, aged 69 years. He was Guest of Honour at the Birthday Celebration Luncheon in 1974 during his time as Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford (1973-8).

Madeline Huxstep

From the Editor

The Wordsworth Winter School 1995

As is the custom in this journal, I am pleased to announce the dates of next year's Wordsworth Winter School: 5-10 February 1995. At this year's Winter School, as at most of its predecessors, it was possible to toast our author's immortal memory on his birthday; next year, perhaps, the toast may be proposed on its eve. At any rate, after the success of this year's Winter School on the theme of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), the organizers have wisely decided to follow it up with that of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). Publicity materials will be

distributed in due course; anyone not on the Wordsworth Trust mailing list should contact Sylvia Wordsworth at Dove Cottage, Grasmere, Cumbria LA22 9SH.

Bibliography of Reviews of the Works of Charles Lamb

We gratefully acknowledge receipt of an important contribution to Elian scholarship: Yasuhiko Ozawa, a Japanese Elian and Professor of English at Shizuoka University in Japan, has just published his 'Bibliography of Reviews of the Works of Charles Lamb in the British and American Periodicals (1) 1798-1934' in *Studies in the Humanties* 45-1 (July 1994) 127-54. It lists early contributors to the *Charles Lamb Society Bulletin*, including the likes of collector and benefactor John Turnbull. Our copy of Professor Ozawa's offprint will now join his 1973 bibliography of Lamb studies (and the Turnbull collection) at the Guildhall Library, where the Society's holdings are being catalogued by the indefatigable Deborah Hedgecock. We wish Professor Ozawa well with his continuing researches.

Library For Sale

I am grateful to Patrick O'Leary for tipping me off as to the future of the Passmore Edwards Library in Fore Street, Edmonton, recently listed Grade II. The Library formerly housed part of the Society's archives, and contains plaques depicting Lamb and Keats. In the *Enfield Preservation Society Newsletter* No. 114 (Summer 1994), Len Keeble reports that the Library is now empty and for sale; it is fervently hoped that a suitable user will shortly be found, and that the plaques to Lamb and Keats will be preserved by its new owner.

From the General Secretary

'Interiors': A Ramble led by Edward Preston

The rail strike on 16 August did not deter members of the Dickens Fellowship and of the Charles Lamb Society from exploration of places associated with both authors in the Holborn/Lincolns Inn area. (At least one CLS member came armed with her copy of the little red book 'Lamb's London'.) Blessed with delightful weather we enjoyed the gardens of Staple's Inn and Lincoln's Inn, and several Lamb sites including Fetter Lane near Bird's Academy (Lamb's first school) and Southampton Buildings (now entirely rebuilt) where Lamb lived briefly on two occasions. It was a privilege to see the interiors of Barnard's Inn, the Patent Office Library, and 57/8 Lincoln's Inn Fields. Edward Preston read relevant passages from Dickens and Lamb; especially appreciated was Lamb's letter to Manning (28.3.1809) describing the horrors of moving house.

Dinner/Luncheon Menus (a repeat request)

Can you help to fill the gaps in our Archives with menus for 1940, 1942-9, 1964, 1966, 1979, 1983, and any for 1991 onwards. Please contact the General Secretary if you can help.

Spreading the word

Did you enjoy this *Bulletin*? Of course you did. Many others want to do so too. We are urgently seeking a volunteer who has a little space available to store back issues of the *Bulletin* and who can deal with requests for back numbers - sometimes whole runs, sometimes single copies. Postage will of course be refunded. If you can help, please contact the General Secretary on 081 940 3837.

Notes and News From Members

Trivial Pursuit

For some time I have been collecting odds and ends of Transatlantic publishing history and gossip (sometimes even amounting to criticism) concerning my favourite author; and after publishing two small books on the subject (*Charles Lamb in America to 1848* [1963], and

Eliana Americana: Charles Lamb in the United States, 1849-1866 [1971]), I have continued to be on the lookout for such anciliary items. Following are two fairly recent examples.

Harrison T. Meserole, in 'Charles Lamb's Reputation and Influence in America to 1835', *Journal of General Education* 16 (January 1965) 281-308, is assiduous in tracing the American periodical appearances of Lamb, both as an involuntary contributor and as the object of critical attention. Most interesting, perhaps, to a 'collector', he does what I should have done in 1963: he identifies the *first* appearance of an Elian essay in American print. On 4 April 1821, the *Philadelphia National Recorder* carried, without comment or credit, the amusing 'Mrs Battle's Opinions on Whist'. That was roughly two months after the piece had first been published in the *London Magazine*.

I was disappointed, in 1963 *and* in 1971, that I had come across no slightest mention of Lamb by the author of *Walden*. I had simply overlooked the delightfully self-contradictory passage in a letter to Charles Wyatt Rice, 5 August 1836 (*The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau* ed. Walter Harding and Carl Bode [New York University Press, 1958], p. 9):

> 'Epistolary matter', says Lamb, usually comprises three topics, news, sentiment and puns. Now as to news I don't know the coin - the newspapers take care of that. Puns I abhor and more especially deliberate ones. Sentiment alone is immortal, the rest short-lived - evanescent. Now this is neither matter-of-fact, nor *pungent* nor yet sentimental -

Wallace Nethery

50 Years Ago: from CLS Bulletin No. 64 (Tenth Year) October 1944

In Memory of 'Q' [first President of the Charles Lamb Society] - by the Hon. Gilbert Coleridge

It is not easy to write without emotion concerning a man whom I have known as a friend for some 60 years. . . . His talk was direct, sometimes original, and tinged with a sunny humour which amused, but never wounded, the soul. Deceit was not in him; he spoke his mind, and he was lovable in that we knew he aimed at truth in his speech. . . . How hard to say anything new about Shakespeare or Milton? But 'Q' has done it, and made an original triumph of it. . . . He was the friend of all, and if they do not miss him as a writer at Fowey, they mourn him as a man. I am privileged to mourn him in both capacities.

Report of September [1944] meeting

Like Kipling's mariner, our Hon. Secretary [Mr. E. G. Crowsley] is a fellow of infinite resource and sagacity; so that when he heard, almost at the last minute, that Dr. Ranjee G. Shahani was not prepared to give his lecture on September 9th, he coolly called upon several members to produce short papers on 'Charles Lamb - The Ideal Bedside Author'. The result was one of the most pleasant meetings the Society has ever held. Mr S. M. Rich, who never reads in bed, was an odd choice for Chairman at such a meeting, but at least he was impartial. . . . Miss Annette Park and Miss Florence Reeves followed with delightful papers prefaced by entirely unnecessary apologies. Mr A. F. Bishop's paper [*On Reading Lamb in Bed*] is given on another page. So is that read by Mr E. F. Lewis, who admitted that his effort [*At the Chemist's: An Elian Prescription*] was not strictly relevant to the subject of the symposium. 'Strictly' is good! There was a very good discussion, in which Miss A. Wedd . . . took part. A vote of thanks to Speakers and Chairman was moved by Mr E. G. Crowsley and seconded by Miss Mary C. Henderson.

Future Meetings

14 October Frank Swinnerton
11 November Edmund Blunden