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Sommario

Editoriale

Emma Mason and Elena Spandri

What is it that continues to draw readers and critics to Wordsworth's writings? Since critics began commenting on his work in the nineteenth century, they have warned us against his egotism, feigned radicalism, ordinariness, late conservatism, and will to bend the world as he saw it to a fiercely independent and subjective vision. Student readers are confronted with a wall of criticism that, as Adam Potkay states, «sees in Wordsworth's lyric imagination a bad-faith effort to evade historical-material realities» [POTKAY 2007, p. 393], not to mention an academic anxiety voiced by at least some of the profession that Romanticism itself is nothing more than a movement of «ideological hostility to the forces giving rise to the modern world» [MANNHEIM 1986, p. 90]. Fears that Romanticism signifies a nostalgic looking back to outmoded virtues have been fired further by the British coalition government's recent attempt to re-brand Romantic poetry as a «demanding» subject with which school children should engage as a test of their intellectual mettle [see ADAMS 2013]. On the one hand, the association between rigour and Romanticism proffered by a Tory-Liberal education system grants ammunition to those who seek to censure the field as «heritage studies»; on the other, it boosts those critics who wish to elevate Romanticism as the most difficult of subjects, an arena for challenging theoretical innovation, marathon archival editions and readings designed to showcase the ingenuity of the critic over and above period writing. Against this is that aspect of Romantic criticism that seeks to protest its cultural diversity, a period of «rebels and reactionaries» whose «distinguishing feature», Octavio Paz writes, was change, «not only in the arts and letters, but also in imagination, sensibility, taste, and ideas. It was a morality, an eroticism, a politics, a way of dressing and a way of loving, a way of living and of dying» [PAZ 1989, p. 60]. Yet as Paz notes, the period's obsession with the emotional experience of «the instantaneous present» has almost obliged critics to turn the other way by anatomizing its world picture into historically measurable themes. This has been particularly true for new historical readings of Wordsworth that, rather than blaming him for overlooking the historical, hyper-historicize his work through contextualizing

and cross-referencing it with specific knowledge sets. While these readings deepen our sense of what Wordsworth read and responded to in his writing, they have hardened the framework through which we approach his poetry, making an approach to his work at once more difficult (only the reader with specialist knowledge can access his work) and more limiting (only methodologies that toughen up our reading experience are seen as legitimate).

Our shared experience of reading and teaching Wordsworth, however, in Italy, the UK and the US, suggests that readers are drawn to Wordsworth because of the way he allows and warrants a kind of «soft» thinking. By «soft» we do not mean «easy» or «weak», but rather «gentle», «malleable» and affective, one that enables the reader to reflect on what is given in the experience of a text rather than basing an interpretation on a working back from external events and sources. Simon Jarvis has recognized this in his commentary on blank verse as a «flexible medium» for Wordsworth, one «in which he is able to follow with close discrimination the minutest nuances of affective coloration or of deep conceptual reflection, and which at the same time is intensely and evidently melodic» [JARVIS 2011, p. 295]. For Jarvis, Wordsworth's investment in form «does not drive the reader forward, but accompanies him or her: a movement inward, a comparison with the shape of our own experience, is necessary to make the writing intelligible» [JARVIS 2011, p. 295]. This movement inward toward experience, sound and feeling begins with observations about Wordsworth and his writing, rather than using him as a text-book guide to various contemporary topics. Why is he always in bed? How does he figure our being in nature? What does he mean when he calls faith «intuition»? Does his philosophical song extend to a singing of material objects, like sofas? How bad was his sense of smell? Why do his gestures of sympathy seem at times so reticent and distanced? What would it mean to think of Wordsworth's imagining of time as a «touch» as well as narrative? What do his ballads reveal about the way his poems tell us stories?

These ideas, all addressed in this issue, are not really «topics» as such, but are rather modes of intimacy with Wordsworth's poetry that fall within fields that comprise the most interesting and exciting of recent work on Wordsworth: affect studies, eco-criticism, thing theory, phenomenology and religion. These are «matters of concern» and not «matters of fact». As Bruno Latour argues, twentieth-century criticism «made a mistake» in believing «there was no efficient way to criticize matters of fact except my moving *away* from them and directing one's attention *toward* the conditions that made them possible» [LATOUR 2004, p. 231]. Encouraging a turn away from «matters of fact» (apparently indisputable, polemical certitudes) to «matters of concern» (that which we «cherish» and seek to protect and care for), Latour asks us to re-assess the thinker who can only debunk, undermine and «toughen up» critical studies. He does this by inviting us to follow Alfred Whitehead's observation that philosophy «bifurcates» nature into primary qualities (the objective «real», the physical world known only to science) and

secondary qualities (subjective experience, what the mind adds to the real to make sense of it). For example, what objectively passes into our eyes (light waves) is not visible until we subjectively «see» them as colour and shape. Whitehead negotiates this dualism by suggesting we «prehend» things in the world through and in our bodies by physically and emotionally perceiving their continual interactions with the environment, us, and the system of relationships in which they occur. If the objective really were split from the subjective, Latour reminds us, living organisms would not be possible «since being an organism means being the sort of thing whose primary and secondary qualities – if they did exist – are endlessly blurred» [LATOUR 2005, p. 227]. Despite this, modern critical thinking still elevates material objects over and above objects of belief (poetry, gods, emotion), the latter clung to only by, it is assumed, the most naïve of believers:

> When naïve believers are clinging forcefully to their objects, claiming that they are made to do things because of their gods, their poetry, their cherished objects, you can turn all of those attachments into so many fetishes and humiliate all the believers by showing that it is nothing but their own projection, that you, yes you alone, can see. [LATOUR 2004, p. 239]

The modern critic then strikes these naïve believers again by showing that «whatever they think, their behaviour is entirely determined» by an «objective reality they don't see», thus privileging a realist thinking directed only to matters of fact, never to matters of concern.

This issue on Wordsworth, however, seeks to engage with matters of concern and collects a series of essays that speak from a critical position that assembles (rather than debunks), gathers (rather than belittles) and cares for a way of reading Wordsworth gently. Latour's engagement with Whitehead is especially relevant here because of Whitehead's own investment in Wordsworth, whom he triumphs in the 1925 *Science and the Modern World*. In Whitehead's cosmological scheme, Wordsworth's imagining of nature is inclusive and unifying and grasps the human, the living and nonliving, and all surrounding things as an ongoing «whole» [WHITEHEAD 1925, p. 127]. Wordsworth's ability to think «beyond anything which we can grasp with a clear apprehension» allows Whitehead to both think «enduring things» («some greater reality […] thought under many names, The Absolute, Brahma, The Order of Heaven, God») apart from «eternal objects» («colour and shape»); but also to recognize the inherent and unifying value of everyday experience:

> Remembering the poetic rendering of our concrete experience, we see at once that the element of value, of being valuable, of having value, of being an end in itself, of being something which is for its own sake,

> must not be omitted in any account of an event as the most concrete actual something. […] This is the secret of Wordsworth's worship of nature. [WHITEHEAD p. 95]

Wordsworth's poetry thus realizes the value of «all things» in one interwoven texture, from valuing the worth of organic life (against scientific abstraction) to its aesthetic appreciation [p. 96]. It forges a contract between things where, in Latour's terminology, matters of fact are suddenly considered as matters of concern, transforming the word «criticism» into an association with «positive metaphors» [LATOUR 2004, p. 247]. Without this impulse, Latour argues, criticism becomes barbarous, seeking facts, science and objectivity as a way of humiliating «naïve believers», who cling to «their gods, their poetry, their cherished objects» while the critic turns «all of those attachments into so many fetishes» to show «that it is nothing but their own projection, that you, yes you alone, can see» [p. 239]. Quoting Whitehead, Latour invokes a nondualist reading of the world as a counter, one in which «the red glow of the sunset should be as much part of nature as are the molecules and electric waves by which men of science would explain the phenomenon» [WHITEHEAD 1920, pp. 28-29]. Such thinking does not oppose the «boring electric waves» to the «rich world of the glowing sun», but rather attempts to see them together, to «gather» them, as Heidegger would say, as mediating objects of experience without reducing that experience to explanation [LATOUR 2004, p. 244].

The volume opens with Geoffrey Hartman, a critic whose percipience and generosity of spirit can be felt across this issue and to whom we dedicate its contents. His wonderful exploration of the ways Wordsworth recasts English cultural memory at the turn of the nineteenth century moves beyond the chivalric ethos and the neo-gothic imagination at work in the traditional ballad form to foster a non-apocalyptic idea of poetic story-telling. The Wordsworthian ballad rescues folkloric belief from residuality and expands cosmic sympathies by igniting a «cultural chain of memorialization» in which collective forms of transmission and post-revolutionary identity issues are not sensed as mutually exclusive. At the same time, Wordsworth's rejection of catastrophic language confronts present-day poets and readers with a radical question: can the mild handling of memory and trauma, figuring in the spots of tradition of the type epitomized in «Hart-Leap Well», still provide a template for post-Holocaust places and genocidal settings? On parallel grounds, Rhian Williams's essay interrogates canonical eco-critical perspectives on Wordsworth's poetry of nature, initiating her discussion with a reflection on the 2009 Cumbrian floods that inundated the town of Cockermouth. The temporary exposure of Wordsworth's former home – a property of the National Trust since 1837 – to the vulnerability of an ordinary place undermines the interpretation of Wordsworth's nature poetry in terms

of a middle-class conservative ideal of permanence and harmony. In confronting contemporary readers with the disquieting spectacle of a disarrayed environment, the image of a flooded Cockermouth encourages a reading of Wordsworthian eco-poetics as an engagement with the affective experience of a natural world that subsists in a continuous process of interaction with human presence and is exposed to the same condition of instability.

Shifting from environmental to communitarian spiritual ethics, the volume proceeds with Emma Mason's investigation on the role of intuition in the religious experience envisaged in *The Excursion*. Against the grain of critical interpretations that downplay the relevance of intuition in Wordsworth's poetry and overvalue the politics of isolation and disengagement embodied by the Solitary and the Wanderer, Mason argues for intuition as an affective and cognitive phenomenon caught up between un-theorized ordinary experience and high philosophical and theological speculation. By reading intuition instead as a vehicle of mutual attention, dialogic exchange, and intimacy among humans, she takes Book IV of *The Excursion* beyond the usual limits designated by a denominational Christianity that is often reductively associated with the poem's religious ethics. Similarly, Rowan Rose Boyson approaches Wordsworth's religious verse from the unconventional vantage point of the poet's anosmia and reads the scent references in *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* in the context of medical discourse on sense deficiencies, as well as in relation to the shifting significance of sensuousness in the nineteenth century. By showing how in Wordsworth's late poetry scent is employed as a metaphor for divine communication and for the cognitive work of the senses, Boyson offers the association of faith, scent, and thought as a strategy of negotiation between the poet's unflinching Anglican affiliations and his subterranean Catholic sympathies.

The intermittence of emotional connectedness and of memory dynamics is the focus of the volume's two succeeding essays. Leslie Brisman investigates Wordsworth's «autistic behaviours» arguing that, although human suffering is a characteristic Wordsworth theme and the transition from love of nature to love of man appears as the trademark of much of Wordsworth's poetry, the poet often exhibits an unnerving reticence about gestures of sympathy. Brisman invites readers to accept Wordsworth's spots of emotional austerity as an affective counterpoint to an all-embracing ethics of poetry that does not discriminate between the touch of nature and the touch of mankind, yet demands occasional pause from the «dizzy raptures» of fellow-feeling. Time imagined in the guise of a sudden, epiphanic touch, as opposed to chronological sequence, is at the core of Giuliana Ferreccio's cross-examination of the different beginnings of *The Two-Part Prelude* and *The Prelude 1805,* as well as of her parallel reading of one landmark spot of time and its earlier sub-text. Drawing from current narratological debates,

Ferreccio shows how critically productive the notion of anticipation of retrospection can be when the critic needs to approach the complex time settings of *The Prelude* in terms of a palimpsest of memories and attachments.

The final two essays included in the volume interrogate Wordsworth's poetry from the allegedly polarised perspectives of thing theory and affect studies. Comparing Cowper's and Wordsworth's view of the «life of things», Crystal Lake reads Wordsworth's poetry of nature and affection as building a case against commodities and global commercialism. Does matter feel? Are all kinds of objects endowed with agency? Does acknowledging the agency of things imply an avowal, or rather a disavowal, of their relationship with imperial economy? These are the questions to which Wordsworth's poetry implicitly responds. Lake contends that Wordsworth creates a typology within those eighteenth-century epistemologies that conflate things with objects, and that such typology enables him to celebrate many organic objects as sentient and autonomous things, while also excluding commodities. In denying commodities the status of «best objects» with which the poet and the readers can «hourly communicate», Wordsworth offers poetry as a site of resistance to the homogenizing pressure of global consumerism and its propensity to neutralize the healthy distance between the world and the mind. Finally, Adela Pinch takes readers as far as Wordsworth's bedchamber through a reading of an 1802 manuscript poem Lake also discusses, one that explores the affective as well as the editorial implications of unsettled feelings: «These Chairs they have no Words to Utter». If the only way to detect the quality and intensity of emotions in poetry is to study how they materialize, not only in speech and words but also in punctuation, what do we make of such weird and inscrutable feelings as shame, disappointment, or irritation, that appear editorially untranslatable? Pinch's essay encourages us to think of the study of literary affect as something that involves transferences and projections of feelings and is highly dependent on our angle of entry into a text. Emotions are intelligent responses to a perception of values [NUSSBAUM 2003] and it is important that, in acknowledging Wordsworth's poems as «containers» for a wide range of feelings, we are ready to take responsibility for our own angles of vision.

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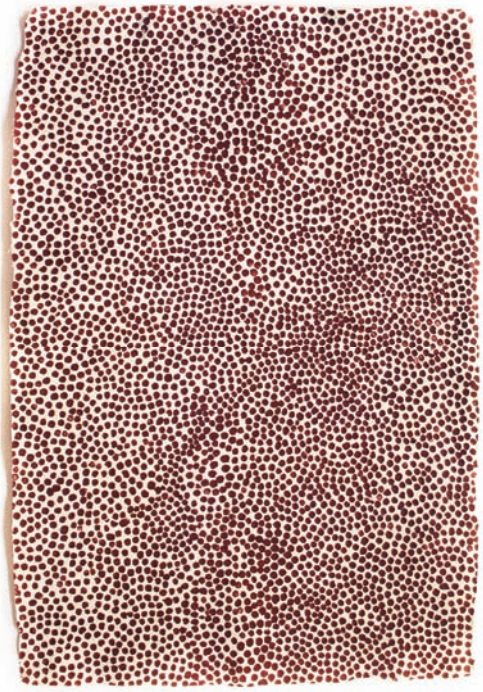

Transforming the Cultural Memory: Wordsworth at Ballads

Abstract

This article reads the 1800 poem «Hart-Leap Well» as the site of negotiation between two mutually constitutive forms of story-telling: the traditional ballad as associated with chivalric stories and collective memory; and the self-reflective account of the post-Enlightenment lyrical poet who creates a tale of his own out of folkloric ethos. The juxtaposition of local superstition, animism, and self-reflectiveness at work in «Hart-Leap Well» fosters a cultural chain of memorialization, that goes from knight to shepherd to poet, and that, at the turn of the eighteenth century, deflates the apocalyptic overtones of folk tales while retaining their ominous elements. In so doing, Wordsworth rescues the traditional ballad from residuality, opening onto the horizon of a new century but also of the millennium.

Geoffrey Hartman

Four Trees – upon a solitary Acre –
Without Design
Or Order, or Apparent Action –
Maintain –
The Sun –
[DICKINSON 2010, p. 326]

I. «Hart-Leap Well», initially published in the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, is a poem in two parts. The first looks like a traditional older ballad. But it is followed by an autobiographical account (in the same verse measure) of how the poet learned from a local shepherd the story on which the ballad is based. The ballad, then, is Wordsworth's recovery of a cultural form belonging to a previous era. The era is seen as chivalrous as well as feudal, with exploits transmitted through oral tradents; and the poet is aware of the passing of a certain kind of imagination, often associated with the medieval realm of «Romance». The concern for the survival of «Romance» in an enlightened age caused a tension intrinsic to the literary movement that

came to be known as Romanticism. The poem's second part changes from the anonymity and *impersonal* tenor of «heroic» ballads. Its self-reflective narrator shifts into the present, and records his and a shepherd's *personal* responses to this tale recreated from the oral tradition. Oral traditions convey stories from the past, stories sometimes pathetic, often fantastic or unusual, and recall events, as here, with a local resonance not always part of a mainstream, official history.

However they differ, both parts of «Hart-Leap Well» display features associated with story-telling generally. If in the ballad proper a moment of hermeneutic puzzlement occurs, a sort of riddle intimating a preternatural event (the hart's stamina and the solitary face-off of hunter and hunted animal), in the personal narrative a perplexing sight (the doleful landscape of lines 101-16) halts the poet by an implicit *siste viator* and again rouses preternatural intimations. Viewed as a whole, «Hart-Leap Well» continues oral tradition's well-known emphasis on place, name, and monument. The vernacular connection is important for Wordsworth who sought to renew his country's poetic language by replacing an overly artificial-neoclassic or neo-archaic-diction. The poem's intriguing place-name, a prefatory note informs us, «is derived from a remarkable chace, the memory of which is preserved by the monuments spoken of in the second Part [...]» [WORDSWORTH 1992, p. 133].

Wordsworth, however, is interested in more than orally transmitted stories at a time when Peddlers hawking ballads, or peasants acquainted with them, are disappearing. Something universal as well as local, something basic to story-telling itself is going on. What generates this poem is, on the one hand, an out-of-the-ordinary incident, and yet, on the other, a minimal archeological marker, like the «straggling heap of unhewn stones» from which the poet conjures up, in the same volume, the tale about shepherd Michael. We also recall that Bible stories often function like this poem. They provide the etiologic explanation of a name and attempt to link *nomen* and *numen*. «Hart-Leap Well», as we shall see, is numinous, the place of a revelation.

II. The monuments described in Part Second are ruins that still intimate «the hand of man» [l. 112]: a pattern of four tree stumps, three pillar-remnants, and a stone-encased spring of water. But it is really the hand of Nature that arrests the poet. Nature has wasted those «monuments»; only their legend outlives them. Merging back into the landscape they suggest an uncanny inscription, an enigmatic nature-speech. The poet's sensitivity to «mute, insensate things» is stirred. He cannot escape a «visionary dreariness» [see WORDSWORTH *Prelude* 1850, XII. l. 256). The landscape riddle is solved when Wordsworth learns from the shepherd (a native informant, not an uncommon figure in Romances, and again pointing to an oral source) that the mysterious remnants are all that is left of a Pleasure House. It was built by

the chivalrous hunter, Sir Walter, to commemorate a hunted hart's final gigantic death-leaps. Centuries later, however, the spot, once verdant and jolly, seems cursed. The conversation that ensues between poet and shepherd tries to fathom whether there is such a curse, or how to understand the reason for its invention. The shepherd rejects the superstitious rumour that a murder was committed in that place and offers in its place a daring surmise about the dying hart's psyche: those wondrous final leaps, he speculates, were animated by flashbacks of its birth-place to which, dying, it wishes to return.

What is the poem's subject, then, if not the persistence of memory in the midst of deadness and decay: a folk or collective (rural) memory that transmits such stories and allows the poet to create a ballad of his own on the basis of the shepherd's tale; the hunted animal's memory, portrayed as a source of joy or suffering; and an overarching memory attributed to Nature as such – a Nature offended, as the formal moral ending of the poem makes clear, by Sir Walter, the knight who built a boastful monument in the form of a Pleasure House on the very spot of the hart's death-agony.

Although Wordsworth is careful to record local superstitions, «Hart-Leap Well» is a Progress poem that proposes a collective advance refining the idea of animism. It guides us from the knight's age of chivalry, its ceremonious blood-sport, to a shepherd's belief that animals have conscious feelings comparable to ours (for the shepherd, the hart's suffering explains why the place is cursed); and it adds the poet's confidence in a watchful presence he calls, avoiding anthropomorphism, «The Being, that is in the clouds and air, / That is in the green leaves among the groves...» [ll. 165ff].

Thus, within this frame of Progress and its Enlightenment ideology, a previous cultural stage is valued enough to preserve this story, still orally handed on, and preserving a hint of strange powers and manners. A live transmission comes into view, a *lien vivant* similar to what characterizes, according to Maurice Halbwachs [1992], the collective memory. A cultural chain of memorialization, in this case with morally improving links, goes from knight to peasant to poet; and it opens, at the turn of the eighteenth century, onto the horizon of a new century but also a new – or the – millennium [ll. 171-176].

III. Concerning the millennium, we know Wordsworth underwent a «trance» at the site of Hart-Leap Well in December 1799. The trance, he writes in «Home at Grasmere», intimated «the milder day / Which is to come, the fairer world than this – / And raised us up, dejected as we were / Among the records of that doleful place [...]» [ll. 238-241]. Returning to his native region, the Lake District, after almost a year and a half (including some eight months in Germany, where he and Coleridge immediately purchased a copy of Gottfried August Bürger's ballads as well as Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*), Wordsworth, accompanied by his sister, experiences an eschatological vision that brings the torment of «poor Creatures» like the

hunted hart closer to humanity and «God / The Mourner, God the Sufferer». The sharp dividing line between human and animal is modified – as later also in «The White Doe of Rylestone».

No wonder the poet credits the shepherd's empathy, his surmise that the hart's dying leaps may have been spurred by a recollection of its birth-place [ll. 149-152]. Wordsworth, in response, extends the shepherd's intuition. He revives the ancient idea that Nature herself is divine as well as creaturely, that as Natura plangens she is part of a sympathetic cosmos:

> This beast not unobserv'd by Nature fell,
> His death was mourn'd by sympathy divine.
> [ll. 159-160]

Still more noteworthy is that the poet's epiphany at Hart-Leap Well comes as he himself is returning to his native region in order to write *The Recluse*, his projected «work of glory». To that end, he hunts his own heart.

IV. But this deeply inscribed self-reflectiveness is already evident in the poet's handling of «Hart-Leap Well's» first impersonal and imitative part. Not only is this formal ballad a modern recreation, it is a specifically Wordsworthian creation. So the action-centered narrative (the chase) is subverted from the start by a contrary rhythm. The hectic hunt unfolds in slow motion, recalling the tempo of another poem in the same volume. «Strange fits of passion» throws a similarly retarding, even dream-like hue over an action that seems to parody the horse-back hero or *Ritter* of traditional heroic ballads. «Action» moves closer to «Passion».

The very opening of «Hart-Leap Well» already undermines the forward motion of the narrative through the near-simile of an adverbial phrase:

> The Knight had ridden down from Wensley moor
> With the slow motion of a summer's cloud;
> [ll. 1-2]

This take (as movie makers say) distances the extreme pursuit. By the fourth stanza, moreover, and climaxing in the seventh, narrative and chase fade out, and an unearthly moment of solitariness surprises the hunter:

> A rout this morning left Sir Walter's Hall,
> That as they gallop'd made the echoes roar;
> But horse and man are vanish'd, one and all;
> Such race, I think, was never seen before.
> [ll. 13-16]

Where is the throng, the tumult of the chase?
The bugles that so joyfully were blown?
– This race it looks not like an earthly race;
Sir Walter and the Hart are left alone.
[ll. 25-28]

With this «alone», this moment of sudden, silent unearthliness, a story-telling and cultural *imaginaire* is quietly altered. For in the older mode of romance symbolism it is at such junctures that a supernatural intervention may occur. In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, a fiercely hunted stag leads Arthur to a similar instant of ominous isolation. So also, in Bürger's gothicized ballad «The Wild Huntsman» («Der wilde Jäger», translated by Sir Walter Scott, and familiar to English audiences), the reckless, trespassing, sacrilegious hunter is suddenly encompassed by silence and solitude, after which a voice resounds from heaven that condemns him and reverses the chase. The supernatural breaks through, and hunter becomes hunted.

Wordsworth approaches that threshold of open vision. Yet he also shies from it. «Das Ach und Weh der Kreatur» («The O and woe of the creature»), as Bürger calls it, is conveyed entirely by naturalistic means. In «Hart-Leap Well» the narrative of a chase in slow motion comes to a stand-still without going over into revelation; while the poet-traveler of the second, autobiographical part is halted by the doleful landscape of worn pillars and lifeless tree stumps. We are deflected at these points of stasis from «holla ho!» action to reflection: in the ballad to a portrait of Sir Walter and his chivalric ethos, in the post-ballad to the shepherd's imaginative surmise and the poet's affirmation of his own personal creed.

That creed, which closes the poem, is more than a sage and serious coda foreshadowing Wordsworth as Victorian Bard. The poet performs an «Arbeit am Mythos» continuous with the folkloric belief and its revision by the shepherd. What caused the curse? What agency maintains it? Is it Nature herself, operating through the collective memory? And what should be the relation of the contemporary (romantic yet enlightened) imagination to this popular, archaic stratum of myth? The most difficult if implicit question of all, unanswered here and perhaps unanswerable, is: does a language of Nature exist, a semiotic received and transmitted by «mighty poets»? Moreover, would such an interest necessarily run into occultism, or could it remain descriptive and provide a missing link between semiotic and phenomenological perspectives?

«A Voice is wanting» Shelley will have Demogorgon say in *Prometheus Unbound* [SHELLEY 2000, 2. 4. l. 115]. The Wordsworthian poet aspires to supply that voice: he embodies a more perfect animistic faith than either Knight or Peasant. Such a faith is necessary not simply to respect an ancient mythic Logos, but to save earthly Nature itself as man's inspiration and home.

V. Story-telling itself, therefore, is at issue here. Wordsworth's modernity is at once radical and conservative. For in the older kind of cultural memory stories also turn on a riddle that intimates a strange or difficult truth, one that may lead to an unknown reality, even a fearful region of unlikeness. A quest ensues provoked by signs, tests, and wonders. That pattern does not change entirely, from the riddling sphinx who challenges Oedipus, to the spectacle confronting Parsifal, to Malory's baying hart, or Keats's casements «opening on faery lands forlorn», even to the Freudian role of dream-images in popular psychological thrillers (consider only Hitchcock's *Spellbound*). In our own era the riddle to be solved is, if anything, more intense, absurd, comprehensive. «They buried milk, they buried meat. They buried bread – it was like an endless funeral procession for inanimate objects. […] They took ground and buried it in the ground» [ALEXIEVICH 2006]. Here too we sense a mysterious agency at work, and the presence of a curse.

Today, however, the reader's way out or in is less certain. Interpretation outgrows explanation. Especially explanation relying on a dominant type of late eighteenth-century formula-fiction: the gothic mystery story's *surnaturel expliqué*. The resolving words to the riddle may not be redemptive enough. So the answer «Chernobyl» anchors the riddle yet also forecloses it like the crudest censorship. Stories, old or new, do not always make sense; they may suspend it, in fact; but in modern fables hermeneutic hesitation enters the text and can become an unresolvable feature.[9]

VI. The difference in representational techniques between Wordsworth and Coleridge helps to exemplify that tension between old and new. It points to a crossroad confronting English poetry circa 1800 and is reflected at many levels in the creative literature of the time. The choice to be made is usually simplified as one between realism and romance; and chapter 14 of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, reporting on the genesis of *Lyrical Ballads*, and the division-of-labour scheme between the two poets, describes it sensitively. Since the marvelous, the riddling, the oneiric, and even the sense of the supernatural, will not go away, can they be naturalized and integrated? They continue to have a real impact on life, and their role is consecrated by some of the strongest traditional verse. The *Romantic* Enlightenment involves, in this respect, a transforming of tradition rather than a break with it.

Coleridge in his *Biographia* presents the difference between him and Wordsworth as involving a technical experiment. This is deceptive. «Hart-Leap Well» competes more deeply with «The Ancient Mariner» than that suggests. Coleridge's poem, published as the opener in the first (1798) edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, is displaced in the 1800 edition, which adds a second volume with «Hart-Leap Well» as its opening poem. But it remains in the collection as the penultimate work in the first volume – thus still in

important place since it comes just before «Tintern Abbey», a non-ballad composed and added only at the last moment to the first edition.

The contrasting character of the two ballads is heightened by the symmetry between them. Coleridge's poem also turns crucially on the killing of an animal. The Mariner's shooting of the albatross, however, remains unmotivated in terms of a culture-specific ethos or psychology. The inventive powers of Coleridge concentrate on plot and narrative momentum. Cause and character matter less than consequence, as the unexplained act creates a break in the natural course of events, triggering ghostly and ghastly incursions, a cosmic retribution that enforces the isolation of the perpetrator. Coleridge's concluding moral is also similar to Wordsworth's. The humblest creature counts. Yet Coleridge's night-*Märchen* suggests that every trespass or cruelty has unforeseeable repercussions.

The Mariner's ship, in tempo now fitful, now becalmed, crosses an invisible line into a fearful, phantasmagoric region. Wordsworth, while skirting that line (a kind of Meridian) does not go over it into dream-vision or the supernatural. His poem, although the hart's leaps are central to it, has no other fitful, fateful leaps (balladic *Würfe und Sprünge*), no other startling events or transitions – except, in my opinion, its coda. The most telling difference, however, between the two poems is that the Mariner remains under a curse never entirely purged and removed.

Indeed, the curse *includes* the poetic impulse, in that the Mariner is compelled to tell his fantastic story again and again. «Hart-Leap Well» stands in contrast since it does not rely on a mythic machinery to magnify the curse-effect, nor does its author associate the poetic impulse with a usurping force, a «woeful agony» whose purgative power leaves Coleridge's Mariner (a type of the Wandering Jew, doomed to deathlessness) free only for a time. Wandering from land to land, he is eternally fated to teach that there exists a communion larger than marriage, larger than what is celebrated by the wedding feast, the setting of the poem's opening frame. A bond of prayer and love should encompass the community of all creatures («all things great and small», «Man and bird and beast»). Agape not Eros should preside.

While the sympathetic imagination, then, is a dominant motif in both poems, Wordsworth omits neo-gothic wonder and terror. Part the Second of «Hart-Leap Well» remains conversational and discursive even when closing with a millennial hopefulness. In time, the poet declares, the monument-records of the crime will be overgrown. Nature will forget itself. Foreseeing a «milder day» the poet passes from a visionary dreariness, inspired by the landscape and suggesting the eternity of memory, to a vista of immemorial and radical obliteration [ll. 169-180].

VII. I find this ending astonishing. It is as if memory had signed a contract with oblivion. Here millennial hope recants not only memory but implicitly the pressure of individuating and isolating moments that were

essential for the growth of Wordsworth's mind and sense of vocation. They determined his conviction that he was a bard chosen by Nature herself. «No secondary hand can intervene» (*Prelude* 1805 XIII. l. 192). Such moments have a resonance like the Biblical «And Jacob was left alone» [Genesis 32.25], which sets the scene for perhaps the most startling personal episode of supernatural intervention in the older *imaginaire*.

The face-off between knight and hart, therefore, and the poet's attempt to directly intuit Nature's messaging, have as significant an implication as the Mariner's extreme solitude: «Alone on a wide, wide, sea, / So lonely 'twas that God himself / Scarce seemed there to be». Yet Wordsworth not only refrains from the psychedelic magnification of a journey into the heart of terror, wonderment, and solitude, but goes in his coda beyond memory in order to offer a non-catastrophic view of renewal in time.

VIII. In comparison, then, to «The Ancient Mariner», «Hart-Leap Well» is a reflective or «sentimental» poem in Friedrich Schiller's sense. It avoids the faux naif and faux supernatural, while saving something of the world of «fine fabling» praised by Richard Hurd in his famous *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* [1762], a world that Hurd, like many at the time, feared forever lost because of the Enlightenment. Wordsworth rescues the fabulous charm of a pre-Enlightenment cultural heritage – though not without a significant mutation.

For the reader's interest is shifted by Wordsworth from the expectation of some dramatic, gothic, supernatural intervention or turn of plot, to the impact of a natural incident. The older, romance symbolism finds a modern, romantic form: the heroic challenge issues now from the poet's awareness of inner, often trance-like acts of mind. (The phrase «fits of passion», in the Lucy poem previously mentioned, harbours the paradox of a moon-struck passivity that points to such an inward happening.) This is not solipsism, for the imaginative powers of the poet are never free of Nature's agency but struggle with it for a just interpretation of the «incumbent mystery of sense and soul».

In Coleridge's ballad a «ride» is depicted that cannot be controlled. In Wordsworth's ballad an out-of-control chase (see its standard cinematic parallel) is modified by reflective retardations. The poem's two parts, moreover, in yielding a twice-told tale, forge a structure that slows narrative time. An *archē*, an imagined source of vital power (the welling up, in the dying stag, of a preternatural strength), is encircled in the second part by a series of surmises. In this way a *psychic* animism necessary for nature-feeling is preserved without regress to conventional spiritualistic myth-making.

IX. In order to create a poetry of his time and climate – a more distinctive «English» form of imagination – Wordsworth recast his country's cultural memory. Both authors of *Lyrical Ballads* wished to renew English poetry,

but Wordsworth's ambition was greater than to utilize like «The Ancient Mariner» Romance or «Oriental» conceptions. Wordsworth opposed not only a specious sublimity but also a frantic and sensation-seeking fantasy that anticipates our own. The first (historicist) part of «Hart-Leap Well» pays tribute to a chivalric ethos and the romance imagination. These are to be acknowledged *and* surpassed. But in the second part the poet farewells the «Warrior's deeds» and moves the action of his song into a new «haunt» eliciting «such fear and awe / As fall upon us often when we look / Into our minds, into the mind of Man» [«Home at Grasmere», MS B, l. 953ff]. This inversion of the Virgilian template of a poetic career also revises the idea of heroism, saving the pastoral ethos, and the vocation of poetry itself, from the imputation of a socially irrelevant *otium*.

Such a conclusion on my part is too formulaic, of course. It does scant justice either to the «fear and awe» that befall Wordsworth as he becomes aware of imagination's strength, or to «the internal brightness, that must not die» which makes him wish to impart that light to others [«Home at Grasmere», MS B, l. 885ff]. But it is clear that unlike Bürger in Germany, or Coleridge trumping Bürger in «The Ancient Mariner», Wordsworth did more than create an Enlightenment form of the gothic.

A minor culture war, it should be recalled, was being waged in those days between English literature and an emerging modern German literature. The war focused on the ballad, a genre appreciated in Germany as a «Northern» literary phenomenon after the 1765 appearance of Thomas Percy's *Reliques*. (In 1770 Percy added a commented translation of Mallet's *Northern Antiquities*). As is well-known, not only Bürger but also Herder and Goethe helped to create a ballad revival, with the British source as a major inspiration. In the 1790s some of Percy's ballads were re-imported into England, mainly via their retranslation of Bürger's fashionably «terrific» versions. The 1790s also saw Walter Scott beginning to collect and publish the historical, romantic, and «riding» ballads that were to find their place in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802, plus important further editions).

The revived popular ballad flourished at the same time as the gothic novel; and both express, one in a brooding, the other in a defensively naive way, the bad conscience as well as the heroic past of their society. Wordsworth's sensitivity to rural life, to its people and ethos, leads to highly self-conscious encounters told in relatively simple diction. His expanded sympathy, however, favoring pathos not terror, is still curbed by a representational limit because of contemporary taste: a limit transgressed in such mock-narrative lyrics as «The Idiot Boy» and «The Thorn», for which he was ridiculed.

Erich Auerbach [2003] might have said that these residues of an older type of romance symbolism shows Wordsworth unable to take his own realism seriously, or that he is still too defensive about it. But this judgment neglects the poet's deliberate refusal to discard completely an older, romance

poetics. He uncovered instead its reason for being. His poetic story-telling seeks a visionary element that is not apocalyptic, that does not foresee a turning away from one's personal past, or the casting out of a «world, which is the world / Of all of us» [*Prelude* 1850, XI. ll. 142-143].

X. «Wofür Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?» Hölderlin asked. Wordsworth abides the question. He is engaged in a rescue mission. How can poetry retain its edge in the modern revolutionary era and counteract ideologies that sever, in *The Prelude's* words, «The man to come [...] as by a *gulph* / From him who had been?» [*Prelude* 1805, XI. ll. 59-60]

Indeed, fearing discontinuity, the poetics of «Hart-Leap Well» raise the issue of canon formation and resolve the matter paradigmatically by how its two parts fit together. The continuity of English poetry will depend on the *lien vital* already described, a collective and not just elite form of transmission, one that raises the issue of the cultural memory's relation to identity. Wordsworth, at this historical moment, feels he must preserve the memory of rural nature, its indispensable folkloric as well as childhood link to the imagination.

With *Lyrical Ballads* he affirmed a sensibility that would carry forward – into the agitated atmosphere of Britain's intellectual turmoil after the revolutionary events in France, the Napoleonic wars, the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and all the concomitant «craving for extraordinary incident» [WORDSWORTH 1992] – a respect for *ordinary* event and *local* romance. Hence his disclaimer at the very beginning of his poem's second part, «The moving accident is not my trade» (alluding to Shakespeare's Desdemona on how Othello won her ear and heart through stories of high adventure). The incidents Wordsworth recounts move without being «moving» in that movie sense, without heroic afflatus and neo-gothic devices of inflation that deprive «accidents» of their own psychic and commonplace resonance.

It remains to be seen whether present-day passion narratives may still learn something from Wordsworth's handling of memory and trauma. What feelings can rural nature evoke, once we know the horrors that occurred in certain spots of this earth, even in idyllic landscapes? The Holocaust-place, the genocidal setting, the lynching tree, are not gothic fantasies but real killing grounds that curse not only a particular locality but nature itself, every part of which is potentially haunted by what happened. This kind of insight that comes retroactively to readers of Wordsworth is a disclosure that makes a poem like «Hart-Leap Well» unbearably ominous in its mildness.

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Wordsworth and Eco-poetics

Abstract

Wordsworth's legacy to the environmental tradition in English literature has been a focus for debate about relationships between man and land, humans and nature. The article interrogates canonical eco-critical perspectives on Wordsworth's poetry of nature, moving from the 2009 inundation of the town of Cockermouth. Wordsworth's flooded house, open to the elements and all their deposits, reconfigures human and nature, displacing the walls of preservation and protection and replacing them with radical togetherness. The article explores a flooded Cockermouth as a way into a Wordsworthian eco-poetics that engages the affective experience of the natural world as disordered: not a scene of confirmation or ideal harmony, but one caught up in a continuous process of interaction with human presence, their shared fate as yet unknown.

Rhian Williams

> … didst thou, beauteous Stream,
> Make ceaseless music through the night and day
> [*The Prelude*, I. 279-280][1]

> The gardens are devastated and a particularly sad thing for us is that the historic garden walls, some of which were overlooking the River Derwent, which is what created the terrace that William wrote about in *The Prelude* and where he and Dorothy used to play as children […] basically they have completely disappeared; I mean, the stone is there, but the walls have totally collapsed [WEAVER 2009].

I. In November 2009, the town of Cockermouth in Cumbria, birthplace of Wordsworth, was inundated with flood water; the town was overwhelmed. Weather conditions had deteriorated over a number of days and by the afternoon of Thursday 19th, rain was falling heavily and the rivers Cocker and Derwent, which join in the town, had broken their banks. By midnight a torrent raged through the main street,

[1] All references to *The Prelude* are from WORDSWORTH, 1991.

reaching depths of more than eight feet and the garden surrounding Wordsworth's former home was destroyed. On returning to the property the following Monday, Jeremy Barlow, property manager at the Wordsworth House and Garden, was bewildered to find that:

> There's stuff from all over the town in the house and garden. You walk through and there's toys from the toyshop down the road. There's wool everywhere from a wool shop that's, you know, 400m down the main street. It's like all the material that was gathered from the properties further down has ended up in Wordsworth House. [WEAVER 2009]

This was Wordsworth's childhood home; it had been presented to the National Trust in 1937 by locals who had raised money to purchase and save it from Cumberland Motor Services' plan to demolish it to make way for a bus station.[2] It was a structure to suggest a badge of settled fixity and quiet resistance, a gentle emblem of environmental responsibility. It materialized what Jonathan Bate celebrates as the legacy of an ideological position on landscape that Wordsworth himself blueprinted in his *Guide to the Lakes*, meaning that «all who walk in the National Parks are legatees of Wordsworth» [BATE 1991, p. 49]. Preservation, conservation, conservatism. Yet now the property had been swiftly returned to vulnerability, rendered borderless by the river's demolition of the walls that had structured Wordsworth's childhood experience. As the Trust's website now remembers, «the tree-lined terrace where William played was open to the river, back wall gone and earth half sucked away». Wordsworth's status as «the Poet of Nature» [ANDERSON 1896, p. 3] and figurehead of an ecological tradition that attunes us to the perilous fate of the earth seemed by this event to have been asserted in the worst of ways. His home had experienced a shift – landscape preservation had slipped, like the silt from the river, into a melting pot of detritus, a repository of displaced ephemera, a museum of «stuff»: «The rushing water had woven brightly coloured wool from the local knitting shop around trees and bushes».[3]

Over the weeks and months that followed, the town revived and re-established itself, and is now celebrated as an emblem of recovery and survival spirit. Wordsworth too continued to be caught up in the flood and its aftermath as the lines from *The Prelude* quoted above were chosen to lead a

[2] National Trust Wordsworth House and Garden website:
<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wordsworth-house/things-to-see-and-do/view-page/item412160/> [last accessed 23 July 2013].

[3] National Trust Wordsworth House and Garden website:
<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wra-1356312076049/view-page/item412720/> [last accessed 23 July 2013].

Flood Poetry Trail that featured across the town's shops and businesses a year later [WAINWRIGHT 2010] and in this neutralizing configuration of Wordsworth, poetry, and commercial enterprise, the Derwent was seemingly quietened back into the cadences of blank verse. But I suggest this episode has more unsettling things to offer the (long, varied, contentious) discourse surrounding Wordsworth and eco-poetics. In this forlorn state, the wall-less garden, open to the river and full of everyday objects («dozens of DVDs, chocolate bars still in their wrappers, potatoes by the sack-load, animal feed and dog coats, women's underwear and shoes, toys and baby clothes, and even a small chest of drawers and a wicker linen basket»[4]) emerges as a disorientating node of nature/human relations, one that offers a new, and not necessarily comforting, context for reading Wordsworth ecologically.

As has been widely recognized, Wordsworth's legacy to the «environmental tradition» in English literature has been a focus for debate about relationships between man and land, humans and nature; his poetry is claimed variously to promote a Burkean duty of care for the land (with all the political and ideological implications that holds) or to testify to nature's fructifying hand in the emergence of poetic selfhood.[5] Wordsworthian nature is nurse, mother, the ground of meaning […] or a conservative ideal, an objectified «setting» for middle-class individualism, a resource for poetic exploitation. But, Wordsworth's house in the Cockermouth floods – literally open to the elements and all their deposits – reconfigures human and nature again, displacing the walls of preservation and protection and replacing them with radical togetherness, emblematized by the disgusting black mud that smeared on the ground-floor walls. In this version of events, I suggest, the house (and from there the ground of Wordsworth's «eco-poetic») has undergone «deep ecological» change, mirroring the individual self in deep ecology, which, as David Harvey elegantly summarizes, «cannot be construed as a bounded entity, a kind of box unto him or herself, but rather like a *point* (which is geometrically defined as something that has no dimensions) formed by innumerable vectors of influences and relations converging at the same junction» [HARVEY 1996, p. 167]. One might say with Michel Serres that «river, fire, and mud are reminding us of their presence» [SERRES 1990, p. 2] and that this has implications for humanity's sense of self, the quality of experience. This essay explores the potential in the flooding scene for a Wordsworthian eco-poetics that engages the affective experience of the natural world as disordered – not the scene of confirmation

[4] National Trust Wordsworth House and Garden website:
<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wra-1356312076049/view-page/item412720/>
[last accessed 23 July 2013].

[5] HESS [2008] summarizes a tradition of eco-critical readings of Wordsworth and BATES [2008] gives a specific history of «Tintern Abbey's» place in this. As KELLY writes in 2012, «That Wordsworth is an 'ecological' poet has become almost a critical commonplace of recent years» [p. 45].

or ideal harmony (a steadying presence that must be preserved) but one caught up in a continuous process of interaction with human presence, their shared fate as yet unknown. In recognition of the everyday items that rained down on Wordsworth's house, I explore this eco-poetics as a type of profound ordinariness.

The terms of Wordsworth's relationship to eco-criticism have inevitably been determined by Bate's naming of him as a «founding father for a thinking of poetry in relation to place, to our dwelling upon the earth» [BATE 2000, p. 205]. Naming him thus formed part of a larger project, which was to offer eco-criticism as a reconceived politics, in answer to Marxist critics' «crude old model of Left and Right» [BATE 1991, p. 3] and, in particular, to critics such as Jerome McGann and Marjorie Levinson, who had drawn robust attention to what they saw as erasures of material, political history in Wordsworth's writing about nature.[6] Bate's riposte accused such readings of making «the economy of human society […] more important than […] 'the economy of nature'» [BATE 1991, p. 9]. As Kerridge has demonstrated, however, such a distinction is complex, and ambivalent even in Bate's account [KERRIDGE 2012, pp. 18-19]. For Wordsworth and eco-poetics though, Bate's intervention has both described and arguably propounded a *de*politicized model of human/nature relations, not least by virtue of his enthusiasm for Wordsworth as a poet who drew on «reverie, solitude, walking» since «to turn these experiences into language is to be an ecopoet» [BATE 2000, p. 42]. As Scott Hess suggests, the legacy of such an approach has certainly been to secure Wordsworth as central to eco-critical reading (Wordsworth perhaps more than any other writer of the period has been considered in eco-critical terms), but it has also been to take solitary reverie as the exemplary eco-critical experience, with the result that «such criticism approaches 'nature' in the terms Wordsworth himself helped to establish: as a special aesthetic and spiritual sphere for intense individual contemplation, set aside from ordinary social, economic, and political relationships» [HESS 2008, p. 83]. Solitary reverie is significantly put into question if we take into account thinkers such as Harvey's view of «the sociality of any project of Self-Realization» [HARVEY 1996, p. 169] and without this, Hess asserts, reading Wordsworth ecologically (in the Bate model) contributes to the damage it purports to decry by becoming a distraction from «daily lifestyle and social structural action» [HESS 2008, p. 99] due to its view of nature as «a sphere for authentic individuality, rather than social relationship» [ibid., p. 97]. In effect, Hess's critique gives an environmentalist edge to McGann's original provocation that in Wordsworth «the mind has triumphed over its times» [MCGANN 1983, p. 88]; Hess would say that the same happens again when eco-critics either derive an abstract metaphysics from Wordsworth's ecological engagements, or else see Wordsworth's poetry as a repository of

[6] See MCGANN [1983], esp. pp. 86-88, and LEVINSON [1986], esp. 46-57.

«wise reminders» of an «organic and integrated order» [WILLIAMS 2011, p. 56], as though they are hermetically sealed from the material effects that this individualizing legacy has had on the landscape.

Acknowledging and rejecting the deficiencies of a model that, even if it seems to trace the establishment of a thoughtful and care-giving relationship between nature and man, is damagingly predicated on the ontological distinctiveness of the human subject, eco-thinkers have importantly called for more nuanced models that bring together a «deep ecological» commitment to the shared fate of (and responsibility for) our planet with the materialist science that demands that we reconceive of the human species as continuous with other species.[7] Timothy Morton calls this «ecological thinking», in which «ecology» is differentiated from «Nature» (a category that he claims perpetuates «'unnatural' qualities, namely […] hierarchy, authority, harmony, purity, neutrality, and mystery» [MORTON 2010] by being «profoundly about coexistence» [ibid.]. Co-existence here constitutes a more committed interdependency, even shared nature, than does Bates' «eco-system» [BATE 2000, p. 106] or Adam Potkay's more recent attempt to recover «Wordsworth's system of things [which] exceeds human agency» [POTKAY 2008, p. 392].[8] Its roots may be seen as continuous with Romantic-period science which, as Greg Garrard and Tim Fulford have importantly elucidated, was thinking dynamically about «the idea of the mutability of species» [FULFORD 1997, p. 130] in ways that contributed toward a «much wider cultural movement away from an atomized view of discrete natural 'types' toward a mode of nature as an organic whole, an ecological system» [ibid., pp. 135-136], evidencing the view that «our own ecological mindfulness […] re-engages an ecological mindfulness of the past» [WILLIAMS 2011, p. 55].[9] Such interdependency doesn't so much confirm, nourish or refocus the human subject however, but radically unsettles its terms. My purpose here is not to advance these writers' work by further bringing Wordsworth into view with scientific materialism (although this rich context merits more consideration than has yet been made in the wake of the *Wordsworth Circle*'s 1997 special issue), but to take from these models of «coexistence» and «organicism» – models in which the natural and human spheres are discomfortingly continuous – a license to see the Cockermouth floods as an occasion that should affect how we read Wordsworth ecologically. I am led here by Levinson's sense of the necessity and inevitability of presentism, now that «nature seems […] a finite domain which we are well on our way to

[7] See LEVINSON [1995].

[8] Potkay's account, following Bate, still invokes a distinction between an «economy of human society» and an «economy of nature» [p. 392], insufficiently accounting for the irreversible ways in which human activity has conditioned the natural world.

[9] See also GARRARD [1996] and LEVINSON [1995].

exhausting» [LEVINSON 1995, p. 117] since reading from the present must then «release a very different picture of the human in its physical environments – or, one could say, of the physical environments which compose the human» [LEVINSON 1995, p. 112].[10]

II.

> Many times while going to school have I grasped a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. [WORDSWORTH 1993, p. 61]

In choosing Wordsworth's lilting, gentle lines about the Derwent, Cockermouth's poetry trail in fact invokes a passage that is troublingly ambivalent about how poetry should record time spent in «fields and rural walks» [*The Prelude*, I. l. 244] and about what this means for the aspirant poet's personal ethics. With all the subtlety of *The Prelude*'s many reflexive passages that make poetry out of an uncertainty about poetry, the older Wordsworth couches his younger sense of failure in terms of a failure of reciprocity:

> Like a false Steward who hath much received
> And renders nothing back. — Was it for this
> That one, the fairest of all Rivers, loved
> To blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song
> And from his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows sent a voice
> That flowed along my dreams?
> [*The Prelude*, I. ll. 271-277]

The earnest desire to write with and of nature is experienced as an «awful burthen» [I. l. 235] from which the poet seeks refuge; the thought of writing makes him «recoil and droop, and seek repose» [I. l. 268]. This is a painful process of scourging scrutiny that pulses with recognition of «vice and virtue» [I. l. 241], «vain perplexity / Unprofitably travelling towards the grave» [I. ll. 269-270], and the knowledge that even «Humility and modest awe» serve only as a «cloak / To a more subtle selfishness» [I. ll. 247-248]. It ignites a series of memories of Wordsworth's childhood joy at swimming in the river, but also his visits to the woodcocks, amongst whom «I was a fell

[10] POTKAY [2008] probes the «puzzlement over where (if anywhere) human beings end and nature begins» in Wordsworth's engagement with «things», understanding Wordsworth's «ambiguities as a bidirectional movement that refuses primacy either to self (the Other's other) or to (things as) the Other» [p. 397].

destroyer» [I. l. 329] who «seem'd to be a trouble to the peace / That was among them» [I. ll. 324-325]. The grounds for this destructive alterity are drawn back, for Wordsworth, to the awful ease with which he falls into «false activity» [l. l. 251] that «beats off / Simplicity and self-presented truth» [I. ll. 251-252] and blocks the «philosophic Song / Of Truth that cherishes our daily life» [I. ll. 231-232]. Immersion in nature, then, is an ambivalent experience that is troubled by the potentially alienating effects of «false activity», by the wedge that «zeal and just ambition» [I. l. 259] drives between the earth and «human waywardness» [I. l. 282]. Such distortions are marked as deviations from simplicity, from daily life, and cause pain to a poet who Geoffrey Hartman pioneeringly identified as having «complete respect for ordinary experience as well as for its extraordinary potential» [HARTMAN 1987, p. 11]. For Hartman's «unremarkable» Wordsworth, the gradual letting go of «tangible words» [ibid., p. 27] – we might say instrumental language – delineates an oscillating haptic process that leads to protection – even invulnerability – stability and insight. Although beginning in the «reality testing» constituted by Wordsworth's grasping at a wall or tree that is, «incited by a ghostliness in nature» [ibid., p. 22], Hartman finds his poetry «almost transcends representation, and thus reality testing. It gives up not only the eyes but also touch – tangible words. It seems to exist then without the material density of poetic texture – without imagistic or narrative detail» [ibid., p. 27]. By using plain, pared down language [ordinary speech], «the presence it continues to evoke becomes 'untouchable'» and the ordinary thus can «inexplicably yield descriptions possessing uncanny and hallucinatory power» [MARSHALL 1987, p. xvii]. Indeed, the ordinary is the necessary condition for «intense and ghostly experiences» [ibid.].

The scene at Cockermouth after the 2009 floods takes us back to this complex, almost occult process in Wordsworth's writing by virtue of its river setting, but its outcome shifts – and this is because this scene of a kind of domesticated post-apocalypse (no walls, trees tangled with knitting wool, mud silted with chocolate bars) radically destabilises the original haptic «reality-testing» ground from which Hartman's reading proceeds. As Levinson has written, an exhausted natural world «challenges classical models of the human in a deep and qualitative way» since «lacking an irreducible and as it were, self-perpetuating otherness in nature, structurally guaranteeing the ongoing recognition of the human, our transformative encounters with the physical environment cannot do the same subject-making work they once did» [LEVINSON 1995, p. 117]. Without walls and trees to grasp, Wordsworth's home is now caught in that «ghostliness of nature» that Hartman found Wordsworth overcoming and these are the real conditions of ecological reading. The earth has been damaged (a legacy, James McKusick writes, of Romantic-period development [MCKUSICK 1997, p. 123]) and we exist in the ongoing aftermath: «and, when the deed was done / I heard among the solitary hills / Low breathings coming after me» [I. ll. 329-331].

What this demands is that we return to Wordsworth not with the certainty that his poetry will overcome rifts, or initiate an inevitable and soothing return to nature's economy (not least because in an ecological view nature's economy is conditioned always by human presence, and *vice versa*), but for how it registers the affective experience of being in a world that is disarrayed, or which goes through moments of oddity and disorientation; a world characterized by regular prompts to recalibrate our relationship with it, rather than by an ongoing predictability. The ties between those prompts aren't always certain and may denote fracture and alienation as well as comfort. This means feeling for the ambivalence and uncertainty that surrounds Wordsworth's turn to the Derwent for «[tempering] steady cadence» [I. l. 281] and reading it from the other side of the river's destructive breach. What I am seeking in Wordsworth, and in my reading of Wordsworth, is to feel for what Kathleen Stewart identifies as «ordinary affects» [STEWART 2007];[11] and therefore for the ways in which his poetry anticipates the conditions of life in the twenty-first century. As Stewart writes, this «means pointing always to an ordinary world whose forms of living are now being composed and suffered, rather than seeking the closure or clarity of a book's interiority or riding a great rush of signs to a satisfying end» [STEWART 2005, p. 5]. This might be where it is possible to find the selfhood that David Harvey insists must face and acknowledge itself as interdependent, political, and social, as is the natural world itself.

My springboard here is the fact that the Cockermouth floods didn't face the guardians of Wordsworth's house with alterity as such (the world wasn't unrecognizable), it was just unrecognizable *in that form*. In the economy of Cockermouth, ordinary items belonged down the road, patiently waiting in their shops to be bought and integrated smoothly into people's lives, but in ways that suggest a potent agency to their ludic and historical powers, here they were, strewn around Wordsworth's garden: this is where they came. The items that swirled in with the mud and river water, riding the wave that destroyed his walls, were wool and toys – material artefacts that hark back to Cumbria's cloth-making, shepherding past (of which Wordsworth wrote so much in *Lyrical Ballads*) and metonymically to Wordsworth's childhood encounters. These little pieces of touching detritus offer themselves as totems (and returns) of the ordinary made extraordinary by the forces of nature and I define them here as affective nodes. It is the sight of these dislocated objects, after all, that emblematise the flood for Barlow, and that cause his narrative to stutter, perhaps even reel, in its attempt to make sense of a present that was, not least by virtue of the historical and national significance of this Wordsworthian spot, becoming an event. Lauren Berlant has written of affect at such moments as a phenomenon whose «activity saturates the corporeal,

[11] I am indebted here, as so often, to Emma Mason's suggestive reading and her identification of Stewart's project as Wordsworthian.

intimate, and political performances of adjustment that make a shared atmosphere something palpable and, in its patterning, releases to view a poetics, a theory-in-practice of how a world works» [BERLANT 2011, p. 16]. I turn now to the *Lyrical Ballads* to seek to release an eco-poetics from its patterning of human/nature relations in affective, corporeal performances.

III. In his recent book on Wordsworth's engagement with the rural poor, Quentin Bailey rightly points out the shortcomings of reading «Tintern Abbey» «as if the poem were somehow wholly independent of its surroundings» [BAILEY 2011, p. 143]. Such isolating gestures, he illustrates, allow critics to manage a delineation of Wordsworth's landscape poetics, but this is necessarily compromised by their neglect of how «Tintern Abbey» dynamically «asks the reader to recall all the stories that have been told» [ibid., p. 145] in the *Lyrical Ballads*. By such means, Bailey argues, Wordsworth «emphasis[es] the value in all the lives the poems chart» by «seeking to construct, in 'Tintern Abbey', a subjectivity that can accommodate the vagrancy and mendacity [sic] that so irked the statesmen of the 1790s» [ibid., p. 162]. If «Tintern Abbey» exemplifies Wordsworth's eco-poetics, then they are an eco-poetics of human / landscape interaction, and are a marker of the material histories that were contemporaneously conditioning the landscape at the time of Wordsworth's writing. As Helena Kelly's careful uncovering of historical record demonstrates, the disenfranchised lives in the *Lyrical Ballads* emerge from «the pressures which are forcing agricultural change and the cost of that change – both in terms of individual hardship and the loss of the old way of interacting with the land» [KELLY 2012, p. 45]. With this context in view the *Lyrical Ballads* becomes a reflexive and affective record of the material history that brings us to our own ecological moment. The alienated figures of the sheep and cloth industries – those in «The Last of the Flock», «The Female Vagrant», «Goody Blake and Harry Gill», and «Michael» – are ghosts caught in the webs of wool that wrapped itself around the trees in the Cockermouth floods, the yarn for leisure knitting now the residual trace of the «empty loom, cold hearth, and silent wheel» [«The Female Vagrant», l. 89][12] that, like their owners, became disqualified objects in a changing economy. The *Lyrical Ballad*'s complex and bi-genred method can release the poetics of «how the world work[ed]» [BERLANT 2011, p. 16] during this change through affect, rhythm, form, and metre (iambs and anapaests that not only recall the cadences of the natural world per se, but of its mobilization in human activity – the spinning wheel, tree felling, reaping, digging). From here the collection emerges as a record that should contribute to the «difficult issue» that John Bellamy Foster insists faces the Left in thinking ecologically: «understanding the *evolving material interrelations* (what Marx called 'metabolic relations')

[12] All references to the *Lyrical Ballads* are taken from WORDSWORTH [1992].

between human beings and nature» [FOSTER 2000, emphasis in the original].[13] In the last part of this essay I offer some close-reading notes on one «interrelation» in the second volume of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*: between «The Brothers» and «Nutting».

The former poem opens with a vision of subsistence labour: a priest is working with his wife and daughter to spin yarn that will form cloth to clothe the family. The blank verse is measured and calm, following the rhythms of work that provide the priest's reference points – reaping corn, carding wool, feeding a spindle, turning «a large round wheel in the open air / With back and forward steps» [«The Brothers», ll. 24-25]. But the priest's family activity transpires to be a residual reminder of a larger community of subsistence that now has been destroyed: we learn, as he speaks to an approaching visitor, of how a nearby:

> [E]state and house were sold, and all their sheep
> A pretty flock, and which, for aught I know,
> Had clothed the Ewbanks for a thousand years.
> [ibid., ll. 297-299][14]

The leading narrative of this poem is the desperate tale of a mariner who returns to the land his family had farmed and finds himself the unwilling audience to his own tale of bereavement, but in the priest's recollections, and in Wordsworth's construction of the mariner's meditations, emerge points of shared vocabulary and shared experience with the more lyrical episodes of «Tintern Abbey» and «Nutting» (this horizontal cross referencing between figures and genres intimates the «unboundedness» and «unstoppability» that Levinson suggests is definitive of subjective experience in an ecological perspective [LEVINSON 1995, p. 124]). Like Wordsworth, the mariner and his brother as children, «like roe-bucks […] went bounding o'er the hills» [«The Brothers», l. 273]; like Wordsworth, the mariner at sea retreats into inward recollection and visions of past landscape experiences. Yet the verb used to describe the mariner's childhood «soul» as «knit to this his native soil» [ibid.

[13] Wordsworth's concern in «Goody Blake and Harry Gill», in which impoverished spinner Goody Blake relies on gathering excess wood from Harry Gill's property, importantly anticipates Marx's first article as the young editor of *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1842. «'Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood' marked an intellectual turning point in [Marx's] life. This, he insisted was 'the really earthly question in all its life-size» [FOSTER 2000]. Foster's account of «Marx's ecology» is grounded in a wide-ranging discussion of materialist thought that uncovers Marx's critique of alienated labour as an ecological critique.

[14] It fits with the *Lyrical Ballads*' preoccupation with modes of remembrance and record-keeping that the family name is all that remains of sheep farming, a testament now only to alienation from the land.

l. 294] introduces a chink between this figure and that of the lyrics. Recalling the affective effect of the Cumberland Beggar's «work» [«the mild necessity of use compels / To acts of love; and habit does the work / Of reason», «The Old Cumberland Beggar», ll. 99-101], the childish shepherd is tied into the soil by means of a habitual, workaday activity that brings together natural world and human use. Similarly, it is structured habit that preserves the natural world from the boys» potential plunder: «The finest Sunday that the Autumn saw, / With all its mealy clusters of ripe nuts, / Could never keep these boys away from church» [«The Brothers», ll. 265-267].

Without such strictures on his time, the childish Wordsworth meanwhile:

> [S]allied from our cottage-door,
> And with a wallet o'er my shoulder slung,
> A nutting crook in hand, I turn'd my steps
> Towards the distant woods.
> [«Nutting», ll. 3-6]

Nevertheless, his Beggar's disguise (an immersion in fabric) binds the young boy to the other figures, their habitual movements, and the feel of their clothing (one of the mariner's potent memories of home [«The Brothers», ll. 61-62].[15] Although «Nutting» has been influentially read by Bate as «miniature allegory of man's rape of nature» [BATE 1995, p. 67], I follow David Joplin's sense of its «biocentric turn» [JOPLIN 1997, p. 22] and seek to extend it. As the boy proceeds to «forc[e]» his way ever further through «thorns, and brakes, and brambles» [«Nutting», l. 11] the *Lyrical Ballads*' other habits of dwelling in nature begin to seep into the poem's vocabulary, rhythm and spatial arrangement. The boy emerges into «A virgin scene» in which «the hazels rose / Tall and erect, with milk-white clusters hung» [ibid., ll. 17-19], but, like the shepherd boys, he exercises «wise restraint» [ibid., l. 21] and this gifts him a temper as though «bless'd / With sudden happiness beyond all hope» [ibid., ll. 26-27]. This blissful moment then precipitates the boy's absorption into natural objects that rehearses the rolling, circling movements of the «Lucy Poems» (violets, moss, stones). With a gesture of extraordinarily sensuous touch (one feels the shady cool as his cheek touches stone), the boy becomes an uncanny shepherd, bound thus into both lyric and ballad figures of the *Lyrical Ballads*:

[15] Wordsworth's disguise suggestively mimics local aristocrat and whig politician John Curwen's (1756-1828), who held the seat for Carlisle during the 1790s. For Curwen, disguise was an act of solidarity: «To emphasize his concern for his constituents he once appeared in the House of Commons dressed like a Cumberland

> And with my cheek on one of those green stones
> That, fleec'd with moss, beneath the shady trees
> Lay round me scatter'd like a flock of sheep,
> I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound.
> [«Nutting», ll. 33-36]

The murmuring repetitions (three times in the space of six lines), the encircling stones, the echoes of the Lucy poems and the structuring assonance (cheek/green/fleec'd/trees; foam/stones; moss/flock) – enacting the murmuring in a soundscape that saturates the blank verse restraint with shadowy force – come together to characterise this moment as an «ordinary affect»:

> It is the intensity born of a momentary suspension of narrative, or a glitch in the projects we call things like the self, agency, home, a life. Or a simple stopping.
>
> When a still life pops up out of the ordinary, it can come as a shock or as some kind of wake-up call. Or it can be a scene of sheer pleasure – an unnamed condensation of thought and feeling. Or an alibi for all of the violence, inequality and social insanity folded into the open disguise of ordinary things. Or it can be a flight from numbing routine all the self-destructive strategies of carrying on.
>
> It can turn the self into a dreaming scene, if only for a minute. [STEWART 2007, p. 19]

In accordance with the transitory, elusive nature of ordinary affect – and confirming the violence, inequality and social insanity that Stewart finds «folded into» ordinary things – the moment is a short-lived dreaming scene: the boy rose up «and dragg'd to earth both branch and bough, with crash / and merciless ravage» [«Nutting», ll. 42-43]. In ecological terms, this constitutes a failure to live in the «bioluminescence» of ordinary affective moments.[16] It is a relapse into instrumental gathering, yield, and gain rather

labourer and carrying a loaf and a cheese under his arms» [*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*].

[16] «Bioluminescence» is the term Donna Haraway uses in her endorsement of Kathleen Stewart's book.

than subsistence and by that way comes alienation from the land.[17] This boy doesn't have the everyday lived experience of the land that the subsistence shepherd does; his rentier class mode rises up to seek profit: «when from the bower I turn'd away, / Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings» [ll. 48-49].[18] This move troubles the present time of the poem's writing («unless I now / Confound my present feelings with the past» [ll. 46-47] as Wordsworth seeks to negotiate his regret, staging in the poem (perhaps as compensation) «the ordinary [as] an impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on» [BERLANT 2011, p. 21]. This is one of «these scenarios of living on in the ordinary, where subjectivity is depicted as overwhelmed, forced to change, and yet also stuck» [ibid.].

Such scrambling, Berlant suggests, will «always have a backstory and induce a poetic of immanent world making» [ibid.]. The shepherds and spinners of the *Lyrical Ballads* are the «backstory» to «Nutting», just as Wordsworth himself is to the Cockermouth floods. This makes the poem's pivoting on now/then/in future a manifestation of the immanent world making that might constitute ecological thinking. This way of reading Wordsworth is perhaps a little hazardous, is contentious, and is certainly embryonically partial, but I suggest it as a means of living ecologically with the legacy of Romantic-period writing. This means facing the ideological implications of the seeming comfort of nature/human relations in Wordsworth and remaining attuned to the present conditions in which our readings must take place – conditions whose outcomes are unclear, may never be «finished» and settled, and are ultimately «ordinary» in the sense that «the vagueness or the unfinished quality of the ordinary is not so much a deficiency as a resource, like a fog of immanent forces still moving even though so much has already happened and there seems to be plenty that's set in stone» [STEWART 2007, p. 127]. Reading Wordsworth thus is to find in his poetry the «material interactions» [FOSTER 2000] that must be ignited if we are to find an eco-poetics that really does release the rhythm of our material existence:

> This is no utopia. Not a challenge to be achieved or an ideal to be realized, but a mode of attunement, a continuous responding to something not quite already given and yet somehow happening. [STEWART 2007, p. 127]

[17] See Harvey's commentary on Arne Naess's «deep ecology» that declares, «Experiencing of an environment happens by doing something in it, by living in it» [HARVEY 1996, p. 169].

[18] Kelly details Wordsworth's father's work as a land agent to the notoriously powerful Sir James Lowther and Wordsworth's ambivalence towards this connection [pp. 46-48].

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Wordsworth's Intuition

Abstract

This article tackles the question of intuition in Wordsworth's poetry, with a particular focus on *The Excursion*. After exploring why critics are so averse to acknowledge dreamy intuition in Wordsworth's poetry, the discussion moves onto historical readings of intuition in the period to establish its relationship to Christianity, proposing the radical dissenter Joseph Fawcett as an interesting template for Wordsworth's Solitary because of his own resistance to intuition. In a reading of the Wanderer's Book IV address to the Solitary, intuition is defended as a peaceful attempt to include the Solitary in the group's meditation. The article suggests that the Wanderer goes beyond denominational Christianity by valuing intuition as an affective thinking practised through listening and communicated in moments of poetic verse, and that the intuitive insights into being that intersperse the Wanderer's homily invite readers to reflect on their understanding of faith as a way of thinking that «active principle» with which *The Excursion* concludes.

Emma Mason

Of one in whom persuasion and belief
Had ripened into faith, and faith become
A passionate intuition
The Excursion [IV. 1294-1296]

At the end of Book IV of *The Excursion* (1814), the Poet describes the Wanderer's faith as «passionate intuition», a mode of spiritual perception and knowing engaged to convince the Solitary to turn towards the divine. While the Poet seems convinced, the Solitary is not, and as such tends to be a favourite of modern readers who find his sceptical refusal of both God and divine feeling a reasoned rebuttal of the Wanderer's intuitive sagacity. Literary critics too tend to be unsure about the idea of «intuition» in Wordsworth's poetry as I discuss in part I of this essay. They take their cue from modern philosophy, which finds intuition disarmingly unreliable and indeterminate. As Herman Capplen [2012] insists in *Philosophy Without Intuitions*, philosophers only ever wrongly think they rely on intuition, and the remnants of intuition in philosophy are in fact empirical judgements and inferences. Timothy Williamson clarifies: «What are called 'intuitions' in philosophy are just applications of our ordinary capacities for judgement. We think of them as intuitions when a special kind

of scepticism about those capacities is salient» [2004, p. 109]. Capplen and Williamson polemically defend philosophy against the charge of insulated conjecture in an echo of Alfred J. Ayer's proclamation that «philosophers who fill their books with assertions that they intuitively 'know' this or that moral or religious 'truth' are merely providing material for the psychoanalyst» [1936, p. 12]. Even so, people rely on intuition to read their worlds, feeling particular relationships or phenomenon to be «true» through what they assume is instinct or a way of automatic «seeing».[1] As such, intuition can be annexed to or explained away as creation or imagination, a neurological memory, an exogenous tip off, or even a way of thinking the «hard» problem of consciousness, David Chalmers' phrase for asking how qualia (subjectively felt or sensed experience) come into being in the first place. What is it that enables the Wanderer to act through «passionate intuition»? Is it his ability to quiet his mind in order to observe his belief from the point of its inception? Or is it related to Chalmers' question: «How can we explain why there is something it is like to entertain a mental image, or to experience an emotion? It is widely agreed that experience arises from a physical basis, but we have no good explanation of why and how it so arises. Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all? It seems objectively unreasonable that it should, and yet it does» [1995, p. 201].

Chalmers' conundrum is dismissed by philosophers with the same vehemence with which readers of Wordsworth disregard the topic of intuition. In his critique of Chalmers, Daniel Dennett, for example, argues that there is no hard problem of consciousness, and that the «easy problems of consciousness» (abilities or functions explained away by neuroimaging and cognitive science) will, one day, fully explain why and how we have subjective experience [1996, p. 5]. For Dennett, Chalmers is an «illusion-generator» [p. 4] seduced by the way consciousness seems to be non-physical; it is in fact, Dennett argues, materially hard-wired into the brain and will eventually be accounted for by a complete map of all brain cells. Similarly, many new historical readings of Wordsworth's intuitions, passions, emotions, senses, imagined and sublime experiential moments explain them away through the dates, facts and figures that comprise Wordsworth's life and works: the material eclipses the immaterial. Yet Coleridge is one reader who believed Wordsworth was a profoundly intuitive poet, writing in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) that: «There is not, I firmly believe, a man now living, who has from his own inward experience, a clearer intuition, than Mr Wordsworth» [2008, p. 361]. Coleridge is right, not because Wordsworth performs a seer-like wizardry of «knowing», but because he practices intuition in his poetry as «immediate consciousness» of the «present moment» through an accumulative attention to nature, to God and to other people [2008, p. 293]. In doing so he foresees what D. T. Suzuki

[1] See VAN CLEVE [1983]; KRIPKE [1983]; HALES [2000]; and BONJOUR [1998].

calls the «innerliness of reality», a «kind of existential intuition» wherein «there is no object, no subject», but only an «absolute is-ness» [1955, p. 56]. Such «is-ness», this essay suggests, involves reciprocal listening as well as dialogic exchange. *The Excursion* is as much a poem of people listening to others over long periods of time, a «knowing together», as it is Ciceronian discourse.[2] For the Wanderer, such listening is like that of a child who brightens «with joy» [IV. l. 1138] while listening «intensely» to the «Murmurings» [IV. l. 1137] inside a shell:

> […] whereby the monitor expressed
> Mysterious union with its native sea.
> Even such a shell the universe itself
> Is to the ear of Faith;
> [IV. ll. 1139-1142]

The child hears the sea by listening intensely to the shell, just as we might hear «Faith» by listening intensely to the universe. Shaped like an ear, we can be sure Wordsworth's depiction of «Faith» is listening back.

The way such listening unites the reader with the universe speaks to the «One Life» idea Wordsworth explored with Coleridge, but it develops in Book IV of *The Excursion* into a passionate intuition that wins over the Poet, if not the Solitary. The Solitary is a foil for the other characters because he consistently ignores the spiritual for material gain and seems unable (or unwilling) to listen to or intuit the Wanderer's homily. Wordsworth encourages his own reader, however, to intuit the Wanderer's words like a child listens to a shell and in doing so feel the poem's rhythmic spiritual murmurings of «Not human nature only» but «All natures» [IV. ll. 333-334]. As Gaston Bachelard writes: «by listening to certain words as a child listens to the sea in a seashell, a word dreamer hears the murmur of a world of dreams» [1971, p. 149]. The question of why critics are so averse to dreamy intuition in Wordsworth's poetry is my concern in part I of this essay; while part II addresses historical readings of intuition in the period to establish its relationship to faith and Christianity. I argue that the radical dissenter Joseph Fawcett proves an interesting template for Wordsworth's «Solitary» because of his own resistance to intuition, one that I read as a response to Richard Price's championing of it as a way of communing with God. Part III develops the discussion in relation to the Wanderer's Book IV address to the Solitary, and defends it as a gentling and peaceful attempt to include the Solitary in the group's meditation. There is nothing new in such an assertion, but I make it as a counter to those critics who turn against the Wanderer as a «dogmatic»

[2] POTKAY [2012] writes that the poem presupposes «community and the importance of *knowing together* – the root meaning of the Latin *conscience*, and one that Wordsworth may have found in Seneca's *Moral Epistles*», p. 165.

and «moralizing mouthpiece» for Wordsworth's late poetry, assumed by these critics to be right-leaning and Christian [WEINFIELD 2012, p. 106; GUEST 1978, p. 21]. I argue that the Wanderer goes beyond denominational Christianity by valuing intuition as an affective thinking practised through listening and communicated in moments of poetic verse. Bachelard [2013] calls these moments «poetic instants», intuitive insights into being that I suggest intersperse the Wanderer's homily and invite readers to reflect on their understanding of faith as a way of thinking that «*active* principle» [IX. l. 3] with which *The Excursion* concludes.

I. Intuition is unfashionable in dominant critical interpretations of Wordsworth. As David Ellis argues, we must beware of overplaying «an idea of the poet as the creature of intuition whose insights have the status of lucky hits» [p. 83]. M. H. Abrams too insists that it is Blake and Shelley that «make poetic imagination the organ of intuition beyond experience» and not Wordsworth, who was instead «an honest heir to the centuries-old English tradition of empiricism» [1953, pp. 313-314]; and Hunter Davies is willing only to attribute intuition to Dorothy («a spirit, a child of nature, an unformed, inspirational, intuitive being»), and not to her brother [2009, pp. 131-132]. Where intuition is admitted to as a way of thinking or feeling in Wordsworth, it is as an embattled process that, Laura Quinney argues, leads to a «representation of the self as porous, fragmented, haunted, and half blind» [2009, p. 2]. Quinney continues to assess Wordsworth's «intuition of selfhood» as a failed reaching out towards confidence and integrity: «it seeks wholeness, but encounters self-division and self-doubt». Like Abrams, she appears able to «measure» intuition, scoring Blake higher than Wordsworth on the intuition meter. For Blake, Quinney writes, «the intuition of selfhood includes the intuition of its transcendence – its superiority to the material world – and he maintained that if this intuition is simply discounted as an illusion, it will not die down but rather rankle and torment» [p. 10]. Thus Quinney's own discounting of intuition in Wordsworth necessarily leads to her assessment of his subjectivity as «porous, fragmented, haunted, and half blind». By the same logic, those willing to address the question of intuition in Wordsworth find a happier poet. D. J. Moores suggests that Wordsworth is a legatee of Milton's intuitive reason, one that leads him to found his poetry on a principle of love that connects him to others: «Love is the principle of individual growth in Wordsworth's verse, and it is the stay of being. Not only does it organize both perception and intuition; love binds all human beings to nature and God. Love thus makes the many forms of communion possible in Wordsworth's poetry» [2006, pp. 117, 160]. Biren Das and Sunil Kumar Sarker both value Wordsworth's spontaneous intuitive vision [2006, p. 111; 2003, p. 341]; Thomas Weiskel and David P. Haney note intuition in their conceptualizing of the Wordsworthian «imagination» [2009, p. 129; 2010, p.

214]; and Adam Potkay, with characteristic buoyancy, notes a «joyful intuition» in Wordsworth's invocation of being [2007, p. 133].

The question of being, how we engage with our world and what that engagement feels like is inseparable from the issue of intuition. For nineteenth-century readers, being was central to the quasi-religious consolation they sought in Wordsworth's poetry. Potkay argues that this manifested as a joy related to «facets of being itself: breathing, circulating blood, sensing, feeling pleasure, sustaining life», one that replaced the Shaftesburian «after-joy» associated with acts of ethical benevolence [2007, p. 121]. This shift from «doing to being» also witnessed the «re-ascension» of joy to heaven, encouraging readers to experience the joy of their own being in relation to either God or Nature or both. For Potkay, Wordsworth's ability to conjure the «joy of being» emerges in part through his reading of Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) with Coleridge in 1796, wherein a knowing-of-God equates to a knowing-of-things because God «constitutes only the essence of the human mind» [SPINOZA 1996, p. 55]. This means that while we perceive and form an understanding of the world through experience (our sense-perception) and memory (imagining), absolute knowing is a process in which we affirm ourselves as identical with reality. Coleridge found further clarification on the subject in Fichte's philosophy, wherein experience is grounded in a pre-conscious subjectivity called *Anschauung*, translated by Coleridge as intuition [2008, p. 303]. A feeling of harmony between ego and non ego, Fichte's intuition corresponds to Wordsworth's «eye made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things» [«Tintern Abbey», 1798, 48-50] and allows for a «thinking» of oppositions as «one» [STEMPEL 1971, p. 373]. Such synthesising is «believed» by the beholder through his or her capacity to «feel» its impact and so register a process of human thinking about our being in the material and spiritual world that Fichte (and Coleridge) named God. As Fichte wrote in the *Vocation of Man* (1800): «Only in our minds has He created a world; at least that *from which* we unfold it, and that *by which* we unfold it; – the voice of duty, and harmonious feelings, intuitions, and laws of thought» [1931, p. 158].

Wordsworth does not name intuitive thinking about being God, but he does call it «faith», a moment of instantaneous unity with the world in which nostalgia and regret is momentarily dispelled. Bachelard describes the «poetic instant» as an escape from everyday time that «rejects doubt» and «hushes the din of prose» to organize sound, conduct «cadences» and orchestrate «passions and tensions» in order to vertically access the depth of being, «life, the becoming of the world» [2013, pp. 58-59]. By rooting the reader into the «now», Wordsworth's poetry enacts a «spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings» but suspends that overflow as a way of focusing the reader and, as Bachelard argues, then releases him or her from continual time to «attain the auto-synchronous reference point at the centre of oneself»

[2013, p. 60]. Wordsworth's intuitive thinking and Bachelard's intuition of the instant also speak to Coleridge's «intellectual intuitions», an «immediate consciousness» of the present moment and living «act of thinking» that «comprehends all truths known to us without a medium» [2008, p. 303]. This consciousness was tuned into the «One Life» idea that Coleridge had discovered through Schiller's intuition contemplation, Joseph Priestley's theories of animated matter, and also Unitarianism. Invoking a unified, life-sustaining energy that permeated creation, the «One Life» rings through that «*active* Principle» that «subsists / In all things» [IX. ll. 3-5] that becomes the Wanderer's mantra by the end of *The Excursion*. Held buoyant in «the stars», «clouds», «brooks» «flower and tree» and «every pebbly stone» [IX. ll. 5-8], this principle is at once faith and intuition and set up Wordsworth to fulfil Coleridge's ideal of the intuitive poet. Coleridge argues that Wordsworth fails because he meditated on the world, not through «principles of grammar, logic, psychology», but rather through what he heard «in the market, wake, high-road, or plough-field» [2008, p. 361]. Heard through this logic, the Wanderer's words carry no import because a Pedlar, not a poet, utters them and Coleridge bemoaned his friend's fall from the lyricism of «Tintern Abbey» and *The Prelude* to the didacticism of *The Excursion*.

Modern critics tend to repeat Coleridge's judgement. *The Excursion* is demoted below *The Prelude* because of the latter's supposed greater subjective insight performed as it is through spots of time, epiphanies and sublime moments of self-reflection. Fabled views include Geoffrey Hartman's summary of it as «a betrayal of possible sublimity» [1971, p. 292]; and Abrams' sense of it as a record of «the failure of millennial hope in the Revolution» [1984, p. 63]. More recently, Mark Canuel claims that it is impossible to reconcile the poem's praise for an established church to which the characters struggle to conform [2002, pp. 172-173]; Alison Hickey regards these characters as «straw» men anyway [1997, p. 14]; and Henry Weinfield brands the poem as a naïve defense of «assured belief» [2012, pp. 16-17]. Even where it is recognized that the poem might turn away from solipsism into a communal affection, critics worry, as Nigel Alderman [2005] does, that *The Excursion's* ostensible efforts to move away from personal vision into the social ends up undermining the ability of poetry to communicate such a message. Sally Bushell [2002] and Paul Fry's [2008] work has served to counter these views by rescuing the poem from these Coleridgean readings, as well as from Francis Jeffrey's endlessly quoted and excessively orotund review of *The Excursion* [«This will never do»; «beyond the power of criticism»; «hopeless»; a «malady» and «disorder»; a «perversion»; marked by «affectation and mysticism and prolixity», 1814, pp.1-30]. But even Bushell and Fry orient the reader away from the poem's concerns with «passionate intuition» into its formal strategies as dramatic experiment; or as a poem motivated by the «ontic unity of all things», a unity that excludes, according to Fry, politics and religion [FRY 2008, pp. 6, 146].

Fry targets transcendent religion in his ontic formula, arguing that Wordsworth is less interested in particular experiences and more astonished by the fact the world exists in the first place.

Yet *The Excursion* is also concerned with instants of experience that cannot be ontically mapped and relate rather to phenomenal existence and how various readers – represented by the Wanderer, Solitary, Pastor and narrator Poet – come to access such phenomena. Weinfield's objection that the religious differences the characters express have no «impact» on «the reader» – aesthetic or otherwise – simply ignores what a reader willing to engage with the poem's instant metaphysics might hear, gestured to in Keats' evaluation of the poem as one of the «things to rejoice at in this Age» [1958, I, p. 203], as well as Charles Kingsley's sense of it as a «light in a dark time» [2011, p. 120]. Critics who disparage *The Excursion* thus do so by overlooking its presentation of religious experience, not as denominational or doctrinal, but as instantaneous, «passionate» and «intuitive». Hazlitt [1869] spoke for many nineteenth-century readers, for example, when he praised the poem's conjuring of present moment consciousness in which everything feels one [«To him the great and the small are the same; the near and the remote; what appears, and what only is», p. 146], as well as its refusal to hierarchize, measure or differentiate people [«Even the dialogues introduced in the present volume are soliloquies of the same character […] The recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in one poet», p. 146]. That Wordsworth writes «as if there were nothing, but himself and the universe. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought» is precisely what appeals to a reader willing to occupy those moments of emotional being the narrative opens up [HAZLITT 1869, p. 146]. Rather than patronizing readers with allegoric symbols of abstract human experience, Wordsworth captures how people act and reciprocate when they spend time with each other, learning to intuit meaning as a mark of intimacy. Coleridge could not access Wordsworth's intuitive turn because he wanted to materialize it as something tangible, or at least visual, like his own description of intuition as «a compleat circle, a one arched Bridge over a smooth clear stream» [1957, p. 1308]. *The Excursion* encourages instead an intuitive present-moment listening that is not like hearing music [«that the wind takes up / By snatches, and lets fall», IV. ll. 1285-1286], and more like intuiting something inward, a making immaterial of material experience.

II. The issue of whether intuition is material (a physical «spark») or immaterial (a felt sense) preoccupied contemporary thinkers. On the one hand, intuition was used as a way of describing an inherited twinkle of insight that enabled good character, knowledge or creative ability, and which moves an individual – «by intuition» – into a certain way of being. The eighteenth-century actress Elizabeth Farren, for example, was described in the press as «knowing» how to fulfil the role of «theatrical luminary» «as by

intuition» [1789, p. 281]; while the East India colonel John Mordant was regarded as successful in his duties «more by intuition, than by any study or effort» [1808, p. 250]. On the other hand, intuition was debated as a way of assessing Chalmers' «hard» problem of consciousness. While Locke [1996] considered the conscious mind a record of learned experiences, and intuition only ever recognition of self-evident truths, Kant [2007] argued for intuition as raw experience given instantly in consciousness. The mind processes the world through a synthesising of conceptual understanding and intuitive sensibility, subsuming intuition under concepts (and so positing «feeling» against «reason»). Fichte [1931] tried to escape this dualism by presenting human thinking as an intuitive feeling of God's «creation» of meaning «in our hearts», later developed by John Abercrombie as «intuitive principles of belief» that infer the «existence» of the «Almighty Creator» [1832, p. 9]. Intuition signified an affective thinking, then, often employed to describe the human relationship to God. A prominent example of the way intuition and belief were interrelated is *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals*, written between 1758 and 1787 by the radical dissenter, Richard Price. Price was famously associated with the Johnson circle through his community at the Unitarian Newington Green meeting house, a position he moved to from the Dissenting Chapel in Old Jewry.[3] *A Review* is clear that belief and morality is founded on «feeling» and «intuition», although his definition of the former recalls Kant's reading of the latter. Feeling, or «immediate consciousness», Price states, allows us to «acquire the knowledge of our own existence, and of the several operations, passions, and sensations of our minds»; intuition seems to synthesise such feeling, «the mind's survey of its own ideas, and the relations between them, and the notice it takes, by its own innate light and intellective power, of what absolutely and necessarily is or is not true and false, consistent and inconsistent, possible and impossible in the nature of things» [1769, pp. 59, 162-163, 164].

Intuition also enables thinking for Price: thought and reflection only lead back to what is «*intuitive* to us», our morals, benevolent relation to things and a sense of our very possibility in the world [1769, pp. 163-167]. What is especially significant about Price's interest in the «*intuitive*» and felt aspect of belief is how sharply it contrasts with the position on belief presented by his successor at the Old Jewry, Joseph Fawcett. Fawcett took over in 1791 and attracted huge crowds, including Wordsworth, who went «to hear Fawcett» preach «on Sundays» during his 1791 stay in London [FENWICK 1993, p. 197]. Yet Wordsworth later told Isabella Fenwick that while he

[3] Price drew a range of intellectuals to the Unitarian Newington Green meeting house at which he worked after Old Jewry. The list includes several members of the Johnson circle, as well as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Tom Paine, David Hume, Adam Smith and Mary Wollstonecraft.

considered Fawcett «an able & eloquent man», he worried that «his Xtianity was probably never very deeply rooted», a note that is often dismissed as a product of Fenwick's Christian editing and Wordsworth's revisionary memory [p. 197]. It nevertheless calls attention to Wordsworth's sense of Fawcett as a religious lightweight, borne out in the preacher's uncompromising investment in «unruffled reason» and the «practical wisdom of man» gleaned through «practical inferences» and the «eye of Strict and Sober Reason» [FAWCETT 1801, pp. 113, 134, 176, 368]. These lines – from his two-volume Old Jewry Sermons – correlate to Godwin's oft-cited declaration that Fawcett was «a declared enemy of the private and domestic affections» [1992, I, p. 53]. God's word was not one of feminised emotion but rather a «voice of reason»; and «love of God» meant the «love of reason»: without such analogy, Fawcett feared, the believer will adore «a God of his own making […] the creature of his fancy; the manufacture of his imagination; a chimerical deity; a spiritual idol» [FAWCETT 1801, pp. 30, 303, 310]. Hence Fawcett avoids nearly all mention of Paul [with his emphasis on the «Spirit of Christ», Romans 8.9; and the «spirit of wisdom and revelation», Ephesians 1.17] and instead shapes a material form of this «spirit» in virtue, a «sense» and «organ» of «enjoyment» essential to the human body [p. 206]. This physicalizing of virtue comes at the end of sermon VII, a reading of the Book of Job in which Job's final words before God's appearance are deemed «the language of a broken heart; of a mind unhinged, and deranged by misery; a mind that feels, more than it thinks; it is the extravagance of grief; it is the enthusiasm of sorrow» [p. 189]. For Fawcett, the narrative has merit only in its application to human beings («put into the mouth of every man, as an address from him to his brother») and as a reminder of life's brevity and the consequent necessity for us to «melt us into mutual compassion and tenderness of treatment toward each other» [pp. 190, 195].

III. Fawcett's despiritualization of Job's narrative is indicative of his relationship to Christianity as a politics of compassion communicated most effectively through metaphor, allegory and reason.[4] Intuition is not mentioned on any of the 758 pages that comprise his sermons because Fawcett worried that responding to God in such an unpredictable and impressionistic way produced only «a chimerical deity; a spiritual idol». His pragmatism, eventual departure from the pulpit for farming, and «unrooted» Christianity make him one of the more interesting contextual referents for the Solitary [see HOLMES

[4] The message also rebounds in *The Art of War* [1795], Fawcett's long poem in which war is not just associated with the moral depravity of the age, but also with the «long minority» of «Reason», ll.1242-1243.

1828, p. 82].[5] A character usually read through his disenchantment with people and God, the Solitary is objectionable not because of his emotional state, but because of his constant derision of his friends and simultaneous desire for personal power. As Potkay's deft reading of the Solitary reveals, he is negatively dependent on others; expresses anger towards a (feminised) personification of «Hope» for granting «fear – doubt – agony» instead of «favours» [III. l. 461]; and thinks only of what will fulfil and satisfy his own needs and imagined desires [2012, pp. 165-167]. His vision of the new Jerusalem at the end of Book II [827-881], for example, recalls only the «glory» and «power» of Revelation 19-21 («Glory beyond all glory»; «Fantastic pomp»; «mightiest power») and none of its affective content: the Solitary's throne is not the glory seat of God or the Lamb, but an empty symbol of power for its own sake. He mourns his wife as a moment of «glory» that falls from «Wretched ambition» [III. ll. 672-674], calls the poor a dependent «multitude» of sick seeds [IX. ll. 141-142] and describes the revelation of «heaven» through meditation as a «wished-for end» «missed» [III. ll. 406-407] by all who aspire to it. While Wordsworth leaves open the dialogue between the Solitary's «slighted Hope» [III. ll. 459] and the Wanderer's «Admiration, Hope, and Love» [IV. 763], he spurs on his readers to sympathise with the Wanderer's attempt to convert his friend to «assured belief» [IV. 12] [WHEELER 1994, p. 54]. While this attempt is perhaps overly persistent, and seemingly blind to the Solitary's repeated protestations of religious doubt, it nevertheless adapts to its circumstance by translating God's «Being / Of infinite benevolence and power» [IV. ll. 14-15], not into a doctrinally limited autocrat, but into a «happiness, or blessedness» and «satisfaction of mind which stems from the intuitive knowledge of God» [SPINOZA 1996, p. 155].

Wordsworth turns explicitly to intuition in Book IV, wherein the Wanderer redresses the Solitary's despondency by attempting to sell the merits of «a lively faith». Like many contemporary Evangelical preachers, he at first rides roughshod over the Solitary's scepticism, pushing a composite of «faith / Faith absolute in God» and an implausible trust in hope as the only and ultimate «safeguard of the world!» [IV. ll. 21-22, 28]. In so doing he fails to listen properly, lacking the «compassion» the Poet hopes the group will express towards their mournful friend [IV. l. 6]. Yet the Wanderer anticipates both the Poet's disappointment and the Solitary and reader's resistance to religion by reorienting his homily to related themes: nature [«How beautiful this dome of sky; And the vast hills», IV. l. 34], feeling [«passions hold a fluctuating seat», IV. 70], and mortality [«Man is of dust», IV. l. 140]. Returning to the solace of dwelling «with God in endless love» [IV. l. 190],

[5] Other models for the Solitary include a «Mr Luff» and a «Grasmere Pauper», both reported on in the Fenwick notes, p. 201; Fawcett became a farmer in Essex after resigning from the Old Jewry, and died in 1804.

the Wanderer continues customize his presentation of faith, here as an energized waking from sleep, and further on in the poem as a «spirit» of «virtue» [IV. l. 313] or mode of «consciousness» [IV. ll. 95, 414]. For some readers, such oratory only suspends a Christian message the poem ultimately imposes; for others, like Catherine Clarkson, it results in a rejection of religion for pantheism or philosophy.[6] Yet the Wanderer's Book IV discourse plots a way through these two extremes by embracing intuition as a way of registering, not what might be, but a belief in the friends' present-moment togetherness and conversation. In reply to the Solitary's Fawcett-like anxiety at trusting in anything imagined or felt [IV. ll. 768-773], the Wanderer suggests he summon direct experiences of «faith» as both everyday thankfulness [for «daily bread», IV. l. 789], and also as an emotional connection with others. This connection, the Wanderer claims, «may be learned» from a «mother's tongue» that teaches religion «feelingly» [IV. ll. 790-791] through a feminised language of maternal interaction that simultaneously signifies as a «first language» of familiar and native terms and phrases. Far from reducing faith to rustic cosiness, the Wanderer invokes this first language as the only viable way of understanding those «living things, and things inanimate» that «Do speak, at Heaven's command, to eye and ear» [IV. ll. 1204-1205]. A language now lost to Wordsworth's readers, they can again hear «the articulate voice / Of God» [IV. ll. 634-635] and talk «With wingèd Messengers» [IV. l. 639] through a «joy and love» accessed through either «actual vision, sensible / To sight and feeling» or «shadowed forth» in «Communications spiritually maintained, / And intuitions moral and divine» [IV. ll. 641-646]. Unwittingly sounding like Price (he is, after all, a Pedlar), the Wanderer stresses the intuitive as a way to counter the silence and invisibility of God [«when the One, ineffable of name, / Of nature indivisible, withdrew», IV. ll. 663-664] and into the local feelings and forms of their topography.

Moral and divine intuitions are key to the conclusion of Book IV. While the Solitary still panics that «showers of grace» might not «refresh a parched and withered land» [IV. ll. 1096-1098], the Wanderer closes his address by asking his audience to reflect on «the Being that we are; / Thus deeply drinking-in the soul of things» [IV. ll. 1264-1265]. Like those metaphors the Wanderer employed at the beginning of his meditation, these references to water recall both Christianity (as baptism) and also a renewing of generic wellbeing. The Wanderer thus closes his speech by supplanting the Solitary's Book II power of glory and might with «the mind's *excursive* power», italicizing «excursive» to spotlight the complexities of the poem's title as a word meaning an outburst of feeling or running over of something, as well as

[6] Wordsworth wrote to Catherine Clarkson in January 1815 because he was concerned by her pantheistic interpretation of the poem. See WORDSWORTH 1970, p. 184.

a journey or deviation. Acknowledging that which individuals can directly «see, / Or feel» [IV. ll. 1270-1271] not only fine tunes them as «corporeal» [IV. ll. 1272] beings in the world, but it also calms them down in the face of «Earthly desires» [IV. ll. 1274], present-moment experience raising them to «divine love» [IV. ll. 1275]. The Wanderer's final lines bring the reader back to the «divine», a word that implies the ability to augur and interpret by an insight and perception that goes beyond calculation and analysis as much as it does «God». The Poet-narrator understands this, book-ending the Wanderer's recital by calling him a «Sage» [IV. ll. 1277] and «Indian Chief» who «discharges from his breast / Into the hearing of assembled tribes» [IV. ll. 1279-1280]. As Tim Fulford argues, Wordsworth «imagined contemplative solitaries as Indians who were to be respected», the chief or shaman a figure that «eluded criteria by which white men defined where rationality ended» [2006, pp. 79, 205-206].[7] While Fulford suggests that Wordsworth «doomed» these imagined Indians «to extinction», the Poet values the Wanderer precisely because his words are permanent and immutable:

> The words he uttered shall not pass away
> Dispersed, like music that the wind takes up
> By snatches, and lets fall, to be forgotten;
> No – they sank into me, the bounteous gift
> Of one whom time and nature had made wise,
> Gracing his doctrine with authority
> Which hostile spirits silently allow;
> Of one accustomed to desires that feed
> On fruitage gathered from the tree of life;
> To hopes on knowledge and experience built;
> Of one in whom persuasion and belief
> Had ripened into faith, and faith become
> A passionate intuition; whence the Soul,
> Though bound to earth by ties of pity and love,
> From all injurious servitude was free.
> [IV. ll. 1284-1298]

The Poet recognizes the Solitary's vision of faith here by conceding those «hostile spirits» [IV. 1. 290] who reduce it to doctrine and authority. By contrast, the Wanderer's words embody a grace given, not by a Church or Pope, but rhythmically in «time and nature» [IV. l. 1288], communicating its presence as affective consciousness, the knowing of how to compassionately be with and listen to others. This is what the Poet recognizes in the Wanderer as passionate intuition. His faith licenses him to narrate long stories in which

[7] Fulford argues that Wordsworth accessed shamanic notions of the Indian in HEARNE 1968.

poetic instants are embedded, what Bachelard calls «all those points where the human heart is able to invert antitheses», overturning preconceptions of religion as a dualistic system to embrace instead a way of thinking that frees the «Soul» [2013, p. 59]. The Wanderer himself is moved by grace, not because he ignored his «desires» [IV. l. 1290] or was without need of «persuasion» [IV. ll. 1293], but because he trusts in emotional communication and connection with his friends, both as «characters» and as aspects of human being. *The Prelude* may contain sublime moments and epiphanies, but it is in *The Excursion* that this develops through faith into intuition, that which registers the joys and sorrows that comprise life simply and immediately. As Wordsworth writes in his famous note to the end of Book V, later published as *Essays on Epitaphs*, the «perfect epitaph» is «an intuition, communicated in adequate words, of the sublimity of intellectual power» [1988, p. 137]. Intuition, then, asks us to value every experience as if it were sublime, or, as Bachelard writes, to «examine with passionate attention» the habitual and regular and learn how to do so through a loving consciousness of «life in all its details» [p. 7].

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Wordsworth's Anosmia

Abstract

The article explores the idea of anosmia in relation to scent references in Wordsworth's later verse, arguing that such references offer a register that should be read creatively and literary-historically rather than simply biographically. The first section of the article offers a brief summary of changes in the medical understanding of smell and anosmia in the early nineteenth century, and connects them both to the comments of Wordsworth's contemporaries on his sensory deficiency; and also to a proposed new poetic distinctiveness of scent at this time. The second section moves from medicine to botany in considering the representation of the scent of flowers, arguing for the influence of Felicia Hemans, and suggesting that for both poets scent signifies Christianity and divine communication. The third section explores these ideas in more detail with a reading of Wordsworth's «Devotional Incitements» (1835), contextualizing it within debates about incense and ritual in Anglicanism in this period. The article concludes in more critical terms by questioning the received idea of Wordsworth's lack of «sensuality», situating this within changing valuations of the language of the senses.

Rowan Rose Boyson

Wordsworth's inability to smell was remarked upon in three accounts published in the mid-nineteenth century, although he himself does not appear to have left any written reference to it. Robert Southey, Christopher Wordsworth and Harriet Martineau all mentioned a curious incident in which Wordsworth's absent sense of smell apparently flared back for an instant. Both Southey and Christopher Wordsworth situated the event in the gardens of Racedown Lodge, Dorset, where the poet lived briefly in the 1790s. Southey specified the sensory trigger as «stocks» and Christopher called them a «parterre of sweet flowers»; whereas Harriet Martineau, anosmic herself, thought this rare onrush of sensation had been provoked by that quintessentially English aroma of a bean-field. In tracing the origins of his own «Love for Botany and Entomology» to his «Grandmother's House at Bedminster» in a letter dated July 1822, a particular scent came into Southey's consciousness, inviting reflection on Wordsworth:

> Just by the orchard gate was a fine barberry-bush; and that peculiar odour of its blossoms, which is supposed to injure the wheat within its reach, is still fresh in my remembrance. Wordsworth has no sense of smell. Once, and once only in his life, the dormant power awakened; it was by a bed of stocks in full bloom, at a house which he inhabited in Dorsetshire, some five-and-twenty years ago; and he says it was like a vision of Paradise to him; but it lasted only a few minutes, and the faculty has continued torpid from that time. The fact is remarkable in itself, and would be worthy of remark, even if it did not relate to a man of whom posterity will desire to know all that can be remembered. He has often expressed to me his regret for this privation. I, on the contrary, possess the sense in such acuteness, that I can remember an odor and call up the ghost of one that is departed. But I must return to the barberry-bush. [SOUTHEY 1849-50, p. 33]

This scented reverie, echoing the sensual plenitude and loss described in «Kubla Khan», serves here as a point of comparison between the «organic sensibility» of the two poets. Southey's prolepsis may suggest the fulfilment of Wordsworth's own claim for the importance of the poet's own «organic sensibility» in the «Preface» to the *Lyrical Ballads*. The whole incident was, however, dismissed by Christopher Wordsworth in his 1851 *Memoirs*, which included William's note appended to «Musings in Aquapendente» (1837) on the scent of the Italian broom. Christopher added this comment:

> With regard to *fragrance*, Mr. Wordsworth spoke from the testimony of *others:* he himself had *no sense of smell*. The single instance of his enjoying such a perception, which is recorded of him in Southey's life, was, in fact, imaginary. The incident occurred at Racedown, when he was walking with Miss H –, who coming suddenly upon a parterre of sweet flowers, expressed her pleasure at his fragrance, – a pleasure which he caught from her lips, and then fancied to be her own. [WORDSWORTH 1851, p. 322]

The Lakeland novelist James Payn recalled that Martineau had, like Southey, made a self-comparison with Wordsworth:

> The sense of smell was also denied her, as it was to Wordsworth; in his case, too, curiously enough, it was vouchsafed to him, she told me, upon one occasion only. «He once smelt a beanfield and thought it heaven». [PAYN 1884, p. 118]

If Martineau's anecdote is misremembered or mistaken, it is not random; the scent of bean-flowers, agricultural rather than horticultural, is frequently used

as a sensory symbol of English belonging in georgic and pastoral verse: consider the Earl of Rochester's «The Choice», S. T. Coleridge's «The Aeolian Harp», John Clare's «The Bean Field», and William Morris's «June» in *The Earthly Paradise*. Christopher Wordsworth's insistence that Wordsworth *never* smelled does not exactly diminish the curiosity of the anecdote. The occasional hesitance of our own cognition of smell is something well attested to by patients suffering long-term anosmia, where scents may randomly and doubtfully present to consciousness [BIRNBAUM 2011]. What, in ordinary experience, is the difference between suddenly noting the «real» heady pleasure of blooming stocks and merely «imagining» that pleasure, as if through a fanciful contagion? Smell is an associative, imaginative and language-oriented sense, one that may be linked to the workings of poetry itself.

In this essay I wish to explore the idea of anosmia in relation to the actual fact of scent references in Wordsworth's later verse. For Wordsworth's poems of the 1820s and 30s refer frequently, if somewhat vaguely, to the scent of flowers and of incense. They offer a register that should be read creatively and literary-historically rather than literally or biographically, especially given that there is no evidence that Wordsworth ever regained his sense of smell. The first section of the essay offers a brief summary of changes in the medical understanding of smell and anosmia in the early nineteenth century, and proposes that this may be one reason why Wordsworth's contemporaries commented on his sensory deficiency and why scent may gain a new poetic distinctiveness. The second section moves from medicine to botany in considering the representation of the scent of flowers, arguing for the influence of Felicia Hemans, and suggesting that for both poets scent signifies Christianity and divine communication. The third section explores these ideas in more detail with a reading of Wordsworth's «Devotional Incitements» (1835), contextualizing it within debates about incense and ritual in Anglicanism in this period. Finally, I conclude in more critical terms by questioning the received idea of Wordsworth's lack of «sensuality», situating this within changing valuations of the language of the senses.

The emergence of anosmia

Smell was becoming a subject of enquiry in the medical science of the 1810s and 20s. The chemist William Prout first defined flavour, as the combination of smell and taste, in a medical essay of 1812, in which he also commented that loss of a sense of smell sometimes led to loss of taste perception [PROUT 1812]. The *OED* gives the first use of «anosmia» in 1811, in Robert Hooper's medical dictionary *Lexicon-medicum*, though the Latin term seems to have

appeared regularly in the great mid-eighteenth-century nosologies, or disease classifications, which for a time were central to European medical thought [KENDELL 1993]. The pioneer of this genre, Boissier de Sauvages, classed anosmia amongst «Debilitates» (weaknesses) in his *Genera Morborum* of 1763, in the category «Dysaesthesiae» – «inability to clearly and distinctly sense», along with problems of vision, weak or false hearing, loss or impairment of taste (agheustia), and loss of touch (anaesthesia) [CULLEN 1800, p. 46]. As Boissier de Sauvages noted, anosmia had previously been identified by the tenth-century Persian physician Haly Abbas and termed *chasemie*, whilst the seventeenth-century German, Daniel Sennert, tutor of Conrad Victor Schneider for whom the Schneiderian membrane was named, called it *olfactus amissio*. Linnaeus, whose own disease taxonomy followed in 1763, grouped anosmia in the genus *Quietales* («diseases in which the voluntary or involuntary Motions or Senses suffer a diminution») and the class «Privativi», alongside such species of disease as morosos (defective imagination), oblivio (defective memory), and anorexia (defective hunger) [PULTENEY 1781, p. 179]. Vogel's nosology of 1764 placed anosmia with diseases such as torpor, paralysis, and asthma in the larger category of Adynamiae (loss of strength or vigour). William Cullen's 1769 Latin nosology (which reprinted the classification structures of his predecessors) was the most influential in the English and Scottish contexts; it placed anosmia in Boissier de Sauvages's «Dysaesthesia» category, though Cullen's simplified system made this one of a larger class of «local» diseases, rather than «weaknesses». Whilst Cullen's «dysaesthesia» category focused mainly on the five senses, it is intriguing that it included what we might now see as hallucinatory or neurotic perceptions, such as «false vision, so that a person thinks he sees objects which do not exist» [CULLEN 1800, p. 158].

John Mason Good, doctor and translator of Lucretius, included a long discussion of what he called «parosmis» as «sense of smell vitiated or lost» in his 1817 *Physiological System of Nosology*. Echoing Cullen, he placed this in the category of «diseases of the nervous function», or «NEUROSES». Drawing on a hint given by Erasmus Darwin, who had made reference to *olfactus acrior*, Mason Good decided to expand the category beyond simply absence of smell to include «acrid smell», «obtuse smell» and «want of smell». Anosmia received lengthy treatment in Hippolyte Cloquet's *Osphrésiologie, ou Traité des odeurs, du sens et des organes de l'olfaction* (1821). In Mason Good's *Study of Medicine* (first published in 4 volumes in 1822), one detects the period's quickening anthropological pulse and a new comparative approach to the senses (human / animal; savage / civilized). Drawing on the French physician-anthropologist Julien-Joseph Virey's *Histoire naturelle de genre humain* (1801), and the extensive discussion of smell in Virey's *Histoire naturelle des Médicamens, des Alimens et des Poisons* (1820), Mason Good comments that «civilized nations» found their «faculty of smell blunted by an habitual exposure to strong odours, or an

intricate combination of odours, and by the use of high-flavoured foods». He adds a cultural-constructivist twist to Virey's more race-based view: «this sense [of smell], he might have added, is capable of cultivation, and of acquiring delicacy of discrimination by use; that savages, many of whom make an approach to the life of quadrupeds, employ it, and trust to it in a similar manner; and that this is perhaps the chief cause of the difference he has pointed out» [MASON GOOD 1826, pp. 251-252]. Mason Good reported the tale of a woman suffering anosmia:

> The author once knew a very beautiful and elegant young lady, who had from birth so total a want of smell as not only to be incapable of perceiving any differences in the odours of different perfumes or flowers, but of sweet and corrupt meats, and who could inhale very powerful errhines without sneezing. Though this affection seemed to have been connate, and dependant upon a natural imperfection of the nerves of smell, the Schneiderian membrane had something of the thickening which is ordinarily produced by catarrh, and the lady always spoke as though under the influence of a slight cold. [MASON GOOD 1826, p. 253]

That this woman could not distinguish between «beef, veal and pork» provided some evidence of the link between smell and flavour. Mason Good wrote that «the sense of taste […] possesses so close analogy to that of smell», but also that «we do not know the cause of that different effect, or in other words, of that variety of taste which different substances produce» [MASON GOOD 1826, pp. 255, 254]; it is clear here and in William Prout's early essay that there was a hesitancy around this infant science of flavour and anosmia. Anosmia was something one might identify as a medical curiosity, linked to notions about the «sensitivity» and «cultivation» of peoples. But its science was changing. One historian of brain science has said that the 1840s saw the beginnings of a «scientific» approach to smell, and the end of «the mixed naturalistic, sociological and philosophical approach that had characterized most previous efforts» [FINGER 1994, p. 178]. In this context, Southey's comparison of his own smell acuity with Wordsworth's may be understood in line with the attention being paid to smell and anosmia by contemporary chemists and physicians. His tone of sympathetic curiosity echoes the case history of the elegant young lady written up by Mason Good. Even Southey's highly conscious attention to the «peculiar» scent (one now described variously as honeyed and yeasty) of the barberry-bush at Bedminster might be thought of as a small example of how a new language of the distinctiveness of individual senses was being produced in science and culture at once.

If the scent of the barberry was unforgettable for Southey, it does not seem to have particularly struck the Wordsworths, near whose home, according to one of Dorothy's journal entries of April 1802, was a barberry tree. «The Barberry-Tree», the manuscript poem attributed to Wordsworth since the mid-twentieth century and dated around 1802, details the wind roaring through the yellow-flowered branches of «this maddest of trees», «ev'ry bough of gladness», but no scent. Scents very occasionally appear in Dorothy's Grasmere and Alfoxden journals, especially in the spring months. Consider «[a] beautiful yellow, palish yellow flower, that looked thick round & double, & smelt very sweet – I supposed it was a ranunculus»; and the observation that «all flowers now are gay & deliciously sweet» [WORDSWORTH 2002, pp. 1, 2]. «Sweetness» is the main observation, and frequently applicable to «days» and winds as well as flowers, although a little more precision is evident in «the valley all perfumed with the Gale & wild thyme» [WORDSWORTH 2002, pp. 3, 5, 11]. When she encounters broom, which also has a powerful scent, it is visual rather than olfactory splendour that is noted: «The Brooms were in full glory everywhere 'veins of gold' among the copses» [WORDSWORTH 2002, p. 107]. Despite numerous references to honeysuckle, Dorothy does not mention its rich perfume. On the other hand, her *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland in A.D. 1803* records various scents, positive and negative, as well as local sensitivities: «a little parlour, dirty, and smelling of liquors»; «[c]ommon as birches are in the north of England, I believe their sweet smell is a thing unnoticed among the peasants» [WORDSWORTH 1874, pp. 57, 102].

It is well known that Wordsworth was used to borrowing sensual observations of Dorothy, though he called her «his eyes and ears» rather than his «nose», and flowers are not usually attributed a scent in Wordsworth's early work. However references to floral odours begin to appear in his 1820s work, including those published in *Yarrow Revisited* of 1835. These poems have characteristic tropes of springtime, flowers, and cultivated nature (lawns and goldfish), and themes of idleness, play, satisfaction and worship. One instance includes the «May Odes», which began as a single poem on springtime entitled «Vernal Stanzas», probably inspired by a trip with Dora in the «mountains» of Newlands Valley in May 1826. Evolving finally into the two 1835 poems «Ode Composed on May Morning» and «To May», the pretty and prettifying stanzas seem conventional in their celebration of the season and personification, but are worthy of closer attention. A certain philosophical tone, especially with respect to pleasure, is continuousness with Wordsworth's «great decade» work: «mellow warble, sprightly trill / The tremulous heart excite, / And hums the balmy air to still / The balance of delight» [«Ode Composed on May Morning», ll. 12-125 in WORDSWORTH

1999, p. 72]. The «May Odes» also carry strong echoes of Shelley's posthumously published lyrics of 1824: «odour», a strongly Shelleyan word, is a recurrent term [see BOYSON 2013]. For instance, lines from the second stanza of «To May» – «Delicious odours! music sweet, / Too sweet to pass away!» – declare the persistence of sensation and the desire for a deathless song, closely echoing Shelley's fragment «Music, when soft voices die» (1824):

> Music, when soft voices die,
> Vibrates in the memory;
> Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
> Live within the sense they quicken.

Shelley's treatment of odours, as molecules traversing matter and mind, has here and elsewhere a materialist tenor not foregrounded in Wordsworth's scents, though Shelley's interest in the living existence of plants, particularly in evidence in «The Sensitive-Plant» (1820), finds echoes in Wordsworth's references to «breathing flowers». Wordsworth's «This Lawn, A Carpet All Alive» (1829) ends odiferously with «the mute repose / Of sweetly breathing flowers» [on «This Lawn», see MORTON 2004]. The idea that Wordsworth had a brief poetic preoccupation with the life and scent of plants is furthered through the manuscript and drafting connections between the several poems referring to May and to lawns [WORDSWORTH 2004, p. 65].

Arguably, however, the direct forerunner of Wordsworth's «breathing» flowers is Felicia Hemans's «Night-Blowing Flowers» (later retitled «The Wanderer and the Night-Flowers»), first published in the inaugurator of the annuals publishing phenomenon, Rudolf Ackermann's *Forget Me Not* for 1823. Wordsworth was scathing about the commercial «annuals» culture through which Hemans made her fame, and was sometimes privately dismissive of the «poetess». Notoriously for modern critics, in a note to his «Extempore Effusion» that alludes to her 1835 death, he complained of her being «totally ignorant of housewifery». But Hemans was received with friendliness by the Wordsworth family in 1830, and letters to and about her continued up until and beyond her death in 1835. Although he rather unsubtly declined her request to dedicate a collection to him (she did anyway), Wordsworth told her he was moved by her poetic drama «Flowers and Music in a Room of Sickness», which, featuring a nature-loving young woman confined to her bed, evoked for him Dorothy's situation. Scent features in that poem: Lillian's mother queries the safety of bringing flowers into the room, concerned about the effect of «These leaves and odours with strange influence».

Hemans' «Night-Blowing Flowers» begins with an odd demand addressed to flowers:

> Call back your odours, lonely flowers,
> From the night-wind call them back,
> And fold your leaves till the laughing hours
> Come forth on the sunbeam's track!
> [HEMANS 2000, p. 439, ll. 1-4]

After playfully rebuking these flowers that stay alert whilst the rest of nature is asleep, the penultimate stanzas allow the flowers to reply:

> Nay, let our shadowy beauty bloom;
> When the stars give quiet light;
> And let us offer our faint perfume
> On the silent shrine of night.
>
> Call it not wasted, the scent we lend
> To the breeze when no step is nigh;
> Oh! thus for ever the earth should send
> Her grateful breath on high!
> [ll. 21-28]

Jeffrey Robinson's insightful reading of Hemans's flower poems focuses on their meta-poetic dimensions and on the theme of scent as waste:

> Neither the wanderer nor the night-flowers want any waste, but they imagine good uses differently. Yet read coolly from outside the wanderer's poetic psychosis, the poem suggests that waste may be all there is; but to imagine waste is to imagine the precious, to describe and praise the unacknowledged. [ROBINSON 2003, §20]

Robinson characterizes Hemans' poetics as a «giving value to the wasting, expiring breath and its perfumed words» [ROBINSON 2003, §16]. He suggests that Wordsworth's own poetry is influenced by contact with that of Hemans, a line of thought I am also pursuing here, though the matter of pleasurable «waste» was one Wordsworth explored earlier in his 1807 poem «Stray Pleasures» and in the unpublished «Barberry-Tree». In the earlier work, the sensuality of music and dance, rather than scent, travels on the air [compare also JARVIS 2007, pp. 105-107]. The trail of scent in the later work seems to lead towards more explicitly Christian themes. Emma Mason has argued that the writings of Hemans and Wordsworth are closely associated through their conjunction of affection, feeling and Christianity: «[f]or Hemans, affection is both stirred by God and necessary for perceiving him, granting the subject a

visionary sense through which to see the world in a christianized and emotive manner» [MASON 2006, p. 45]. Wordsworth's and Hemans' 1820s poems extend the idea of «visionary sense» to include the pleasure of scent. This idea of odoriferous «giving» (or positive «wasting») occurs in Hemans' popular annuals poem «Evening Prayer at a Girl's School», first published in the 1826 *Forget Me Not*. She describes the young girls bowed like flowers closed at night, ending with a metaphor linking the girls, the atmospheric evening of prayer, and memories of them, «as a sweet dew» that

> Earth will forsake - Oh! happy to have given
> Th'unbroken heart's first fragrance unto Heaven.
> [HEMANS, 2000, p. 436]

One might argue that the image of girls as flowers draws on the Linnaean botany that had highly gendered and sexualized meanings for British culture from the 1770s. Amy M. King has connected the «gendered controversies» around botany in girls' education in the 1790s to the representation of «blooming» girls and women in «marriage plots» from Maria Edgeworth through to Austen, Eliot, Dickens and James. Novels are central to her analysis: «the Linnaean system was constructed around a narrative of marriage and sexual reproduction that was more conducive to the prose narrative than lyric poetry» [KING 2003, p. 63]. Although, as she suggests, the poetry of Charlotte Smith and Erasmus Darwin demonstrates the «vivid leakage of a scientific vocabulary into literary and popular discourses», she finds that poetic treatments of flowers retained their older «emblematic and pastoral meanings» rather than evoking the new «sexualist» system [KING 2003, pp. 72, 63]. This seems persuasive when considering Hemans' and Wordsworth's poetic scented flowers, which seem to be concerned less with modern gender debates than with older ideas of fragrance as a means of communication with God. Such an ancient theme is rooted in the association of incense and sacrifice, and formed part of the mythology around Adam and Eve's departure from the Garden of Eden [HARVEY 2006, p. 51]. Hemans' and Wordsworth's reactivation of this old mythic symbol through fashionable and feminine floral imagery shows some of the larger intellectual and theological significance of this verse.

Incense in Ecclesiastical Sonnets and «Devotional Incitements»: divine communication

The flowers in Wordsworth's more explicitly religious poems of the 1820s and 30s don't just breathe; they breathe incense. They make much of scent, and speak to contemporary debates around the place of ritual and forms in

Anglicanism. Incense appears several times in the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* of 1822, generally in negative terms. Sonnet VI, «Transubstantiation», begins: «ENOUGH! for see, with dim association / The tapers burn; the odorous incense feeds / A greedy flame; the pompous mass proceeds» (ll. 1-3). Rather melodramatically, incense is categorized as an «appalling rite» in XXI, «Continued» [from «Church to be Erected»]; one which confusingly, if attractively, aestheticizes faith: «clouds of incense mounting veiled the rood, / That glimmered like a pine-tree dimly viewed / Through Alpine vapours» (ll. 4-6). At the end of this poem Wordsworth sets up a comparison between incense and plant scents in closing lines (here «it» is the Cross): «And the fresh air of 'incense-breathing morn'/ Shall wooingly embrace it; and green moss / Creep rounds its arms through centuries unborn» (ll. 12-14). The phrase «incense-breathing morn» is borrowed from Gray's «Elegy», which, as the Cornell editors note, probably itself draws from *Paradise Lost* Book IX's «humid Flours, that breath'd / Their morning Incense» [WORDSWORTH 1999, p. 273]. An association of scent with religious feeling, again drawn from *Paradise Lost* and its account of a «spicie shoare» (Book IV), is made at the end of XXIX, «Eminent Reformers». This sonnet celebrates the influence of the sixteenth-century defenders of Anglicanism, John Jewel and Richard Hooker, in odorous terms:

> More sweet than odours caught by him who sails
> Near spicy shores of Araby the blest,
> A thousand times more exquisitely sweet,
> The freight of holy feeling which we meet,
> In thoughtful moments, wafted by the gales
> From fields where good men walk, or bowers wherein they rest.
> [ll. 9-14]

Scent here functions as a metaphor for divine communication and for the cognitive work of the senses. This is a theme also briefly treated in «Presentiments» (1830), which celebrates intuition or half-conscious cognition linked to sense, «instruments» of which include «A subtle smell that Spring unbinds» (l. 39). The poem ends with a Popean connection between animal and human sagaciousness, rooted in scent:

> God, who instructs the brutes to scent
> All changes of the element,
> Whose wisdom fixed the scale
> Of natures, for our wants provides
> By higher, sometimes humbler, guides,
> When lights of reason fail.

The association of faith, scent and thought in both the *Sonnets* and «Presentiments» is pursued in «Devotional Incitements», which brings together the *topoi* of incense and nature most successfully and interestingly. Composed probably in June 1832 (as a two-stanza, 29-line poem) and published in *Yarrow Revisited* in 1835 (as a four-stanza, 77-line poem), «Devotional Incitements» explores the role of sensuality in faith, contrasting the summons to worship of institutional religion versus the incitements offered by the church of Nature. The earlier version of the poem begins with a six-line stanza describing the stern priestly «summons loud», admitting that this sound is «Not wasted», «[n]or wholly lost» on the crowds in the church and street outside. This ambiguous acknowledgment of the church's authority turns more critical in the second stanza, which describes how whilst the seasons turn, religious rows and «misdeeds» cause priests to be ejected and temples ground down. By contrast, the church of Nature is steadfast:

> Where flower-breathed Incense to the skies
> Is wafted in mute harmonies
> And ground fresh cloven by the plough
> Is fragrant with a humbler vow […]
> Kind Nature keeps a heavenly door
> Wide open for the scattered Poor.
> [WORDSWORTH 1999, p. 226, ll. 60-63; ll. 58-59]

This image of «flower-breathed Incense» is central to the revised, longer version, which asserts the significance of the idea of sensual communication through the air with an opening epigraph (slightly abbreviated) from *Paradise Lost*: «Not to the earth confined / Ascend to heaven». In Milton's poem, Eve is recalling to Adam her dream of Satan's voice, telling her to taste the fruit of knowledge (a fruit with a «pleasant savoury smell»), so that she will be

> henceforth among the Gods
> Thy self a Goddess, not to earth confin'd,
> But somtimes in the Air, as wee, somtimes,
> Ascend to Heav'n […]
> [*Paradise Lost*, V, ll. 78-80]

Replanted at the opening of Wordsworth's revised version of «Devotional Incitements», these hubristic lines get an entirely new context as a broader account of scent. Wordsworth personifies scents as wilful, unstoppable emanations from baby flowers:

Where will they stop, those breathing Powers,
The Spirits of the new-born flowers?
They wander with the breeze, they wind
Where'er the streams a passage find;
Up from their native ground they rise
In mute aërial harmonies;
From humble violet – modest thyme –
Exhaled, the essential odours climb,
As if no space below the sky
Their subtle flight could satisfy:
Heaven will not tax our thoughts with pride
If like ambition be *their* guide.
[ll. 1-12]

Whilst these lines echo the address of Hemans' «Night-Blowing Flowers», they also offer a playful and strange reworking of Milton, in that Wordsworth restores Satan's tempting words to a claim that we can rightfully ascend to heaven if we model our movement on «essential odours». Synaesthesia (to use a later term) is undecided here: «violet» evokes colour as quickly as smell; and scents are harmonies, if «mute» ones; there is no suggestion here, as one might find in Shelley, that scents *are* sounds. The language also has a natural-philosophical, Lucretian tone: the odours are «subtle» (like the «subtil ether» of previous centuries) and travel in molecular streams in the breeze. The second stanza of the poem is in a Chaucerian or Spenserian mode, with its fast trochaic opening, «Roused by this kindliest of May-showers», emulating the raindrops it describes (l. 13). This offers a transition from the damp scented leaves to the bird song which reaches excess (the trope of waste seen in the earlier version, and discussed in the previous section of this essay): «there the music runs to waste, / With bounty more and more enlarged» (ll. 20-21). Man, who canst *«think* as well as feel», is urged in fact to feel: to «give ear» and «thirst for no inferior zeal» (ll. 23-25). The third stanza takes us into the Church's own attempt to rouse the ear and sight, with the pleading of the «cathedral choir» and the «visual plea / Of still or moving imagery» (l. 37, ll. 50-51), and we return to the olfactory image:

While incense from the altar breathes
Rich fragrance in embodied wreaths;
Or, flung from swinging censer, shrouds
The taper-lights, and curls in clouds
Around angelic Forms, the still
Creation of the painter's skill,
That on the service wait concealed
One moment, and the next revealed.
[ll. 30-37]

Those active verbs – «breathes», «shrouds», «curls» – foreground the presence of the incense. Incense has a vexed and fascinating history, sketched wittily by E. G. Cuthbert F. Atchley. Atchley's long 1909 tome was written in response to fraught turn-of-the-century arguments within the Anglican church as Ritualism gained ground, which witnessed pamphlets such as «The Case for Incense» and «The Case Against Incense» [WESTALL 1899; FRANEY 1899]. In ancient pagan and Jewish religion, incense was supplement, in that Derridean sense, to sacrifice, and so it was used as a test against early Christians: suspected Christians had to agree to burn a small piece of incense before a statue of a pagan deity to avoid martyrdom [ATCHLEY 1909, p. 85]. Incense seems to have been accepted into Christian worship from at least the tenth century, for driving away demons, expelling diseases and restoring health, and was used for different purposes thereafter by both the Catholic and Anglican churches. However, it was the cause of periodic controversies, including with respect to the censing of *images*. Whilst the 1549 Book of Common Prayer made no specific comments on incense, Edward VI's 1547 Injunctions had demanded that images that were «abused with pilgrimage or offering of anything made thereunto, or shall be hereafter censed unto» should be destroyed [ATCHLEY 1909, pp. 329-330].

In this context Wordsworth's account of incense as concealing and revealing the religious paintings – «curls in clouds / Around angelic Forms» (ll. 32-37) – evokes questions about the place of sensual ritual that were very much current in the culture. The 1820s and early 1830s were also times of urgent debate in Anglicanism, not least with the birth of the Oxford Movement, which as Stephen Prickett argued some decades ago, was itself influenced by Wordsworth and Coleridge [see PRICKETT 1976]. As Wordsworth explained in his Advertisement to the *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, he was preoccupied with Catholic Emancipation in the early 1820s: «The Catholic Question, which was agitated in Parliament about that time [i.e. 1821], kept my thoughts in the same course» [WORDSWORTH 2004, p. 137]. But despite some criticisms of Catholic rites in the Sonnets, there is also sympathy. Dora Wordsworth described the poems to Edward Quillinan as «shewing very happily the poetry of *Romanism* and making us wish that some of your rites had been retained by our Church» [WORDSWORTH 2004, p. 132]. Wordsworth noted, «To the second part of the same series I have also added two, in order to do more justice to the Papal Church for the services which she did actually render to Christianity and humanity in the middle ages» [WORDSWORTH 2004, p. 134]. In the context of these debates about Anglicanism and Catholicism, Wordsworth's friend and patron, the sugar-plantation-heir John Kenyon had published in 1833 a long poem in heroic couplets entitled «A Rhymed Plea for Tolerance», which offers a mild-mannered support to all forms of institutional religion. In a letter of December that year, Wordsworth complimented him on his line, «And incense breathes at once thro' sense and soul», highlighting the similarity

with his own discussion of incense in «Devotional Incitements», thus stressing the centrality of scent in his conception of that poem [v 1999, p. 454]. «Devotional Incitements» is not really «tolerant» or «intolerant» of different practices of worship, but rather historical. In the stanza following that on the censing of images, Wordsworth writes on the passing of «forms» from faith:

> Alas! the sanctities combined
> By art to unsenzualize the mind,
> Decay and languish; or, as creeds
> And humours change, are spurned like weeds:
> The solemn rites, the awful forms,
> Founder amid fanatic storms;
> The priests are from their altars thrust;
> Temples are levelled with the dust.
> [ll. 46-51]

«Unsenzualize» is an unusual verb, one that Wordsworth probably borrowed from Coleridge, who used the term positively in his poem «The Destiny of Nations»: «Fancy is the power, / That first unsensualizes the dark mind, / Giving it new delights» (ll. 80-82). Drawing from Hartley's perfectibilist account of the progress of mind from mere sensation towards the rational and divine, Coleridge celebrates emancipation from «the present impulse» (l. 86). Wordsworth's poem is softer in its contrasts, comparing different modes of sensual persuasion rather than decrying sensuality altogether. Whilst ultimately «Devotional Incitements» argues that flowers, birds and mists offer a more durable and more accessible encouragement to worship God than «pomp of sacrifice» and «solemn Rites», the trope of scent-as-spirituality suggests a continuity between historic forms of worship and insists upon the cognitive power of the senses.

Conclusion

That the later Wordsworth is both sensual in language and Anglican in religion and politics draws into question some modern critical assumptions around poetic sensuousness. «Sensual» was once a derogatory descriptor, indicating gratification of the senses often implicitly sexual, an adjective that Milton carefully avoided by inventing the word «sensuous» [*OED Online*]. Poetry, he wrote in *Of Education* (1644) is more «simple, sensuous and passionate» than logic and metaphysics. Coleridge picked this term up again in his *Principles of Genial Criticism* of 1814: «to express in one word what belongs to the senses, or the recipient and more passive faculty of the soul, I have reintroduced the word *sensuous*, used, among many others of our elder

writers, by Milton» [COLERIDGE 1995]. In a footnote to his famous review of Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, discussing Sensitive, Reflective and Passionate poetic emotion, Arthur Hallam offered «sensuous» as an alternative to «sensitive», noting that it was «a word in use amongst our elder divines, and revived by a few bold writers in our own time» [HALLAM 1831, p. 620]. The word then had a successful critical career: a Google ngram reveals how the uses of the word «sensuous» overtook «sensual» in published books in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. In modern English, «sensuous» tends to denote an aesthetic (rather than a sexual) evocation of the senses, especially the senses of touch, taste and smell, particularly as against the traditionally privileged sense of sight [see JAY 1993 on ocularcentrism and its critique]. As a style of writing it is often now taken to be a positive or celebratory end in itself.

The value-laden language of sensuality has informed the occasional discussion of Wordsworth's anosmia by biographers and critics. It has sometimes been used against him as an oddly moralized weapon in the war on his poetic ideology. Wordsworth's anosmia added fuel to Denise Gigante's argument that Wordsworth denies the actual bodily experience of gustation in his idealized understanding of taste as metaphor:

> The metaphor of feeding in his poetry is exalted above the more mundane physical activity of processing the world through sensory perception, and it is perhaps no irony that, as Robert Southey tells us, the poet whose lifetime was preoccupied with taste was physically deprived of its sensory pleasures. [GIGANTE 2005, p. 69]

The biographer Hunter Davies suggested that the anosmia might explain Wordsworth's «passionless» nature, unlike that of the sensual southern younger Romantics, Byron, Keats and Shelley, finding it telling that given Wordsworth's great fame for a poem on flowers («Daffodils»), Wordsworth celebrated the *scentless* varieties: daisies and celandines [DAVIES 1980, p. 320]. The reception of Wordsworth's sensual language has, however, changed in recent years. Critics more sympathetic to his treatment of the senses have focused on his attention to sound as (drawing from his *Prelude* phrase) a «counteracting sense» [HARTMAN 1987, p. 24]. Kerry McSweeney draws on Hazlitt's essay «Why Distant Objects Please» to stress Wordsworth's interest in senses that operate «at a distance» [MCSWEENEY 1998, p. 52]. Adam Potkay argues for the importance of audition as a receptive sense of «attachment», a form of «environmental aesthetic» [POTKAY 2012, p. 14]; he notes brief smell references in *The Prelude* and in «Devotional Incitements», but adds that «smell and taste are excluded from his most concerted effort at synaesthesia, 'Airey-Force Valley'» [POTKAY 2011, p. 28]. Noel Jackson has also written suggestively about the

development or progress of the senses in the *Prelude* [JACKSON 2008, pp. 70-91]. This essay has aimed to contribute to such a broader and more historical understanding of Wordsworth's sensual language. The starting point of Wordsworth's anosmia invites us to recall the creative, imaginative and essentially borrowed nature of any sensuous register, as well as the intellectual history that informs the reception of such registers. As sensory disabilities go, anosmia is undoubtedly a minor one, but it is instructive in terms of «the necessity of assessing, for an aesthetic or cultural purpose, the implications of disability as critical insight» [SNYDER 2002, p. 178]. Southey's curious sympathy about Wordsworth's anosmia seems a better model than the comic derision of later commentators when they attack the poet for a lack of sensuality: a quasi-ethical failing in modern critical frameworks. Smell, the senses, and sensuousness have historical and critical dimensions as multi-faceted as their real experience.

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Wordsworth's Autism

Abstract

Though human suffering and human sympathy are characteristic Wordsworthian themes, the poet often exhibits an unnerving reticence about gestures of sympathy. To say the language of human contact is «displaced» from man to nature is in part to acknowledge but in part to undermine Wordsworth's own contention that the love of nature leads to the love of man. Perhaps we need to acknowledge with respectful awe rather than with compulsive probing, Wordsworth's personal, emotion need and poetic, representational need to keep others – their claims on us, their mortality – at a distance. If Wordsworth glories in the memory of «obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things», those things include individual persons to whom one might all too easily become attached – and views of collective mankind with whom one might all too easily become disgusted.

Leslie Brisman

It would be misleading to suggest that, in the past twenty years, Wordsworth criticism, like the mind of Wordsworth at the sight of the blind beggar and his sign, «turned round / As with the might of waters» [*Prelude* VII. ll. 643-644]. Even if it were possible to divide Wordsworth studies into those that focus on imagination and those that centre on the human heart (his self-declared overarching themes), we would have to acknowledge that many of the studies of Wordsworth's humanism antedate the turn of the century, some by decades. Consider just a few greatest: John Beer, *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* [1978]; James Averill, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering* [1980]; David Pirie, *William Wordsworth: The Poetry of Grandeur and of Tenderness* [1982]; David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory* [1998]; and one would have to add to these numerous invaluable essays about Wordsworth and the affections from Cleanth Brooks through Geoffrey Hartman. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that in the last decade, there has been a renewed focus on and insight into the difficult representation of human sympathy in Wordsworth's poems. I would single out Seth Reno, «Wordsworthian Love» [2012], Michelle Levy, «The Wordsworths, the Greens, and the Limits of Sympathy» [2003], and most especially Francis O'Gorman, «Wordsworth and Touch» [2009]. When such giants as Kenneth Johnston, David Simpson, Paul Fry, and (preeminently)

Geoffrey Hartman revisit poems they have discussed before with ever-renewed insight, it is risky to claim that there is something startlingly new in the work of others revisiting Wordsworth on love, but I believe that Francis O'Gorman has done just that in venturing further into the mechanisms of defense against the expression of love than Richard Onoroto, or even Geoffrey Hartman.

O'Gorman ventures far by paying close attention to both the representation and the avoidance of human contact in Wordsworth's poetry: «The hand that blesses, that welcomes, and that lays a duty is not unknown. But the hand that offers a gesture of friendship or affection or a compassionate touch, let alone one that helps, hardly finds a place even in Wordsworth's poems that concern themselves most fully with the operations of sympathy» [p. 7].

Why not? Like a seasoned psychotherapist, O'Gorman's wisdom seems close allied to his silence, his way of pointing to the fact of displacement without loudly theorizing about it. Thus, of the discharged soldier in *Prelude* IV he writes, «The staff, a replacement for the helping hand, an arm of support, is already at hand» [p. 7]. At hand but not a hand. The difference seems all the more poignant for the gentle way the missing human gesture is noted. Something similar, but perhaps still more startling, happens in his discussion of «Tintern Abbey»: «The language of contact is pushed from man out into the operations of Nature, which '*inform* / The mind' and '*impress* with quietness and beauty'» [p. 10]. The sheer slowing down to take notice, represented by those italics, conveys some of the pathos one feels in reading, in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, «I take the pressure of thy hand» when the actual hand of Hallam is no more. There is something so right in the critical observation that «the language of contact is pushed from man out into the operations of Nature»; it is something similar to the contemporaneous observation by Paul Fry that in «Tintern Abbey» «an indiscriminate eroticism is sublimated as an indiscriminate 'appetite' for nature, 'a feeling and a love, / That had no need of a remoter charm, / By thought supplied» [FRY 2008, p. 181]. But there does also seem to be something so wrong with Wordsworth that he should feel the need so to displace the language of contact from man to Nature. What's wrong?

I would like first to multiply the figurations of this question, to represent the ubiquity and disturbing nature of what, if it is not an «intellectual disease», seems at least a mode of being «alternately abled». First, why does Wordsworth, in many lyrics implicitly and in *The Prelude* explicitly, hold dear to the zany myth of «the love of nature leading to the love of man»? What's wrong with Wordsworth that he should need to be so led? Related to this binding of one kind of love with another is the «common currency» theory of the affections and (to borrow an association from disastrous theoreticians of euro commonality), the question why emotional austerity should be a desideratum? What is the nature of Wordsworth's emotional

economy that would allow him to say, with special emphasis, about the Pedlar, «He could *afford* to suffer»[1] [*Excursion* 1. l. 370] – which Paul Fry calls «having emotional capital to spare»? [p. 153] If he is not, as De Quincey accused him of being, somewhat deficient in fellow-feeling, why does Wordsworth give us the impression that fellow-feeling has been carefully counted out, the last coins in a purse with no bills? A separate but related puzzle is why two of the most opaque passages of *The Prelude* both contain the word «sympathy».

And one more: ever since Geoffrey Hartman first published *The Sympathy Paradox* [1996], I have reread that essay at least once a year, haunted by something in its indirection that strikes me as more *like* Wordsworth than an assessment *of* Wordsworth. Hartman defines what he calls «the sympathy paradox» thus: «The paradox of the sympathetic imagination is that the more successful an expanding sensibility becomes, the more evidence we find of actual insensibility» [p. 144]. Reading that pronouncement in context, one cannot be sure if it refers to Wordsworth's «expanding sensibility» or to a cultural phenomenon to be traced from Wordsworth to, say, so-called «compassionate conservatives». If Hartman means this to be a paradox about Wordsworth, then it is one with what Paul Fry, twelve years later, describes as the paradox of the Wanderer's unmarried state: «Why then is it the Wanderer alone among Wordsworth's characters whose life has passed without immediate human ties? The better to make humanity his family, one again hears it whispered» [FRY 2008, p. 151]. It has taken me a long time, but I think I can finally say about Hartman's paradox as such, «that may be a paradox, but it is not *the* sympathy paradox». David Simpson, in his 2009 study, *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern*, seems to me to get closer to the heart of the matter, pun intended: «How do you gain access to a common human nature if the minute circumstances of the situation are what you must use to construct it, while living in a world where the minute circumstances are themselves not completely recoverable […] and where the passions that devolve from them may not be legible?» [p. 33]

Yet I am not sure that even a scholar whose expert eye has been so steadily focused on problems of sympathetic imagination hasn't, like Wordsworth himself, done as much to divert us from the problem as he has to illuminate it. For surely it is a distraction to worry about the «recoverability» of the particulars rather than the efforts Wordsworth makes to keep himself at a distance from them. We know, if anything, too much about the actual leech gatherer Wordsworth and Dorothy encountered, and too little about Wordsworth's distraction from what the leech gatherer was saying, about the peculiar distancing the poet creates between his self-representations and the objects of sympathy he encounters.

[1] See FRY 2008, p. 153.

In what follows, I would like to take up three aspects of one concern – in reverse order: first, the definition of «the sympathy problem»; second, the peculiar opacity that attends the very use of the word *sympathy*; and finally, the meaning of that crucial but impossible myth that depends on and reifies a sympathy problem: the love of nature leading to the love of man.

The Sympathy Problem

I do not think we can talk of a sympathy problem as peculiar to *The Prelude* or even to the whole *Recluse* project; there are just too many texts, from short lyrics to *The Excursion*, that leave us wondering about Wordsworth's «distance from the kind». I borrow the phrase from «Elegiac Stanzas» (Peele Castle), where to be sure the poet is saying *farewell* to the heart that lives alone. But he is so often saying farewell to the heart that lives alone, or expressing his admiration for a heart like the Wanderer's that lives alone, that we have to wonder. There is, without question, far more fascination with such emotional insularity than there is condemnation of it. The Wanderer is not just the main protagonist but to an uncomfortable extent the hero of *The Excursion.* Writing in 2008, Paul Fry not only reacts against condemnations of The Wanderer in the Wordsworth criticism behind him, but seems to anticipate David Simpson's 2009 study: «That he 'never did anything for' Margaret is easily answered with 'What *could* he have done?'» [p. 152]. David Simpson's response is by no means naïve or reductive: «In the midst of his recounted sympathy for Margaret, he evinces disengagement rather than anguish» [p. 43]. What Simpson helps us see is that Wordsworth is not just curious about the Wanderer's disengagement; that disengagement is the object of special admiration! If it is not to be confused with stoicism, it is nonetheless presented as a proper, even an essential prophylaxis against being overwhelmed by the miseries of the world – or more accurately, by a particular, personal misery.

Sympathy and Opacity

In dealing with questions of opacity in *The Prelude*, it is worthwhile trying to distinguish problems in figuring out *what* Wordsworth is saying for problems in figuring out *why* he is saying what he appears to be saying. The two are clearly related, though, and we can even watch Wordsworth substitute one kind of difficulty for another. Take the drowned man episode in the various versions of *The Prelude*. In 1799, the prodded body of the drowned man «bolt upright / Rose with his ghastly face» [Il. 279-280]. One might be

tempted to call this an archetypal confrontation with the ghastliness of mortality – except that giving the episode such a label seems less to describe than provoke what looks like Wordsworth's morally obtuse reaction to the scene:

> I might advert
> To numerous accidents in flood or field,
> Quarry or moor, or 'mid the winter snows,
> Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
> Of rural history, that impressed my mind
> With images to which in following years
> Far other feelings were attached—with forms
> That yet exist with independent life,
> And like their archetypes, know no decay.
> [ll. 279-287]

Misery, we say, loves company – but hates competition. Isn't it just as unfeeling a reaction to this tragic fact to say «I might advert / To numerous accidents» as it is for Claudius to say to Hamlet, «thou knowest 'tis common»? [I.ii.73] No matter how many times I read Wordsworth's lines, I cannot tame the impulse to shout, «well, good for you! I'm glad you could *advert* to other ghastly scenes; but that doesn't absolve you from the obligation not to *avert* your eyes from this one!» The poet seems to pay tribute to the dead, or rather to this particular image of death, by promising the consolation of lingering power: these images do not decay; they stay with you. But the plural, «these images», seems like such an immoral defense against the power of this image. If these images have an afterlife like «archetypes», then they get blurred into the general category that insulates us from feeling anything more than mild satisfaction at a neat job: the image has been correctly filed in the «archetype of ghastliness» category.

Wordsworth must have shared my uneasiness at the ghastliness of the lines he first wrote in response to that ghastly face, for he rewrote them in what we now call the *1805 Prelude.* The effort to diminish the force of the ghastly image is now redoubled. The corpse shoots bolt upright […] with his ghastly face,

> And yet no vulgar fear,
> Young as I was, a child not nine years old,
> Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
> Such sights before among the shining streams
> Of fairyland, the forests of romance –
> Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
> With decoration and ideal grace,

A dignity, a smoothness, like the wor[k]s
Of Grecian art and purest poesy.
[1805 *Prelude* V. ll. 473-481]

If the obscurity of the earlier lines is now gone, the question «why are you saying that?» is no less haunting. There is what we might call the «gracious» answer: Book V is about books, and so Wordsworth does his best to attribute to books the prophylactic effect he elsewhere reserves for nature. Distinct from this is the view founded on a sense of uneasiness perhaps developed throughout Book V, a sense that he is «getting it wrong». Our uneasiness at the idea that books protect us from life would thus be a cultivated uneasiness, and uneasiness that Wordsworth wishes us to share in the journey from fairyland to reality, from «the forests of romance» to the ordinary lake country landscape, from books to nature. In this reading, the peon to early reading rings as false as the portrait of the infant prodigy is clearly intended to ring. One can pretend that the scene of the resurrected body of the drowned schoolmaster has the dignity and smoothness of Grecian pottery, but it is pottery that, no sooner imaginatively grasped, fragments into dust. We can thus apply to these lines what Wordsworth says shortly before about the infant prodigy phenomenon: «Fresh and shewy as it is, the corps / Slips from us into powder» [V. ll. 353-354]. I am reminded of Tennyson's Percivale, who, discovering the withering power of his own isolation cries, «Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself / And touch it, it will crumble into dust!» [«The Holy Grail», Tennyson 2007, ll. 438-439]. May it not be that Wordsworth wants us to feel not the «ideal grace» but the passage on ideal grace crumpling into dust? The lines on the prodigy continue,

Vanity,
That is his soul: there lives he, and there moves –
It is the soul of every thing he seeks –
That gone, nothing is left which he can love.
[V. ll. 354-357]

The terror of the prodigy turning into a soul incapable of love may be the same terror behind those lines that protect Wordsworth from the drowned schoolmaster. Let me label it the terror of autism.

Once we raise the possibility that a passage about sympathy may be read not just for what it *says* but what it is *doing* in a larger, perhaps not fully articulated drama of sympathy or the withholding of sympathy, we can turn anew to those especially problematic passages of *The Prelude* where the word *sympathy* gives us pause. Perhaps the most climactic of these concerns the Reign of Terror. We expect, we crave, some powerful statement of sympathy with those who fell victim to the bloody revolutionary zeal of the

murderous wielders of the guillotine. What we get instead is an evocation of prophetic wrath against those who ruined the revolution, and an identification with the prophets of old who found «consolation» in denouncing inhumanity. What a strange evasion of the pitiable is here! Wordsworth turns not to spectacles of suffering innocents but to the glorious ferocity of prophetic wrath against inhumanity:

> So did some portion of that spirit fall
> On me to uphold me through those evil times,
> And in their rage and dog-day heat I found
> Something to glory in, as just and fit,
> And in the order of sublimest laws.
> And even if that were not, amid the awe
> Of unintelligible chastisement
> I felt a kind of sympathy with power –
> Motions raised up within me, nevertheless,
> Which had relationship to highest things.
> [1805 *Prelude* X. ll. 409-418]

«Something to glory in» – now? Granted, Wordsworth is not implying that he felt sympathy with those who abused their political power for inhuman ends; but he is, all the same, abstracting himself from horror to imagine some apocalyptic vengeance against inhumanity, and to identify with the sheer grandeur of such ultimate vengeance. He wants «elevation and a sanctity» even here no less, indeed a thousand times more, than at the sight of the drowned schoolmaster.

I think the phrase «sympathy with power» has haunted David Bromwich as much as it has me, and I think it tells you something about how profound a Wordsworthian Bromwich is that he moves, in the manner of Wordsworth himself, to abstract that sympathy from human misery – to aestheticize it. In the Preface to *Disowned by Memory,* Bromwich appears to be defending Wordsworth's sense of «personal identity» as a fundamental respect for individuality: «it is wrong to make that mean a sublimation of social matter into aesthetic form». But the very next sentence moves (I think) from persons to images in general as they captivate the poet: «For him, the aesthetic is isolable only as a primitive phenomenon, a 'sympathy with power' that returns and is repeated in various shapes» [p. x]. What is the citation […] of the difficult phrase from *Prelude* X doing here? In an email response to my query, Bromwich explains: «the ambiguous fascination he feels for an object or idea or event that arrests and holds attention absolutely» (3/18/12). The «absolutely» here accords to an image or event something of the moral absolute he pointed to in the book, «a human dignity that is prior to the moral language in which it is rendered normative». In context, Wordsworth is

referring to sympathy with apocalyptic power, or perhaps better specified as prophetic power to identify with the moral force of apocalyptic imagery. But for Bromwich, that power is not confined to the images of righteous indignation; it is the power inherent in any image or event caught with what appears to us as a powerful grasp on the actual. When I questioned Bromwich whether he had in mind specifically the power of the guillotine, he demurred in a brilliantly Wordsworthian fashion. Of the haunting scene of the Carrousel, Bromwich writes, «This was a scene of power, the exertion of power, and he feels somehow in complicity with that power; but not sure even, necessarily, what was the moral right of the case. He isn't yet reflective in that way. But he is disturbed (at the time, and more in retrospect) by his own fascination. And he knows it has something to do with his being a poet» (email 3/18/12). How is it possible to abstract the power of the scene from its moral meaning? Bromwich appears to be capturing a pre-moral fascination (Wordsworth isn't YET reflective in that way) – a pre-moral fascination that is, quintessentially, aesthetic power: this fascination «has something to do with his being a poet».

I hope it is clear that I do not wish to criticize Bromwich but to admire, while growing chilly at the very thought, that any object might have a power on the mind that Wordsworth seizes precisely because it is «prior to the moral language in which it is rendered normative». But there is a tree, of many one, in the «Intimations Ode», and presumably that tree, without the aid of Marjorie Levinson's historicization of revolutionary trees, has, as an image, a power on his mind – or rather a power with which his powerful mind can sympathize. In the Isabella Fenwick note on the «Intimations Ode», Wordsworth claimed that as a child he grasped at «a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality». But then, shockingly, he goes on to imagine just the sort of moral ambiguity that so fascinates Bromwich: «In later periods of life I have deplored, as we have all reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character». This is, presumably, what T.S. Eliot in «Little Gidding» calls «attachment to self and to things and to persons». Attachment and detachment are the two forms of subjugation in the Isabella Fenwick note. But are they equal and simultaneous powers of the soul, or is it not essential Wordsworth myth that one can be saved from attachment by the memory of «obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things», the memory, that is, of having experienced shocking and powerful moments of detachment? In thinking of Wordsworth's fear of attachment as a form of autism, I am not simply choosing one of two poles in an imaginative give-and-take. I am questioning whether attachment *to persons* is not in some sense a fundamental fear for which both images of attachment to things (a Carrousel, a tree of many one) and detachment from persons (beggars, discharged soldiers) are defenses.

Let us turn now to a second, particularly gnarled passage of *The Prelude* involving the word *sympathy*. This one too concerns Wordsworth's reaction

to the French Revolution, and emerges somehow out of a faith that is (despite a cautious clarification) crystal clear:

> Shall I avow that I had hope to see
> (I mean that future times would surely see)
> The man to come parted as by a gulph
> From him who had been?
> [1805 *Prelude* XI. ll. 57-60]

History is a muddle; at least, the political processes by which genuine progress in human rights is made can be messy indeed. But the Revolution is guided, at least Wordsworth is guided, by the hope that the man of the future, freed from the tyrannies and oppressions of the past, will stand clear – clear of the past, and clearly envisioned in his full humanity. What happens next is very strange indeed. Wordsworth shifts the vision of muddle from history to the mass of humanity, or more accurately to a select group of those with whom he can imagine something of an «immediate family» group within the amorphous larger group of the family of man. Yet the very lines that raise the possibility of standing with this smaller family group are the lines in which Wordsworth insists on standing apart:

> I could no more
> Trust the elevation which had made me one
> With the great family that here and there
> Is scattered through the abyss of ages past,
> Sage, patriot, lover, hero.

No firm ground here. Wordsworth says he cannot trust the «elevation», but he does not mean that he is one with all those not on his height. He means he cannot trust any in the small coterie he might have thought to stand with him:

> For it seemed
> That their best virtues were not free from taint
> Of something false and weak, which could not stand
> The open eye of reason.

The clarity with which the man of the future was to be apprehended now becomes the clarity of «the open eye of reason» that others lack. Before retreating into his sole self (the «one just man» complex he inherited from Milton?), he makes a last attempt to limit the elevated group to a few with whom he can share this Pisgah site – the poets:

Then I said,
Go to the poets, they will speak to thee
More perfectly of purer creatures.

Fair enough. It looks as though he has found the right small group with whom he can share his vision of ennobled or restored Man to Come – his übermensch. But no.

If reason be nobility in man,
Can aught be more ignoble than the man
Whom they describe, would fasten if they may
Upon our love by sympathies of truth?

This is very muddled, strangely muddled, though something of what he is saying is immediately clear: Wordsworth thinks about poets, and distances himself from his clan: I can't identify with any of them; they've got it wrong.

Though the phrase «sympathies of truth» remains almost unbearably, unfairly opaque, it is not hard to see that Wordsworth is trying to distance himself from other poets who have shared with him some hopeful image of idealized man. James Chandler, in *Wordsworth's Second Nature*, tries to help by positing «a separation which is the mirror image of the one he initially imagines between himself and the human future» [1984, p. 196]. Yet how much do we understand in thinking of one separation as «the mirror image» of another? Ordinary defensive psychology tells us more than mirror images: I react with coldness when I am threatened by others' coldness. Yet the threatening coldness would ordinarily be that of friends or family, not the coldness of the marble statues of the poets of the past assembled in a museum-like memory. Can this passage really be about the anxiety of influence, about Wordsworth's attempt to separate himself from the threatening achievements of past poets? I think Chandler proves more helpful when he goes on to say, of these lines dismissive of the idealized man, «Even 'the poets,' […] who speak 'More perfectly of purer creatures,' failed to satisfy his rigorously rational and exclusively private criteria» [p. 197]. The insightful but troublesome word here is *private*: In what way are Wordsworth's criteria private? The poet seems to be making an all too public generalizable truth: poets lure us into attaching our deepest yearnings for justice and human rights to figures who imperfectly embody these ideals. The «sympathies with truth» are coaxed into the service of hero worship, fictions, lamentable fictions, in which flawed individuals stand for those pure ideals. Yet why «sympathies of truth», and not «sympathies with Truth» or better, «attachment to ideals», for the word *sympathies* does not naturally adhere to something as abstract as *Truth.* Wordsworth turns his readers into Pilates, questioning Jesus, «What is truth?» (John 18:38). Perhaps Wordsworth out-

Pilates Pilate not in cynicism that any one man (such as Jesus) could embody Truth but in cynicism about any literary fiction of an idealized hero (such as Jesus) embodying Truth. I cannot help wondering what Wordsworth would have said of Dickens' Sydney Carton – or whether he thought only *he* could give us a Michel Beaupuy.

To be sure, the passage in question does not represent the final views of Wordsworth but something of a low point in Wordsworth's relation to others and to his own past, his heart cut off «From all the sources of her former strength» [XI. l. 78]. It must also be noted that the lines in Manuscript A are heavily crossed out [*The Thirteen Book Prelude,* p. 1086], and that the rewritten passage in the 1850 *Prelude* poses no such surface difficulty. Yet even the rewritten lines can baffle us with the strength of their revulsion against poetic heroes:

> Then I said,
> 'Go to the Poets; they will speak to thee
> More perfectly of purer creatures; – yet
> If reason be nobility in man,
> Can aught be more ignoble than the man
> Whom they delight in, blinded as he is
> By prejudice, the miserable slave
> Of low ambition or distempered love?'
> [1850 *Prelude* XII. ll. 68-74]

Are Homer's Hector, Virgil's Aeneas, Milton's Adam, Shakespeare's Hamlet to be dismissed as the miserable slaves of low ambition or distempered love? We need to emphasize the dramatic presentation of such a fit of bad humour: *then I said*, but such distance is there between what I said then and what I know when I am in my habitual, poetry-loving self. Even so, however, I think there is a truth worth noting, dare I say a truth worth our sympathy, in James Chandler's description of the criteria for heroism as «exclusively private». The point is made with harrowing insight by David Bromwich in an email responding to my bafflement over «sympathies with truth». Bromwich writes, «This seems an intuition so inward with Wordsworth, that for that reason – but perhaps from other causes, too – he goes into a sort of dense shorthand when he tries to describe it» (10/27/11). Is it just an accident, a scholarly caution, or a deep identification with Wordsworth that makes Bromwich add the gnomic qualifier «but perhaps from other causes, too»? What Bromwich, more than Chandler, intuits is an inwardness or privacy so fragile, so disturbed, that Wordsworth can only count Truth, not his friends or poets, living or dead, as sharers in his vision of man to come, «parted as by a gulph / From him who had been». The gulf for Wordsworth, in some sense, always was the gulf not between what was and what was to be, nor the gulf

between his former self and his present consciousness, but the gulf between himself and other human beings from whom he always needed to be protected and, towards him he needed to be, gingerly, by nature led into limited relation.

The Love of Nature Leading

What is bizarre about «the love of nature leading to the love of man» looks still more bizarre in the actual poetic language of *Prelude* VIII, encoded in the belief «that noticeable kindliness of heart / Sprang out of fountains» [1850 *Prelude* VIII. ll. 124-125]. In one sense, however, this myth of Romantic origins is actually easier to understand than the doubly encoded language of «the love of nature leading to the love of man». To say that the love of man «sprang out of fountains» is to attribute to rural experience a sense of human dignity, human lovability, that can withstand all that the Wordsworth wiser in the ways of London, of the French Revolution, and of his own untrustworthy heart comes to know. What is misleading about the phrase «love of nature leading to love of man» is the suggestion of «love of man» as a belated concept, product of the earlier «love of nature». What Wordsworth means, however, is perhaps better conveyed by supplying the implied adverb *back*: love of nature leading back to the love of mankind. Back after what? In context, at the beginning of Book VIII, he means «back from London to rural, childhood experience», back to something gentle and lovely after «all those loathsome sights / Of wretchedness and vice» [1805 *Prelude* VIII. ll. 65-66]. In the context of *The Prelude* as a whole, he will mean «back to what I believed earlier before I learned at first hand the meanness of which men are capable under the crush of experience». Yet to interpret *leading* as *leading back* is to overlook the special mythic force of the formula as Wordsworth gives it: To experience «love of Nature leading» is to intuit what he calls in *Resolution and Independence* «a leading from above, a something given». If the forward leading of experience takes one from «simplicity, / And beauty, and inevitable grace» (1805 *Prelude* VIII. ll. 157-158), a «leading from above» takes one back to this idealized view of human nature that no experienced knowledge can destroy. The «love of man» is protected against the assaults of experience, the failures Wordsworth encounters in other people (starting with members of his own family) and himself. This we recognize as a dominant Wordsworth myth. It must be the dominant sense of «intimations of immortality from recollections of early childhood» – that is, intimations that there is something that doth live, worthily live in human nature, despite all that adult experience brings to make us doubt. And it is, I believe, the dominant sense of «nature never did betray the heart that loved her» in «Tintern Abbey»: that is, human beings are

always, repeatedly, nastily betraying one another, but Nature's leading, that «leading from above» that takes us back to an earlier perception of man, insulates us against the betrayals and meannesses we come to know.

What makes this myth of Nature alluring, but not too alluring, is our sense always that the setting sun bears more love to mountain regions (1805 *Prelude* VIII. ll. 117-118) than Wordsworth characteristically bears to actual human beings. Men, actual men, present themselves «removed, and at a distance that was fit» [1805 *Prelude* VIII. ll. 439-440], a fitting that is as much a source of comfort to the poet as it is discomfiting to his readers. Man is ennobled, «ennobled outwardly before mine eyes», if and only if «his form hath flashed upon me glorified / By the deep radiance of the setting sun» [ll. 404-405]. Get no closer or the shepherd will turn out to be what Chaucer called «a shitten shepherd» with a foul rag and boneshop of a heart. Wordsworth speaks of his idealized, distant shepherd figure as his introduction «to an unconscious love and reverence / Of human nature» [ll. 413-414]; but he does not want to be «introduced», let alone to shake hands: every wall of this imaginary Busiraine's castle proclaims, Be close? Be close? BE NOT TOO CLOSE! Every man is a betrayer, every woman an unrepentant Magdalene. The motto not just of *Prelude* Book VIII but of the overwhelming bulk of Wordsworth's poetry might well be Jesus' injunction to Mary Magadene: *noli me tangere.*

Wordsworth's obsession about keeping his distance gets figured and refigured into countless texts in which we sense that what ought to be «touching» is instead transmuted into «a spirit hallowing what I saw / With decoration and ideal grace» [1805 *Prelude* V. l. 479]. Would not «vulgar fear» be better than this zany transmutation into «Grecian art and purest poesy»? Wordsworth's faith that nature never did betray the heart that loved her looks too much like bad faith – or if sincere, a sincere case of emotional autism.

This much, I think, represents no special insight into Wordsworth and insufficient justification for my applying, figuratively, what sounds more like a diagnosis than a helpful figure of speech. But together with the compulsion not to touch or be touched is a persistent, «autistic» fear of looking or being seen. Wordsworth really, deeply, IS the old Cumberland beggar about whose eyes the poet says, «as he moves along / They move along the ground». And on the model of David Bromwich's stunning reading of that great crux in «Tintern Abbey» («Nature never did betray the heart that loved her» means, Bromwich teaches us, «I William Wordsworth, betrayed Annette Vallon»), we may say that Wordsworth *is* the Old Cumberland Beggar, a figure whose indifference to suffering is the «don't touch me» and «I can't be touched» that the poet actually admires – or needs. The meaning of that poem's problematic ethical stance, «Let him alone» then becomes not an appeal (like the persistent Republican argument against Affordable Healthcare) «Let the

poor alone to fend for themselves», but rather «Let me alone». Don't touch me.

The beggar's eyes, detached from human seeing and the seeing of humans, eyes that, as the beggar moves along «move along the ground», help us to understand the strange displacements in sight that Wordsworth repeatedly images at stunning and seemingly benignant moments. My argument is that Wordsworth is compelled to turn eye contact into Nature's «watchful eye», as though anything more personal, anything closer to the maternal watchful eye, would be unbearable. Let me attempt to distinguish such a reading from the best I think one can do without it. To Christopher R. Miller belongs the most subtle interpretation of Nature's watchful eye as a benignant presence. Thus Miller sees the ending of the «Intimations Ode» as all involved with an «abundant recompense» for the loss of a Miltonic, Christian faith in the watchfulness of God:

> The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
> Do take a sober colouring from an eye
> That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality.

Miller contrasts Milton's «Cherubim / That kept their watch» over Eden at night – guarding against mortality – with Wordsworth, keeping a deathbed watch and contemplating mortality. Wordsworth's is a less effective, but also a less threatening, watchfulness: «It is an activity of mindful attention rather than omnipotent protection» [MILLER 2006, p. 120]. That distinction, in human terms the distinction between a wished for Watch that keeps out death and a possible, consoling watchful presence at a deathbed may be a reading with too much benignity. I would hesitate to call the sunset eye Wordsworth himself, or an image of Wordsworth's compensatory myth, as I think Miller implies, let alone a collective «generalized 'eye' [of] his predecessors and successors» [MILLER 2006, p. 120] – which is what Miller actually offers. One might take comfort from the myth that Nature, like a parent, continues to watch over us, or at least from the myth that all is not lost if we can still dream of Nature, in place of God, watching over us. But I think Wordsworth is as much threatened as comforted by watchfulness, and he takes comfort from the thought that that setting sun is only figuratively an eye keeping watch o'er man's mortality. Perhaps he takes more comfort still from the built-in shut-eye of the sunset: the language ostensibly conveys the immortality of the cycle of days; but perhaps the deeper comfort is the thought that with the setting of the sun that eye will shut and give us a respite from constant surveillance.

I think it might well be worthwhile examining all Wordsworth characters who have trouble making eye contact or with whom others have trouble making eye contact – «She looks as if at them – but they / Regard her not» [«Gipsies»] as potential figures for Wordsworth's own autism. Autistic behaviours are everywhere in Wordsworth: those beggars and wanderers who move about constantly, those figures or self-presentations of retreat into one's own world, those peculiar moments of callous indifference to the feelings of others, those moments when a child or old man appears not to hear – all these may be aspects of a fundamental, Romantic problem in relating to others that we might label, metaphorically, autism. Let me conclude by trying to keep our eyes firmly set on one last object: what shall we do with the introduction to «Michael» with its deliberate, shocking dismissal of the human for the inanimate:

> Shepherds, dwellers in the valley, men
> Whom I already loved—not verily
> For their own sakes but for the fields and hills
> Where was their occupation and abode.
> [ll. 23-26]

As long as the shepherds are shepherds of tales, not real, needy, shitten shepherds, Wordsworth can love them, love the hills, love perhaps not Michael, but the tale of Michael. As Geoffrey Hartman remarked long ago, «Wordsworth is like one who may not come near the quick of grief» [HARTMAN 1964, p. 265). Nature is what keeps him from being too touched. I cannot pretend that I love him more because he loves the shepherds for the sake of the fields, rather than vice-versa. But I can find strength in attending to the ways he coped with his need for such emotional reserve. If we are not going to condemn Wordsworth for his emotional failures nor, in bad faith, pretend to admire him for these failures, the response that he teaches us is the most appropriate way to read him goes by the name of *sympathy*.

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«The Unimaginable Touch of Time»: Time and Narrative in Wordsworth's *Prelude*

Abstract

The descripion of narrative temporality has lately seemed to have exhausted its interpretive potential. More recently, the subject of time has been resumed by theorists and narratologists who have focused on contemporary novels which are structured achronologically on anticipation of retrospection. This article explores how useful this notion can be when looking for new ways of interpreting the complex time settings of various episodes in Wordsworth's the *Prelude*. The argument is based on a cross examination of the different beginnings of *The Two-Part Prelude* and *The Prelude 1805,* and on a parallel reading of one famous spot of time and its earlier sub-text.

Giuliana Ferreccio

to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.
[T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, 2004]

The Unimaginable Touch of Time

Time seems to be Wordsworth's main concern along with «the poetry of human suffering» [AVERILL, 1980], although only rarely does it actually surface as a theme, as in the memorable line «the unimaginable touch of time» [WORDSWORTH 2012, p. 408]. Time, however, dominates Wordsworth's *oeuvre* and his own relationship to it is apparent

from «Tintern Abbey» to the spots of time [*1799* I. ll. 288-299].[1] Is the touch of time unimaginable or is this unforgettably moving poem the product of a more mature and sterner mood than the one accompanying his younger years? Or is its being unimaginable a prerequisite for giving impulse to the various beginnings of his epic autobiography, where the touch of time is represented through a variety of temporal settings?

Although the great bulk of Wordsworth's poetry is narrative, only in *The Prelude* do we find such a rich variety of temporal representations. *The Prelude* is about time in more senses than one; in the first place, it is the time of Wordsworth's life, since it explores the nature of personal and historical time through the temporal logic of narration, reconfiguring the poet's life experiences and the growth of his mind. Narrative in general makes time comprehensible as human time [RICOEUR 1983, p. 17] by shaping the features of temporal experience, which hardly follow the course of linear, chronological time. If narrative is one of the foremost modes configuring *The Prelude*, it is not the only one, however, as various modes and genres intermingle with it – lyric, autobiography and confession, to name just a few – interacting in ways that may alter the narrative argument. Passages in which the lyric mode prevails tend to suspend the flow of time effected by linear narration by displacing the narrative into an atemporal dimension. Displacing may mean disrupting the flow and the logic of narrative by introducing a sense of discontinuity and uncertainty, which accounts for the poem's lively ambiguities.[2]

The description of narrative temporality often tends to get involved in hopeless complexity, so much so that De Man's famous «Rhetoric of Temporality» seemed to have put an end to its study. One of the main sources of confusion appears to stem from the clash between a chronological and an achronological view of time (in Ricoeur's terms, cosmological and phenomenological time), which may parallel the contrast between the linear time of narrative and the atemporal dimension of lyric. In Ricoeur's view, cosmological time is objective linear time, a succession of nows, while phenomenological time is something like an embedding structure, in which former presents exist as if embedded inside one another as the essential parts of an eternal present.[3] «Phenomenological time draws the notions of past and

[1] Abbreviations in brackets are as follows: *1799* for the *Two-Part Prelude*, *1805* for *The Prelude 1805*. Since I am comparing the two, my citations will rely heavily on the 1799 text.

[2] Monique R. Morgan has analysed temporality in *The Prelude* in an extremely well-documented study, in which she maintains that *The Prelude* is a «striking case study of cooperative lyric-narrative hybridity, of narrative means serving lyric ends» [MORGAN 2008]. I will take a few hints from her argument although I do not agree with her conclusions.

[3] I am partly leaning on the argument Mark Currie develops in his *About Time. Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* [2007] in which he compares Ricoeur's

future into the present in such a way that the anteriority of the past and the posteriority of the future are questioned» [CURRIE 2007, p. 33]. We could say that an achronological time setting may often rely on a merging of narrative and lyric modes.

But once we enter the field of self-narration, the touch of time may actually make stronger demands on imagination in order to be represented. In other words, representing the flow of time may come into clash with the inevitable split any confessional narrative, such as *The Prelude*, is grounded on. As Wordsworth himself comments at the beginning of the «Second Part» of *The Two-Part Prelude*, after having recollected the series of childhood episodes which he later terms as «spots of time», the gap between narrated time and the time of narration, that is, his present self, is so wide that he seems to have «two consciousnesses – conscious of (himself), / And of some other being» [*1799* II. ll. 26-31]. What is most alien and far away is felt to have «such self-presence» as to weaken present time. The touch of time may interrupt the continuity of an individual's life and arguably there was nothing Wordsworth valued more than «tracing the evidence that affinities had been preserved between all stages of a man's life» [GILL 2011, p. 1], nothing he valued less than discontinuity and fragmentation. The incorporation of self-distance within the lived present produces memorable verse in the revolutionary books (IX, X), but its destructive consequences must be overcome for imagination to be «restored». Time's depredations and discontinuities could be countered only by rendering time imaginable through the agency of the creative imagination.

The Prelude's temporal complexities have long been recognized by most critics, and although there is little agreement as to what they consist of, agreement is general when defining its structure as prospective or forward-looking [MORGAN 2008, p. 302, HARTMAN 1964, pp. 29-30]. M.H. Abrams was the first to point out that *The Prelude*, like Proust's *Recherche,* is not simply a narrative of things past, but a present remembrance of things past and that its construction is achronological, starting not at the beginning but at the end [ABRAMS, 1971, p. 74]. In the course of the poem, Wordsworth gives repeated hints that his work has been conceived to circle back to its starting point, that is, his return to Grasmere and the walk to his beloved vale, which will supply the subject-matter for a separate work, *Home at Grasmere*, started soon after he dropped the first two books of *The Two-Part Prelude*. At the beginning of *The Prelude*, in the «Great Preamble», Wordsworth proclaims the end of his long apprenticeship toward writing his masterpiece. Although not all critics would agree as to which masterpiece is being referred

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position with recent analytical views of time. Considering the prevailing role of time in contemporary novels, Currie foresees that narrative theory and the study of temporal structures will recover a foremost position in criticism. His own exhaustive study concentrates on prolepsis or the anticipation of retrospection as the main feature of contemporary representations of time.

to here, the never accomplished *Recluse* or *The Prelude*, there is good reason to assert that in recounting that preparation he has completed *The Prelude* itself [ABRAMS 1971, p. 117]. The unfolding of that particular story, his becoming a poet, turns out to be simultaneous with the act of narration, endowing the narrative with both a referential quality and a performative function: it enacts the story in the present, while narrating it in the past tense. Although the reader is given to understand the meaning of events retrospectively, Wordsworth narrates these life events prospectively [MORGAN 2008 p. 314], building up expectations about a conclusion the reader is already familiar with from the start. If an established tradition of narrative criticism maintains that telling a story is structured by the presence of the end [BROOKS 1984, p. 22], in *The Prelude* the whole narrative is teleologically oriented, and anticipation of the endpoint is so pervasive and insistent as to instil some doubts about its actual outcome. While the poem describes and narrates the years of his childhood and youth (1770-98), it also implicitly inscribes the years 1799-1805, during which it was composed [GILL 2011, p. 11]. Present remembrance of things past has a dynamic quality encompassing the experiences, events and changes intervening between the time locus of the past and the time locus of narration, between narrated time and the time of narration.

Nothing is lost en route. Continuity means conveying equal dignity to every phase of the poet's life by living each of them all over again, or rather by re-writing them, as is often the case in his endless revisions. Now that the Wordsworth Cornell Edition has rendered so much unpublished material available, it is almost inevitable that critics will dip into what Wordsworth left in manuscript form, retracing the passages, lines or sentences he resumed in later published works or following his endless revisions, which may lead to the discovery of a wholly new text implied and hidden in the published one.[4] No wonder there have been strong objections to taking Wordsworth's presentation of his sudden epiphanies and the agency of Nature at face value, considering how often he had revised his verse [RAJAN 1990, p. 365]. This achronological arrangement creates the illusion that the narrator's present moment overlaps with what is recounted from the past, or that the action takes place before the eyes as a special present or a second degree present [ASSMANN 2002, p. 114]. This may occasionally happen in most narratives, but *The Prelude* intensifies it both because it is a long poem and because of its being structured on the spots of time that punctuate almost all of its books. The relation of a quasi present to the structural retrospect of tense could be thought of as the lyric time of discourse, as opposed to the time of the

[4] In the past decades scholars have identified five different versions of *The Prelude*. Jonathan Wordsworth maintains that *The Prelude* has four texts, including a 1798 *Was It For This* [WORDSWORTH 1995]. Duncan Wu has edited a *Five-Book Prelude* [WU 1997].

narrated story. Whether the two modes clash or merge into each other is to be decided on in each single case, although it is true that the poem's circular time structure tends to blur contrasts and conflicts. Its overall prospective time setting also accounts for its performative tinge, which is especially evident both at the beginning of *The Two-Part Prelude* of 1799 and in the «Glad Preamble» opening the 1805 version.

The present can only be narrated in the past tense because narration is always retrospective and can only represent what is no longer present.[5] Being a long poem, however, *The Prelude* welds narrative and lyric, or combines the two modes in ways that have been interpreted in quite differing manners, depending on whether one stresses continuity or fragmentation, the temporal connectedness of the episodes of his life with its endpoint or their mutual conflicting with one another [HARTMAN 1990, p. 14, DE MAN 1967, pp. 88-91]. Although the poet's life is often compared to a river, the Derwent of his childhood or the meandering stream of later years, there are many momentous interruptions, notably the spots of time studding the various books, and, more drastically, what is recounted in the central revolutionary books, his «juvenile errors», which trouble the continuous flow of time, leading to an ominous «stride at once / Into another region» [*1805* X. ll. 240-41].

Keeping in mind the effect of simultaneity produced by the looping anticipation of retrospection[6] on which *The Prelude* is constructed, I will try to point out its effects on a few famous passages that may illustrate the complexities of time perceptions and the ambiguous temporal structures exhibited in *The Prelude*. The poem's main temporal feature, that is, its circular structure, reflects on the time setting of each single episode in different ways. Considering time structures in Wordsworth's *oeuvre* cannot ignore the relation between what he published and what he did not publish. Manuscripts uncovered by the Cornell Edition make up an extended text, which many have come to consider as relevant as the published work, to which Wordsworth kept coming back, whether to add new verse, to cross out link passages or to re-write parts.

In order to explore a few instances of time representation in *The Prelude*, I will first dwell on a cross-examination of «Was it for this», the beginning of

[5] There is disagreement on this point. Dorrit Cohn claims «that the past tense inevitably reminds the reader that (the narrator's past thoughts) are mediated by memory» therefore «not literally present» [COHN 1999, p. 107], whereas merging lyric and narrative may produce a shift in time consciousness.

[6] Any critic facing the problem of prolepsis or anticipation somehow has recourse to Peter Brooks' apt definition: «If the past is to be read as present, it is a curious present that we know to be past in relation to a future we know to be already in place […] Perhaps we would do best to speak of the anticipation of retrospection as our chief tool in making sense of narrative, the master trope of its strange logic» [BROOKS 1984, p. 23].

The Two-Part Prelude, and the «Glad Preamble» opening *The Prelude 1805*, in which anticipation of retrospection may be viewed according to two different types of prolepsis, which share however a common performative function. A performative prolepsis may be viewed as a self-fulfilling prophecy, as a narrative anticipating events belonging to the future in order to «envisage an event which produces the present in such a way that the envisaged future actually comes about» [CURRIE 2007, p. 42]. A performative proleptic narrative produces the future in the very act of imaging it forth so that the possible transforms itself into the actual. In both beginnings, anticipation gives a narrative structure to what follows, but there is a difference: in the former case, the expected ending never takes place and the story gives no real answer to the poet's initial question; in the latter, on the contrary, expectations are fulfilled, and the story follows the unfolding of life's events marked by the decisive turning point of his revolutionary enthusiasm, his disillusions and the eventual restoring of his imaginative powers. The opening of *1799* can be described as a rhetorical prolepsis, the *1805* preamble as a structural prolepsis.[7] I will next consider one famous spot of time and its original drafts going back to Wordsworth's earliest juvenilia where retrospection is multiplied in a series of backward-looking acts which bring out the theme of guilt and suffering as one of his main leitmotifs.

Was it for this

There is a great difference between the original opening of *The Two-Part Prelude*, «Was it for this», and the «Glad Preamble» starting all later versions, which Wordsworth probably composed between 1800 and 1801, after he had abandoned the first two books. If compared with the later versions, *The Two-Part Prelude* shows a much more unified theme and a more coherent formal structure than anything one can find later on. In the «First Part», attention is focused on the birth and shaping of the creative imagination by Nature's interventions, while the «Second Part» shows the episodes from his adolescence leading to «love of Nature» for its own sake. The «Second Part» is rounded off in the ending by a long series of dubitative half questions («If in my youth […] if in this time / Of dereliction and dismay […]», ll. 473-487) paralleling the repeated questionings at the beginning of

[7] Mark Currie classifies three types of prolepsis as follows: 1. narratological prolepsis, «a form of anticipation which takes place within the time locus of the narrated […] or flash-forward»; 2. structural prolepsis, a form of anticipation which takes place «between the time locus of the narrated and the time locus of the narrator»; 3. rhetorical prolepsis, the anticipation of an «objection and the preclusion of that objection by incorporating a counter-argument into the discourse» [CURRIE 2007, p. 31].

the «First Part» («Was it for this […] for this didst thou […]», ll. 1-17). If *The Prelude* is the great celebration of the poet's return to a harmonious conjunction of imagination and nature, the redemptive course one usually finds in it is not a trait discernible in the 1799 version. Uncertainty and dissatisfaction set the tone in this early version, although the poet repeatedly looks for, and obtains, assurance from Nature's testimony of having been picked out as her chosen son. The voice continuously oscillates between a sense of frustrated hopes and failure for not having been up to a poetic calling, all the more painful since Nature had from the beginning chosen him as a «favoured being». The repeated bulk of «severer interventions», signalling that Nature taught him «by beauty and by fear», are imbued with threatening anticipations, as though his course were darkened by ominous intimations and troubling forebodings.

«Was it for this», albeit a rhetorical device, has nonetheless a troubled urgency which, at this point, will not be assuaged. The first manuscript draft [1798] starts in small letters, in an unassuming way, in the middle of the line, almost an off-hand opening, which turns, however, into an obsessive, insistent repetition. The question implies dissatisfaction, failure to keep promises and despondency, which will be toned down in later versions: the sentence recurs six times in 1798, decreasing to three times in *The Two-Part Prelude* and to two in *The Prelude 1805*. Wordsworth never provides an antecedent for the reiterated «this», although it is usually assumed that he is referring to his discontent at his failure to begin work on *The Recluse*, or it is read as a general feeling of self-reproach. Whatever it was meant to be, what it in fact does is give a start to the series of recollected «hours» which will become *The Prelude*. Lacking any other reference, «this» may simply imply his present condition, which unfolds through an abrupt retrospective narration of vivid childhood scenes. The present sense of frustration opening the doors to the past has no real presence in verb tense; rather, it is produced in the reader's mind as a time lapse between a retrospect witnessing Nature's favour and the anticipation of an uncertain future. Anticipation, albeit hesitating and doubtful, is a prerequisite for retrospection.

The circular temporal structure of the poem is here announced, but while its structural function is thinned down to the point of disappearance, its rhetorical function is much more evident. The question «was it for this» does not really point to a time locus between narrated past and the time of narrative, but rather pre-empts the anticipation of an objection which is in fact disposed of by the poetry which is being written; the more his doubtful questions return, the more vivid episodes succeed one another, as though self-doubt were the effectual trigger of remembrance and narration. Performative anticipation produces the future in the act of visualizing it, in such a way that what is possible turns into the actual [CURRIE 2007, pp. 43-44]. It does so in a range of moods which in this case waver between doubt, dejection and the assurance of having been chosen for a poetic vocation. The

time setting of this first version is modelled on «Tintern Abbey» [1798], in which Wordsworth first discovers time as his main poetic concern. As the title reminds us, «Tintern Abbey» is a poem of the present, his present exultation at having discovered continuity between past and present. Soon, however, the emphasis on retrospect becomes the keynote – «Five years have passed […] Once again I hear» – and the present acquires presence in relation to the past. Evidence about the present and anticipation of the future are drawn from analysing what has changed «between then, the earlier visit, and now the writing of the poem» [GILL 2011, pp. 9-10]. In Dorothy's «wild eyes» not only does he behold his own past, but the present is lived as anticipation of retrospection: «(when) thy memory (shall) be as a dwelling-place /For all sweet sounds and harmonies». The later *Prelude* works almost in the same way, when the new version of 1805 opens with the new preamble. The «Glad Preamble» is an effusion at his now being able to start on the projected philosophical poem, but we soon discover that the new start is also a retrospect, that this outburst took place in the past: «Oh there is a blessing in this gentle breeze, (1) […] Thus far, O friend, did I, not used to make / A present joy the matter of my song, / Pour out that day[…]» [ll. 55-57].

Many critics have dwelt on the outstanding range of effects any one of the first series of spots of time offers. The verse suggests dynamism and energy, which seem to strain it in its struggle for forward momentum towards a climax and a resolution [GILL 1991, p. 29]. Whether it be the stolen boat episode or the ice-skating scene, the verse enacts the movement and the emotions that are its subject-matter. In the wood-cock snaring episode, the movements of his «anxious visitation, hurrying on, / Still hurrying, hurrying onward» preying on another's toil, bring about a similar movement of «Low breathings coming after (him)» [*1799*, ll. 38-49], trodding the turf as stealthily as he had stolen the snared birds. The forward movement enhances the feeling of presence the child senses around him. The enacting is certainly due to rhythm and concreteness, but it is also triggered by the sense of anticipation posed by the initial question. For anticipation to function, however, there must be retrospection, and memory turns into poetry when it testifies the present through a self-fulfilling prophecy. We are dealing with a special present based on the relation between past and future. At this stage in *The Two-Part Prelude*, however, we do not find a proper prolepsis from a narrative point of view, because prolepsis needs a first chain of events to counteract by anticipating what has not yet happened, and here nothing much has happened yet. Nor can it be properly called a structural prolepsis because the main point is not a contrast between narrated time and the time of narration. «Was it for this» certainly provides a more appropriate lyric start for the sudden appearance of the sequence of childhood episodes than the later, more descriptive and meditative «Glad Preamble».

In passing from the beginning of *The Two-Part Prelude* to *The Prelude 1805*, the anticipation of retrospection acquires the clearer marks of a structural prolepsis, as the poem explicitly takes its start from Wordsworth's return to his beloved vale; the end of the long journey of his apprenticeship to becoming a poet is also the beginning of the poem itself. The chronological time of his life story is refigured in the achronological setting which joins end and beginning. The distressful question of the original opening, now moved to line 257, is almost submerged by the new, larger and more varied Book I, now openly structured on Milton's epic. Although the first group of childhood spots of time of 1799 does not show much revision when moved to the middle of Book I in the 1805 version, the sense of suddenness and surprise, the startling beginning in *medias res* and the sense of foreboding are largely blurred. The dark zone or threat anticipated by the times of «dereliction and dismay» announcing Wordsworth's revolutionary break with Nature, is now muffled in being followed by more books taking us back to Wordsworth's childhood again.

In the 1805 thirteen-book version, self-doubt and uncertainty are compensated for not only by retrospectively, and insistently, recognizing Nature's favour but also by teleologically anticipating the poem's closing lines: the ending of Book II is recalled almost verbatim at the end of Book XIII, endowing his early anticipation with a prophetic prescience of his and Coleridge's becoming «prophets of Nature» [*1805* XIII, l. 442]. In the new context, prolepsis has taken the fore over retrospection and memory has turned into a never-failing principle of joy, as it often does in *The Prelude*, promising blessings thanks to Nature's assistance and overthrowing the fears of his «uneasy heart» thanks to his discovering, in the course of Book II, the «one life» [l. 460], the active universe introduced to him by Coleridge. As Hartman has aptly observed, while in *The Two-Part Prelude* «Was it for this» does not receive an answer, all the following versions are so structured as to afford reaching a positive answer; we pass from «was it for this?» to «it was for this».

From The Two-Part Prelude *to* The Prelude 1805

What sets the two beginnings apart is made even clearer by Wordsworth's revisions when, after writing the «Glad Preamble» he decides to split the sequence of childhood episodes. In March 1804 the original extended sequence of spots of time, until then all concentrated in the «First Part» of 1799, was split up and moved to subsequent books. The last two – «Penrith Beacon» and «Waiting for the Horses» – were at first to supply the climatic ending of the *Five-Book Prelude* [1804] but then became the testimony of imagination being restored, after the revolution, in all subsequent versions. After completing it, Wordsworth felt he had left out too seminal a part of his

life, his revolutionary «juvenile errors». In April 1805 an extended version of lines 288-374, the last two spots of time, became *The Prelude 1805* XI, ll. 257-388. While separating the second group from the rest, Wordsworth struck out the link passage of 1799, which has no counterpart in later versions but is of considerable importance. Visual impressions are stored in the memory and assume new significance with the passing of time. They are «archetypes» living an independent life of the imagination. In its place a new passage is rescued from previous fragments, but its tone and perspective is greatly changed. In this new setting we find less emphasis on beginnings and the creative potential of the first group, which in 1799 had a «fructifying» [l. 290] virtue and here a weaker «renovating» power. In spite of his new awareness that «the mind is lord and master», a deeper doubt creeps in to darkly colour the added passage: «I see by glimpses now, when age comes on / May scarcely see at all» [*1805*, l. 337]. Its gloomier view may remind one that it was set in place after Wordsworth completed the *Immortality Ode*. Why separate them and why choose the last two to signal a climax of some kind? Where does the difference between this second group and the previous one lie?

Generally speaking, the canonical definition of the spots of time tells us that «the reader always remains aware of two points in time, […] the present […] and the deep well of the personal past» [LINDERNBERGER 1963, p.143], but the effect of simultaneity does not necessarily imply overcoming the gap between the two forms of consciousness; it may on the contrary deepen the poet's awareness of self-distance and loss. Most critics have indeed interpreted the relation to be an endlessly precarious state of suspension between continuity and fragmentation [DE MAN 1971, pp. 223-225] or have recognized a conflict setting narrative linear time and lyric chronological suspension against one another. On the other hand, there is also a tendency to stress continuity because lyrical effects do bring about a temporal blurring, a sort of suspended time, an atemporal time setting, similar to the feeling of being «all in all» of «Tintern Abbey», which may be found in some of the spots of time.[8] Although every spot of time has its own character and temporality, it is true that in this initial group one can see the poet identifying with his former self, re-experiencing enthusiasm, fear and exultation: «Oh, when I have hung / Above the raven's nest» [*1799*, l. 57]. The verbs are in the past tense, but it may be both an iterative past of repeated actions and a preterite having happened once. The mixed temporal setting intensifies the ambiguity; while the overall effect is to give the liveliness of singularity, the episodes acquire an atemporal quality. Narrative presents perceptions and

[8] Aleida Assmann is of great help in giving both interpretations their due. She makes a difference between the two types of memory that she sees at work in the *Prelude*: a kind of Platonic *anamnesis* and a form of recollection which measures the temporal distance separating then and now.

emotions as if they were an atemporal eternal suspension of time [MORGAN 2008, p. 311]. These first spots of time move «from a world of transitory things to intimations of a more eternal realm» [LINDENBERGER 1963, p. 146].

This does not happen in the second group, in which the former temporal blurring is replaced by a wide vacancy between the narrating I now and the narrated I then. The recounted events happen unmistakably only once, and the time structure has lost immediacy by the introduction of a long comment, instead of topping off the episode with an apostrophe to nature leading to the discovery of «unknown modes of being». Even in the 1799 version the surprise and emotional immediacy characterizing the first group were toned down in the second by explicitly introducing memory for the first time: «I remember well» [l. 296], «Nor less I recollect» [l. 327], «Yes, I remember» [l. 391]. By moving the second group away Wordsworth has also severed it from the time dimension, in which the «common face of Nature spake to (him) / Rememberable things», and eliminated the important link passage about the permanence of archetypes. The added passage stresses, on the contrary, mutability and forgetfulness: «the hiding-places of my power / Seem open, I approach, and then they close» [ll. 335-336]. If he chose to move those in particular, there must have been something even in 1799 that kept them apart.

The first group, dealing with lively, intense enterprises the child hurled into, were always accompanied by «the impressive agency of fear» [*1799*, l. 433], by «danger or desire» [l. 195] or by an impending punishment. In the second group connection with guilt is much more explicit, though not caused by some trespassing or violence against nature. Guilt comes out of the child's imaginings, whether he be frightened by a corpse suddenly rising from the beauteous water «bolt upright / […] with a ghastly face» [ll. 278-279] or tripping over a murderer's gibbet, or feeling guilt for his father's death. It is no longer Nature admonishing him by beauty and by fear, but the child's guilty projections resurfacing from the past. Some suggest that he had indulged in «unclean sympathies» with the murderers, convicts and drifters of his early poems [BROMWICH 1998, p.1], and of course these last two episodes have received adequate psychoanalytical interpretations. The connection between memory and guilt returns in a later short poem, «Memory». Among its other attributes, memory may: «like a tool of fancy, (work) / those Spectres to dilate / that startle Conscience, as she lurks / within her lonely seat».[9] Memory reveals itself as an ambiguous tool. On the one hand, it is memory that gives the start to recollection of the hours «that have the charm of visionary things» [*1799* II, ll. 460-461], while on the other, memory unleashes and uncovers a whole repository of guilt feelings he had bodied forth in his very early «Prose Fragments» and «Gothic Fragments»

[9] Wordsworth's distinction between fancy and imagination may be glimpsed as early as 1805 in Book VIII. See FERRECCIO 2006.

[*The Vale of Esthwaite*, Fragment 2]. Retrospection may host a beast in the jungle, a whole scene of loss and guilt, if it is not assisted by anticipation, by an opening towards the future.

This second group of childhood reminiscences is more open to encompassing failure, guilt and loss. They are, however, still part of the circular structure on which *The Prelude* is built, with a difference: the atemporal quality they share with previous spots of time is now tinged by the poet's awareness that memory marks distance and discontinuity, that present remembrance of things past may mean acknowledging the absence of what is recollected. At the same time they show the positive side of what is absent, its anteriority, its shadowy permanence, a kind of continuity which can never be taken for granted, nor secured by memory, but liable to be evoked by a renewed act of creative imagination, a continuous present which keeps changing in the course of time [RICOEUR 2004, chapter I]. Acknowledging the lapse of time becomes a vital generative agent. In this second group the spot reminds one of what is irretrievable; imagination in the present creates what life takes away, namely, its presence. While measuring the distance that is brought about by the touch of time, memory is mysteriously tied to guilt. Guilt accompanies both groups in part; it constitutes what ties them together, but in the second group it is prominent and not explicitly related to natural intervention. The welding of narrative and lyric which had opened the quasi present of an atemporal dimension is no longer the main point.

Visions, Revisions, Revisitings

Unlike Eliot's, Wordsworth's visions may have taken longer than a minute to be reversed, but they certainly were often and heavily revised. One of the decisive traits distinguishing the last two episodes from the previous group is their being revisitings of earlier verse. It is no longer memory but literally poetry that opens towards the future, and re-enacting the past now turns into re-inscribing previous unpublished material [GILL 2011]. The first spots of time had no connection to previous juvenilia, while the last three witness the complex turns Wordsworth followed in revising, shifting whole passages, isolated lines and single images, or tapping episodes from earlier unpublished works. Structural prolepsis, or what separates the time of narrated events from the time of narration, acquires a new significance if one considers the «text» of Wordsworth's moving back and forth among his published and unpublished works. This effort to efface chronology by fending off the unimaginable touch of time is reflected in his relentless revisions to *The Prelude* and in the ever new arrangements he gave to the various collections of his poems. His constant revisions indicate the importance he attached to his oeuvre as «an evolving whole which had historical existence, but much more importantly, a being in the continuous present» [GILL 2011, p. 36].

Revisiting allows memory to avoid becoming «a tool of fancy» to shun fixity and become instead «a live engagement with the past that reactivates it into conjunction with the present». We know that he kept going back to places that had marked his life and poetry (e.g. the Grande Chartreuse, Furness Abbey, Salisbury Plain), confronting «his sense of the present and the intervening years in fresh acts of creation», enlivened by ever-changing perspectives [GILL 2011, p. 8].

The «Penrith Beacon» and «Waiting for the Horses» episodes represent the first significant revisiting in Wordsworth's *oeuvre* and are among the main recurrent key-motifs which acquire ever-growing and changing meanings as they are revisited over the years. The event of his father's death stands out as a token of an irretrievable loss which kept resurfacing from early on until it could find a steady setting in 1799 in the second group of the spots of time sequence. At Christmas-time the boy was waiting for the horses that would take him home for the holidays. A few days after reaching home his father dies and the boy feels responsible for his death.

> […] Ere I to school returned
> That dreary time, ere I had been ten days
> A dweller in my father's house, he died,
> […]
> […] The event,
> With all the sorrow which it brought, appeared
> A chastisement; and when I called to mind
> That day so lately passed, when from the crag
> I looked in such anxiety of hope,
> With trite reflections of morality,
> Yet with the deepest passion, I bowed low
> To God who thus corrected my desires.
> [*1799*, ll. 349-360]

This spot of time is actually built on a succession of mournful stages. The first refers to his father's death when Wordsworth was thirteen; at a later time when the boy called the «event» to mind he did so in a twofold manner: he both reacted in a morally conventional way («with trite reflections of morality») and «passionately» accepted his loss as part of a larger design. Something else is added, however, in the present moment of recollection: the sense of an excessive, trespassing desire which may have caused God's punishment.

The subtext to this famous «spot» was not known until about a decade ago but the episode had been immediately recognized as a token of Wordsworth's psychoanalytical sensibilities. The irretrievable lapse of time finds its first configuration as a re-enactment of an earlier feeling of guilt [WU 2004, pp. 3-7, pp. 131-134, 2003, p. 24):

Long Long upon yon steepy rock,
Alone I bore the bitter shock;
Long Long my swimming eyes did roam
For little Horse to bear me home,
To bear me (what avails my tear?)
To sorrow o'er a father's bier. –
Flow on, in vain thou hast not flow'd,
But eas'd me of an heavy load,
For much it gives my soul relief
To pay the mighty debt of Grief.
With sighs repeated o'er and o'er,
I mourn because I mourned no more;
[*The Vale of Esthwaite*, Fragment 3]

The three stages of composition – 1787, 1798, 1805 (WU 2002, p. xi) – show a gradual transition from an emotional trauma to a poetic embodiment of mourning. As we compare the earliest version of the same traumatic experience with the later one, apart from stylistic considerations, we notice that although both rely on retrospect, the latter has acquired a complex temporal dimension by having been located in place and time. It is no longer a repeated re-enactment of grief («o'er and oe'r, / I mourn because I mourned no more»), but a memory which acknowledges the lapse of time and grants a distancing perception of his earlier self.

The earliest version portrays a state which can be described in Freudian terms as melancholy. In his essay on «Mourning and Melancolia» Freud terms mourning one's reaction to suddenly losing a loved person or an ideal which makes one feel unworthy, leading to self-accusations or to scolding oneself for the loved object's loss. At times melancholia springs forth instead of mourning so that the individual keeps re-enacting what has been lost, that is, he cannot separate himself from the loved one, and refuses to work through his loss by allowing a verbal form of recollection. On the contrary, melancholy brings along a compulsion to repeat which is quite evident in the almost ritual reiterations of young Wordsworth's conventional and sing-song rhymed couplets («Long Long, Flow on, repeated o'er and o'er», etc). The work of mourning (Freud's *Arbeit*) can only be borne by coming to terms with guilt.[10] Mourning replaces melancholy when loss can be accepted as such by establishing a temporal distance between present guilt and past loss

[10] Duncan Wu has emphasized the central role of grief and guilt in his recent «spiritual» biography, but his description of melancholy and mourning relies on Melanie Klein instead of Freud [WU 2004, pp. 39-40].

and by overcoming the confusion of two time *loci*. Narrative maps the distance between times, reconciling differences between guilt and loss.[11]

Retrospection lends concreteness to the «Spectres of memory» by making the lapse of time between the poems a vital generative agency projecting into the future. For retrospection to function there must be loss of continuity, break and interruption of the flow of time. One cannot recall the past without acknowledging the lapse of time, but acknowledging the «unimaginable touch of time» also means projecting into the future, in imaging forth what has been lost by keeping «watch over man's mortality».

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[11] The «Waiting for the Horses» episode has long given rise to manifold interpretations. Quite recently Adam Potkay has contributed a groundbreaking new reading in his *Wordsworth's Ethics* [2012]. Potkay focuses on the boy's «desire» («anxiety of hope») which has formerly given rise to rather «trite» versions of the Oedipus's complex. Comparing the death-dealing guilt the boy felt at his father's death in the earliest writing with the new source of his guilt – «an inordinate, anxious hope in sublunary things» – Potkay reads Wordsworth's sin as an evasion or repression. Wordsworth's interest now is not in the guilty conscience of his adolescence but rather in remembering the numinous aura that objects possessed before. He rightly focuses on the intense singularity of the objects in the later version («the wind and the sleety rain», «the single sheep», «the one blasted tree») but draws special attention to «the bleak music of that old stone wall». The music, though bleak, opens up the path of recollection and does not enforce, as in his adolescence, the deathly repetitions of the voice of conscience. There is a strict connection between getting rid of «the deathly voice of conscience» and shifting from re-enactment to recollection.

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Wordsworth's Sofa

Abstract

Drawing from contemporary thing theory, actor network theory and object-oriented ontology, the article explores the status of objects and things in Wordsworth's poetry and poetics through a sustained parallel with Cowper's *The Task*. Unlike Cowper, who ascribes an unusual amount of agency to all objects, Wordsworth prefers to celebrate natural objects to singing sofas, and engages in the eighteenth-century epistemologies of things in a selective and critical way, excluding commodities from the range of objects endowed with sentience and agency. In denying commodities the autonomous life that characterizes organic objects, Wordsworth resists the commodification of British culture and its imperial underpinnings.

Crystal Lake

Would William Wordsworth have sung the sofa? The question is not as idle as it might at first seem. I have in mind William Cowper's *The Task* (1785), a poem Wordsworth studied while at Cambridge and one that critics have found influenced both his poetic style and his philosophy of poetry.[1] *The Task*, of course, begins with the famous line, «I sing the sofa» [COWPER 1785, p. 1]. Where previously Cowper had turned his poetic attention to more abstract, less material subjects, such as «Truth, Hope, and Charity», now he «seek[s] repose upon a humbler theme», commanded, presumably in more ways than one, to meditate on his couch by «the fair» [COWPER 1785, p. 1]. For Cowper, however, the sofa proves as powerful a poetic theme as any. It sets him upon a «historical deduction of seats» that becomes a history of industrialism, art, British imperialism. Finally, the sofa embeds a narrative of the poet's psychological development that props up Cowper's theory of poetic purpose [COWPER 1785, p. iii]. Cowper sings the sofa precisely because its status as an everyday object

[1] See, for example, Martin Priestman's *Cowper's Task: Structure and Influence*, David J. Leigh's «Cowper, Wordsworth, and the Sacred Moment of Perception», Marshall Brown's «The Pre-Romantic Discovery of Consciousness», Timothy Fulford's «Wordsworth, Cowper, and the Language of Eighteenth-Century Politics», Myrddin Jones's «Wordsworth and Cowper: The Eye Made Quiet» and W.J.B. Owen's «Literary Echoes in *The Prelude*».

embodies the poet's «task» of unveiling the universal moral truths that are preserved in nature but obfuscated by the rise of global commercialism.

The sofa, therefore, establishes Cowper's satire and his didacticism: his critique of eighteenth-century England's excesses and his celebration of a pastoral state in which faith and liberty are more purely encountered and more simply appreciated. On the one hand, the sofa as a seat of repose emphasizes Cowper's call for readers to reject the siren call of urban bustle – its shopkeepers, its spectacles of illusion and vice, its political injustices – in favour of more mundane, minute, and virtuous notice of the natural world.[2] On the other, the sofa represents the poet's particular ability, as Wordsworth might have put it, to «see into the life of things», to find the order and divine purpose that inhere in objects [WORDSWORTH 1800, p. 203]. We might say that Cowper's sofa is overstuffed, inviting as it does a poem with a pastoral agenda to begin with a celebratory digression on «the birth-day of invention» [COWPER 1785, p. 2]. Under the sofa cushions, Cowper discovers a history of rocks sat upon by Druids, and then three-legged stools on which «slabs» were affixed for kings. Next, Cowper finds, a «generation more refined» who «made three legs four», and the «cane from India» used to give benches a back and make them into chairs and then into armchairs [COWPER 1785, p. 3]. As the empire and its markets expand, Cowper suggests that so too does its seating. The armchair becomes the settee, and the settee becomes, at last, the sofa. An emblem of «bliss» and «slow […] growth of what is excellent», the sofa symbolizes the natural apotheosis of «invention» and «convenience:» «luxury» [COWPER 1785, p. 5]. According to Cowper, the sofa's luxury is unparalleled as evidenced by the exquisite «repose» it «yields» [COWPER 1785, p. 5]. Both as an object and as a thematic subject, the sofa facilitates the poet's flights of fancy and moral insights; from the sofa and on the sofa, Cowper finds himself poised to ruminate on his personal history of pastoral excursion and to write about nature, in all its material and moral guises.

Cowper's use of the sofa in this way is explained less by his poetic inventiveness than by eighteenth-century epistemologies. Under the sway of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), such epistemologies privileged what John Yolton has identified as «cognitive contact» [YOLTON 1983, p. 125]. In its most reductionist version, Locke's schema implied that the mind's *tabula rasa* required direct, material encounters with objects in order to think and form ideas. Consequently, Locke's work raised the possibility that matter itself might be responsible for

[2] This point is made explicit by Cowper when he writes, «In gross and pamper'd cities sloth and lust, / And wantonness and gluttonous excess. In cities, vice is hidden with most east, Or seen with less reproach; and virtue taught / By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there / Beyond th' atchievement [sic] of successful flight» [pp. 36-37].

sentience and might in and of itself be sentient. As Yolton observes, despite Locke's best intentions to separate thought from matter by rendering both the causal effects of divine intention, eighteenth-century thinkers continued to debate the possibility that objects possessed autonomous agency in the processes of cognition.

Cowper appears aware, although wary, of the implications of these epistemologies. One section of *The Task* hangs its moral complaint on London where members of the Royal Society would yield too much agency to objects. Cowper asks, where does «philosophy» find «her eagle eye» [COWPER 1785, p. 38]. In London, he tentatively wonders, where with «implements exact» philosophy «calculates computes and scans / All distance, motion, magnitude, and now / Measures an atom, and now girds a world» [COWPER 1785, p. 38]. However, the same principles that let the atomists in the Royal Society run wild with Locke's findings also problematically provide «commerce» with «a mart» in London. Although commerce's mart is «rich» and «throng'd», it is morally and materially bankrupt [COWPER 1785, p. 38]. Like the commodities that appear «so fair» but that are in reality «foul», the philosophy on offer in London is «witty», but not «wise» [COWPER 1785, p. 38]. London, in other words, proves a predictably unsatisfactory place for philosophy to find its fullest expression for Cowper's pastoral purposes. Yet *The Task* appears to fall into the London atomists' trap, premised as it as on an associative ramble that takes it readers from a single sofa, through history, to nature in order to arrive at the poet's memory and mind.

On the surface and with retrospective critical insight, such a ramble looks as pre-Romantic, even Wordsworthian, as it does Lockean. Martin Priestman's meticulous reconstruction of *The Prelude's* (1850) extensive allusions to *The Task* shows that Wordsworth had Cowper's poem in mind as he worked on his own similar project. There is, however, a significant difference between Wordsworth's and Cowper's theory of things. I've suggested elsewhere that the application of contemporary thing theory to Wordsworth's poetics proves problematically anachronistic, given precisely the conflation Cowper illustrates (despite his reservations about both philosophy and commodities) between an object like the sofa and the mind of the poet [LAKE 2012]. In the context of the popular eighteenth-century epistemologies that were premised on cognitive contact, the Heideggarian distinction contemporary thing theory draws between objects and things doesn't quite yet exist. Bill Brown, for example, invites us to consider things as the agents and objects as the effects of ideology [BROWN 2001, pp. 3-7). Samuel Johnson, however, reminds us that in the 1700's, many were powerfully convinced that *all* objects were always/already things. When offering the first definition of an object, Johnson describes it as «that about which any power or faculty is employed», a phrasing that suggests objects are merely matter perceived. Johnson glosses, however, this definition with a

quote from Sir John Davies' poem, *Nosce Teipsum* (1599), «no beams unto […] objects send / But all rays are from their objects sent», and in so doing, recapitulates the kinds of atomistic theories that asserted objects' capacity for cognition [JOHNSON 1755, p. 2. l. 105]. Johnson goes on to provide a second definition. This explicitly emphasizes the power of objects themselves to «raise any affection or emotion in the mind» [JOHNSON 1755, p. 2. l. 105]. In later editions of the dictionary, this was the only definition to appear, but the gloss from Davies attached to the first definition remained.

Johnson and Cowper, in their own ways, therefore suggest that thing theory's distinction between objects and things would find itself sitting uncomfortably in the parlour of eighteenth-century epistemologies. Johnson and Cowper, however, do seem to have room to accommodate thing theory's other guises: Bruno Latour's actor network theory and Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology. Johnson proves the more welcoming of the two hosts, but Cowper can hardly deny that his sofa operates, in Latour's terminology, as an actant [LATOUR 2005, pp. 54-55]. That is to say, despite his mistrust of the commodification of British culture, Cowper ascribes an unusual amount of agency to, of all objects, a sofa. The sofa provides, literally and metaphorically, the means for the repose Cowper will celebrate as the state of mind that engenders *The Task*'s composition as well as its thematic concerns with history and the pastoral's political virtues. That Cowper's poem affirms the agency of the sofa while it implicitly disavows its relationship to global commercialism also exemplifies what Latour identifies as the salient feature of modernity: its penchant for creating «mixtures between two entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture» and its simultaneous insistence that nature and culture occupy «two entirely distinct ontological zones» [LATOUR 1993, pp. 10-11]. This is nowhere more evident than in Cowper's depiction of the sofa as the product of a seemingly inevitable teleology that facilitates Cowper's own poetic insight into the vices of Britain's empire of commodities and the virtues of the pastoral's separate moral order. In other words, Cowper succumbs to the sofa's cognitive contact in recounting the history of invention it encodes and in evoking its ability to extend an influential natural state of repose to the poet. At the same time, Cowper's sofa somehow exists magically outside of the commercial networks he will go on to critique, despite the fact that such commercialism makes the sofa an available actant for the poet's purposes.

Wordsworth, not unlike Latour, finds such «modern» disassembling between nature and culture, and mind and object problematic. That doesn't mean, however, that Wordsworth throws objects like the sofa over in favour of treating them as things imbued with the capacity to act on and within networks in the ways that Cowper seems unwilling (or unable) to acknowledge. Yet critical readings of Wordsworth raise this possibility. For example, Adam Potkay traces the curious history of what the term «thing» denotes, beginning with the Anglo-Saxon period where «thing» could mean

not only objects but also events, actions, feelings, or anything at all. In this sense, Brown's «thing theory» restores «thing» to its etymological roots. So too, Potkay argues, would Wordsworth. As Potkay observes, «thing» would gradually shift meaning, coming to signify during the Enlightenment any thing «excepting persons» (in Johnson's phrasing) and, ten years later, any «being without life or consciousness» (in William Blackstone's phrasing) [POTKAY 2012, pp. 76-77]. For Potkay, however, Wordsworth «does not use *thing* in this delimited sense» [POTKAY 2012, p. 78]. That is to say, Wordsworth would seem to return us to a more capacious sense of things, using the term and representations of objects «in a way that blurs distinctions between persons and non persons, between entities and events» that was more characteristic of an earlier period [POTKAY 2012, p. 78].

Were Wordsworth to do this, he would have to make room on his sofa for Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology to take a prominent seat next to Latour's actor-network-theory. Harman extends and flattens Latour's theory of networks and actors, giving prominence of place to material objects. Where Latour emphasizes objects as part of a network in which they are simultaneously the products and producers of hybrid collectives, Harman is more interested in the autonomous relationships objects engender between themselves. Harman writes, for example, that «[o]bjects interact on the basis of essential properties. In order to interact, objects need to know something of one another», whether we know them or not [HARMAN, et. al. 2007, p. 367]. For Harman, Cowper would appear to fail to recognize the role the sofa plays in the composition of *The Task*. The sofa, after all, physically establishes the state of repose that effects Cowper' mental excursions. Moreover, Harman would suggest that the sofa has a relationship with Cowper's pen and ink and paper. The sofa, Harman invites us to consider, may be said to be an author, maybe even the author, of *The Task*.[3]

Those who subscribed to the theory of cognitive contact in the 1700's would have made similar claims in suggesting that Cowper's physical proximity to the sofa controlled his physical action and, more importantly, allowed it to populate his mental excursions. As Johnson's definition of «object» suggests, the sofa sends out «rays» that «raise» the «affection or emotion» in Cowper's «mind». Cowper's history of furniture would therefore be the history the sofa knows best. Cowper's insights into nature and commercialism would have their origin, at least in part, in the sofa. Cowper resists such a reading, as I suggested earlier, by exemplifying the modern paradoxes Latour critiques. Nevertheless, Cowper's resistance to such a

[3] In fact, in 1742 a novella translated from the French pretended to be just such a text. *The Sopha: A Moral Tale* resembles other eighteenth-century «it-narratives»; drawing on the popularity of «cognitive contact», these works represented themselves as the autonomous narratives written by objects, such as a corkscrew, a coat, a pin cushion, and a coin.

reading points to its viability within eighteenth-century epistemological contexts. In other words, object-oriented ontology harkens back to the epistemologies *au courant* in Cowper's own moment in its desire to avoid reposing on Kant's uncertain sofa [HARMAN, et. al. 2007, p. 368]. Object-oriented ontologies are implicitly drawn to what Latour might call a premodern sensibility, one in which we relinquish postmodernism's endlessly discursive, virtual states of remediation in favor of objects' concrete agencies.[4] Both Johnson's definition of «object» and Cowper's obfuscations hint at these agencies.

Wordsworth's poetry, however, is not as responsive to applications of thing theory's various incarnations as it is poised to offer commentary on them. Wordsworth, after all, was writing in the wake of not only the eighteenth-century's interest in cognitive contact, but also Kant's interventions. Moreover, the question of objects' agencies and ontologies was made even more urgent by the rise of global consumerism and the newly enriched imperial market of goods, as Cowper's paradoxical invocation and disavowal of commodities makes clear. While Cowper denounced markets, their objects, and their consumers even as he found the capacity to do so from his sofa, Wordsworth detected the dangerous hypocrisies of a position that would flatten ontologies and grant so much poetic agency to a manufactured commodity in the first place. In short, Wordsworth did not sing the sofa.

This might seem like a surprising statement to make about a poet who famously saw «into the life of things». Recent work by Potkay, Marilyn Gaull, and Mary Jacobus has claimed for Wordsworth a place of prominence in the emerging findings of thing theory, actor network theory, and object-oriented ontology. These critics argue that Wordsworth's poetry imagines all objects in productive intermediary spaces between matter and mind, and nature and culture. For example, Gaull writes that in Wordsworth's poems, «objects look like things», which is to say that they behave in autonomous ways as both the inspirations for and the extensions of Wordsworth's thoughts. At the same time, Gaull contends that Wordsworth nevertheless maintains things' autonomy as objects that «[exist] whether one perceives or uses them or not» [GAULL 2008, p. 53]. This latter feature of Wordsworth's poetry makes it unique, Gaull asserts, in the post-Kantian Romantic world that would render all objects the mere effects of subjective perceptions. Mary Jacobus likewise argues that Wordsworth's lyric forms in particular emphasize the ways that

> [t]hings and language may be alike in shaping psychic and social relations. But, equally, their work is not limited to constructing the

[4] For a fuller account of object-oriented ontology's relationship to «premodern» philosophy, see Andrew Cole's «The Call of Things».

> unconscious, maintaining the social, or providing symbolic circuits of exchange; nor are they confined to how we understand them. Things look back at us. They may even seem to talk back. Rather than taking us closer to unmediated or concrete reality, things and words may take us […] toward a «dim an undetermin'd sense / Of unknown modes of being» (*The Prelude*, I. 420-421). This as-yet-undetermined sense baffles and resists comprehension or redirects attention to the unfamiliar furniture of existence […]. [JACOBUS 2012, p. 5]

Here, Jacobus finds Wordsworth to be in agreement with Harman's object-oriented ontology. He depicts objects' capacity for agency without recourse to anthropomorphic projections. Similarly, Potkay argues that such a position is politically advantageous. It sets the stage for Wordsworth to take unabashed joy in celebrating all things, and in so doing, to craft an «ecological ethic» that contemporary readers would do well to heed [POTKAY 2012, pp. 391-392]. By representing nonhuman objects as things without reducing their agencies to knowable forms of human subjectivity, Wordsworth invites us to consider anew our material encounters with everyday environments and to entertain the possibility that discrete forms of matter have «no small influence» on us – that they do, in fact, possess a life worth appreciating and preserving all their own.[5]

Like Cowper, however, the fact that Wordsworth appears to refuse to distinguish things from objects is less a function of his poetic invention than the philosophical contexts in which he worked. Wordsworth, in other words, inevitably reproduces in part the same conflation of things with objects as did his contemporaries. Wordsworth doesn't, however, reproduce those epistemologies unthinkingly. Rather, Wordsworth constructs from within those epistemologies a typology of objects and things. *Some* objects are things, but not *all* objects should be treated as things by poets, Wordsworth contends. This is the case because, like Cowper, Wordsworth was wary of the material world of eighteenth-century Britain made even more powerful by

[5] In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett draws on recent developments in thing theory to emphasize what she terms the «positive, productive power» of things. She describes her ultimate goal in doing so is recognize «nonhuman[s]» as «vital players in the world», and she hopes that such recognition will «enhance receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us», and «enable wiser interventions into that ecology» [pp. 3-4]. Bennett's reasons are here very admirable, especially when they inspire a consciousness of ecosystems that demands we think about the life of nonhumans. I'd like to suggest, however, that Wordsworth reminds us that it's one thing to acknowledge the «thing-power» (in Bennett's terms) of the «debris» that destroys the environment, another thing to grapple with the «thing-power» of a bird caught in that debris, but it's quite another thing, entirely, to pause in productive «methodological naiveté» at the seemingly self-possessed agency of a commodity like an iPhone or, even, a weapon [17].

culture's increasing commodification. Moreover, the epistemological systems that made *all* objects capable of acting as agents troubled Wordsworth. «Chairs», after all, «have no words to utter». That chairs don't speak, however, doesn't mean that Wordsworth would ascribe to them the same kinds of unique, nonhuman agency he will allow other kinds of objects, such as Lucy's body and the «rocks, and stones, or trees» with which it «roll[s] round in Earth's diurnal course». These do speak to and act upon the poet and his networks in knowable and unknowable ways. Wordsworth celebrates many organic objects as autonomous things that possess the capacity for agency and whose networks deserve consideration; commodities, however, prove far more problematic.

Readers can detect such concerns in the preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), for as much as the preface advocates for a new poetics, it also depicts Wordsworth's project as a philosophical one, the stakes of which are planted deep in his critique of a society senselessly suspended in a world of consumer goods. Wordsworth writes, for example, that his «principal object» in composing the poems «was to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement» [WORDSWORTH 1800, pp. x-xi]. The discourse of eighteenth-century philosophy infuses this and similar sentences in the preface, underpinning Wordsworth's interest in the «primary laws of nature», that govern our «associate[ions] of ideas» in «state[s] of excitement» [WORDSWORTH 1800, pp. x-xi].

These are the terms that interested philosophers examining the relationships between the objects and the mind. In this vein, Wordsworth also explicitly represents his poetic project as one that attempts to return to the elemental sources of things, feelings, and ideas. He focuses on «low and rustic life», because there, he believes, the «essential passions of the heart find a better soil»; there, «elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity» [WORDSWORTH 1800, p. xi]. Wordsworth characterizes his poetry as a study that attempts to uncover the most basic relationships between everyday encounters and the mind, relationships he thinks are best discovered in a rural laboratory. Wordsworth goes to some length to justify his project as an empirical one, invested in ontologies as evidenced by his interest in elemental matter, transparency, durability, and permanence; «low and rustic» life is the focus of his study, he claims, because of its «simplicity». Moreover, in rural contexts Wordsworth argues that «manners», «character», and «passions» are «more easily comprehended» as well as «more durable» entities for study. Finally, these qualities of mind are more commensurate with «permanent forms of nature» [WORDSWORTH 1800, p. xi].[6]

[6] As an example of contemporary thing theories' interest in durability and permanence, see Latour's *Reassembling the Social* [pp. 67-69].

For Wordsworth, then, poetry's task is in large part the task of the ontologist, but an ontologist with a «purpose» [WORDSWORTH 1800, p. xiii]. Wordsworth's specific form of poetry, the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* argues, knows objects best; more importantly, it knows the best objects. Wordsworth concludes the defense of his poetry of «low and rustic life» by declaring that those who live in rural states «hourly communicate with the best objects». The poet who works in the medium of such men's language, therefore, crafts a poetics «more permanent» and «far more philosophical» than the poet who writes highly stylized verses steeped in the urban world of manufactured goods [WORDSWORTH 1800, p. xii]. These other poets, those we might infer who would sing of sofas, appear to be for Wordsworth part and parcel of a new world order, a series of «great national events taking place», that include «the encreasing [sic] accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident» [WORDSWORTH 1800, p. xviii]. «[F]rantic novels» and «deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse» gratify these cravings, yet they «blunt the discriminating powers of the mind» and «reduce it to a state of savage torpor» [WORDSWORTH 1800, pp. xviii-xix]. Wordsworth suggests that poetry must resist the call of philosophy and global consumerism to flatten the world and the mind by rendering every object equally capable of agency. He prefers instead to avoid «personifications» and to «keep [his] Reader in the company of flesh and blood» [WORDSWORTH 1800, p. xxi].

Wordsworth continued to have these concerns almost a decade later, writing in his tract, «The Convention of Cintra» (1809), that «[w]hile Mechanic Arts, Manufactures, Agriculture, Commerce, and all these products of knowledge which are confined to gross – definite – and tangible objects, have, with the aid of Experimental Philosophy, been every day putting on more brilliant colours, the splendor of the Imagination has been fading» [*Prose Works,* p. 154]. The effects of an epistemology that would imbue manufactured, mechanical, and commercial objects with increasingly «more brilliant colours» had begun to have disastrous political effects. «By furnishing such attractive stores of outward accommodation», Wordsworth writes, the «progress» of the manufacturing «arts […] has misled» and betrayed Enlightenment principles: «[a]nimal comforts have been rejoiced over, as if they were the end of being» [*Prose Works*, p. 154]. Although Wordsworth finds that «a neater and more fertile garden; a greener field; implements and utensils more apt; a dwelling more commodious and better furnished» are all admirable goals, they threaten to make the mind a complacent «slave».[7]

[7] In the sonnet Wordsworth composed at the same time as his tract on the Convention of Cintra, he writes that Enlightenment is found «Not 'mid the World's vain objects that enslave / The free-born Soul […] Not there!» Rather, «Nature» supplies the objects – the «dark wood», the «rocky cave», the «hollow vale» – best suited to furnish the mind with enlightenment. «The World is Too Much With Us»

As David Simpson has shown, Wordsworth's concerns about commodities resemble those of Karl Marx [see SIMPSON 2009, pp. 143-173]. In *Capital*, Marx famously explicates commodity fetishism with the image of wooden table that takes on the magical appearance of an object capable of springing fully-formed ideas from its matter and relating, seemingly autonomously, to other objects. It dances; it shimmers; it turns everything on its head. Marx's table exemplifies the epistemological principles of the previous century that had privileged notions of cognitive contact. In Marx's rendering, however, such principles appear perverse. They inevitably fetishize commodities at the cost of hiding the real mechanisms of labor, capital, and power. Marx is no proto-object-oriented ontologist, in other words. That the table has assumed or been granted the agency of an entity capable of acting on its own is a problematic function of a capitalist system that would project a misguided form of personification onto a commodity as a means of obfuscating real material relations. Wordsworth agrees, although with an important difference. Because he's writing from within the context of an epistemological system with which Marx will take issue, Wordsworth resists even the representation of commodities, like a table or a sofa, in his poetic forms.

That is to say, the objects that are missing from Wordsworth's poetry may be as important as the objects he represents and say as much about his theory of things. Wordsworth, for example, had ample opportunities to sing of sofas. Scenes of repose, or sleep, or half-wakefulness are all common enough in his poems; we need only think of the slumber sealed by his spirit, or the sweet sensations he celebrates in «hours of weariness», or the moment when, «in pensive mood», he lies on his couch and remembers the daffodils. Wordsworth didn't completely refrain from ever mentioning couch, as «I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud» (1807) powerfully reminds us, but the occurrences are rare enough to be reassembled into patterns, and they reveal his deep-seated resistance to commodity forms.

For example, in *Wordsworth's Complete Poetical Works* (1888), the word «couch» or «couches» appears in thirty-four poems, in twenty-three of these instances as a noun.[8] Rarely, however, does Wordsworth use the term to refer to a literal piece of furniture. Often, the «couch» is an imagined entity. In «Ode Composed on May Morning» (1835), for example, it is the metaphorically allegorical seat from which «Blithe Flora […] upstarts» to follow the dawn [WORDSWORTH 1835, l. 3]. «Cynthia» similarly leaves her «couch» to follow sound in «Echo, Upon the Gemmi» [WORDSWORTH 1822, ll. 5-6]. In some cases, the couch is historical or poetic, merely on loan from

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also echoes this sentiment; by «getting and spending», individuals «have given [their] hearts away».

[8] Taking Mary Jacobus' «clouds, rocks, and trees» as counterexamples, «cloud» or «clouds» appear 203 times, «rock» or «rocks» appear 162 times, and «tree» or «trees» 199 times.

the past or another poem. This is the case in «Michael Angelo in Reply to the Passage Upon his Statue of Night Sleeping» (ca. 1806), where Michelangelo invites «gentle Sleep», even though it shares «Death's image», to «come share [his] couch» [ll. 10-11]. Similarly, in Wordsworth's translation of the *Aeneid*, the Tyrian queen «recline[s] in festal pomp» on her «golden couch» [WORDSWORTH 1832, ll. 56-57]. And in his «Sonnet on Roman Antiquities Discovered at Bishopstone, Herefordshire» (1835), Wordsworth explicitly celebrates an imagined couch over literal objects; the poet, he writes, has access to a richer, more imaginative world where «Romans» appear «reclin[ing] on couches, myrtle-crowned» whereas the «poring Antiquarians» merely scours «the ground» for artifacts [WORDSWORTH 1835, ll. 5 and 1].

In all of these instances, the couch is an ephemeral object of the imagination. More frequently in Wordsworth's poems, however, the couch is a seat made by and of nature. «[T]wo sisters» «[gaze]» at a landscape upon a «couch» of «blooming heath» in «Forth from a Jutting Ridge» in *Poems on the Naming of Places*, for example [WORDSWORTH 1845, VII. l. 11]. Likewise, the «moss-grown root» below a «shady tree» «serve[s] for couch or seat» for the pilgrim in «The Star and the Glow-Worm» (1818) [l. 11]. And the young Wordsworth «r[ises] not from that soft couch» «amid a stately grove of oaks» until the sun goes down in first book of *The Prelude* [WORDSWORTH 1850, I. 86]. In almost every poem, therefore, the couch is either a pure product of an imaginative escapade into allegory, poetry, or history, or it is a structure built by nature that resembles but surpasses the commodity. This tendency of Wordsworth's seems to have been recognizable enough to his contemporaries. Henry William Pickersgill's portrait of Wordsworth (ca. 1850) notably depicts the poet sitting on just the kind of couch he celebrated most in his poems: on a ledge of rock flanked by a tree and flowers.

There are only four instances in Wordsworth's poems where the word «couch» refers to an actual piece of furniture that could be surmised to have existed in a room the poet suggests he may have personally encountered. In two of these poems, the couch appears, at best, as an ambiguous commodity. The first of these occurs in «Liberty» (1835). Here, Wordsworth celebrates the «Bard» that is «true to inborn right» and who not only «exults in freedom» but «can with rapture vouch / For the dear blessings of a lowly couch» [WORDSWORTH 1835, ll. 83-84]. Given the use of the adjective «lowly» and that the next line goes on to claim that the «Bard» also vouches for the blessings of «a natural meal» and a life of simplicity in nature, we may infer that Wordsworth has in mind not a stuffed piece of furniture, but the kinds of natural seats beneath trees and among rocks on which the figures in his other poems were pleased to repose. In the second instance, Wordsworth writes in his «Upon the Birth of Her First-Born Child, March 1833» (1835) that the «Angels» «hovering round» the mother's «couch» promise to look after both mother and child [WORDSWORTH 1835, l. 51]. In

this case, «couch» seems like a convenient formal choice used to complete the rhyme with «vouch» in the following line. The «couch» bears notably little relationship to the angels that hover and sing over it, or to the mother that might be said to recline on it, or even to the poem's overarching themes.

This is not the case, however, where couch as furniture makes its most ostentatious appearance in the third instance where it appears nominally in Wordsworth's collected poems: in «I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud». The poem famously begins by describing Wordsworth's experience of encountering a bank of daffodils on a walk. «A poet could not but be gay» upon seeing them, Wordsworth writes, as the daffodils dance and sparkle – more lively than waves, more bright than stars [WORDSWORTH 1807, l. 9]. The poem reflects, however, that the pleasure of the daffodils is more than he at first could recognize, that he «little thought» at the time «what wealth the show to me had brought» [WORDSWORTH 1807, ll. 11-12]. On recollection from his couch, he realizes the real «wealth» «brought» by the daffodils. In «I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud», Wordsworth's couch functions in a decidedly different way than Cowper's sofa. It is, in fact, the mute object against which Wordsworth will juxtapose the lively organicism and profitability of the daffodils. The «vacant» or «pensive mood» that Wordsworth experiences reposing on his couch exists in marked contrast to the dancing, golden liveliness of remembered daffodils [WORDSWORTH 1807, l. 14]. These objects of nature, rather than the sofa's history of empire or its testimony to industry's supposed achievements, «flash upon» Wordsworth's «inward eye» [WORDSWORTH 1807, l. 15]. Wordsworth's «heart» and mind are more commiserate with these remembered things than with the more proximate material object of his couch [WORDSWORTH 1807, l. 17].

The only use of the word «sofa» in Wordsworth's *Complete Poetical Works* emphasizes this point. In Book VII of *The Excursion* (1814), the poet invites the vicar to explain to him the history of the five graves he sees in the rural distance. The poem embeds the vicar's history of a priest who brought his family to a parsonage in the secluded vale. Their family history is an uncanny but heartwarming story. As they find their way amidst the gossiping community, they help the poor, cultivate simple pleasures, and then they all die peacefully, one after the other. Their graves are the graves the poet has seen. The sofa appears in this embedded history as an object that the family remarkably *doesn't* possess. «[D]ays and years [pass] on» after their arrival as they slowly turn the cottage into their home [WORDSWORTH 1814, VII. l. 169]. Although they «enrich» the house with «things of price», these are not superfluous things [WORDSWORTH 1814, VII. l. 172]. «No soft and costly sofa there insidiously stretched out its lazy length» [WORDSWORTH 1814, VII. ll. 174-175]. The priest's cottage is a useful domicile at home in nature, one in which commodities'«insidious» and «lazy» agency are kept admirably far at bay.

In his use of the adverb «insidiously» and the adjective «lazy», Wordsworth also implicitly glosses the function of the couch in «I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud». The couch's agency is a problematic one. It threatens, as part of the commodified culture Wordsworth distrusts in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and in «The Convention of Cintra», to plunge the individuals it encounters into a «savage torpor» or to «[fade]» the «splendour of the imagination». For Wordsworth, resisting the siren call of the couch's cognitive contact bolsters the poetic purpose of «I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud»: the poem replaces the agency of the commodified object with the agency of the organic daffodils and the poet's perceptions. The couch, in fact, harkens to states of despair and anxiety that Wordsworth believes are best mitigated by natural objects and their commensurate poetic forms. Excluding or replacing commodities like couches or sofas with organic objects and the poet's sensibility is part of this process, not least because the epistemological principles of the previous century had locked objects into an ontologically closed circuit. The aesthetic interest Wordsworth takes in the commensurability between things and feelings as mediated by a new kind of poet is more than just a representational ethos, in other words. It functions as a poetical form of epistemological activism. The poet's work is half-perception *and* half-creation; the networks of object-oriented ontologies, for Wordsworth, are, in their own way, as insidiously flat and entrapping as the sofas on which they repose.[9]

In the last instance where «couch» functions nominally in Wordsworth's poetry, this problem with the theory of things is made explicit. «Quit your couch», the Wanderer asserts in Book IV of *The Excursion* [WORDSWORTH 1814, IV. l. 481]. As a remedy for «despondency«, the Wanderer demands that the Solitary, the poet, and their readers look for the «bountiful» in «nature» and «cleave not so fondly to [their] moody cell» [WORDSWORTH 1814, IV. l. 482]. Later in the same book, the «couch» appears again, this time as an object that «may seem» «soft», but which is really a «disguise / Stuffed with the thorny substance of the past / For fixed annoyance and full oft beset / With floating dreams, black and disconsolate» [WORDSWORTH 1814, IV. ll. 1052-1056]. Here, then, is the other and darker side of Wordsworth's theory of things, the one that recognizes that the epistemologies of the previous century had, troublingly, granted too much agency to some objects. Sofas were overstuffed with «thorny substance», trapped in a hermetically sealed system of «fixed annoyance». The poet's task, Wordsworth insists from within this paradigm, is to refashion that agency: both to acknowledge its existence and also to resist it in its problematic forms. Why sing of sofas, and their «black and disconsolate» dreams, Wordsworth asks, when there are daffodils to be sung?

[9] See, especially, JACKSON 2008, pp. 132-162.

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Wordsworth in Bed

Abstract

Wordsworth and the Romantics have long been central to the study of the emotions, but recently some of Wordsworth's best critics have begun to move away from bold print passions in order to consider the relevance of minor affects and ugly feelings in his poetry. Drawing from recent theories of affect that have widened the range of emotions involved in poetry writing and reading, from nineteenth-century debates on editorial conventions regarding the material expression of passion, as well as from present-day revisions of speech act theories, the article reads the 1802 manuscript poem «The chairs» as a case in point, contending that reading for bad feelings, or minor feelings, may mean reading Wordsworth differently.

Adela Pinch

> There is also a meditative, as well as a human, pathos; an enthusiastic, as well as an ordinary, sorrow; a sadness that has its seat in the depths of reason, to which the mind cannot sink gently of itself – but to which it must descend by treading the steps of thought
> [WORDSWORTH 1974, III. pp. 62-85]

> Affect constitutes a challenge to thought
> [GREEN 1986]

> I am absolutely consumed by thinking and feeling
> [WORDSWORTH 1967, p. 236]

Wordsworth and the Affective Turn

Readers of Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals* (1800-1802) cannot help being struck by how much time the residents of Dove Cottage spend in bed. They sleep, rest, even eat in bed. «I broiled Coleridge a mutton chop», Dorothy records, duly noting: «which he ate in bed» [WORDSWORTH, D. 2002, p. 20]. William and Dorothy work on poems in bed, reading and writing, both together and separately: «He wrote several stanzas in bed this morning» [p. 94]; «I read it to him in Bed. We left out

some lines» [p. 88]; «he came down to me & read the Poem to me in bed» [p. 80]; «We went soon to bed. I repeated verses to William while he was in bed» [p. 96]. They rise and retire at all hours. «We lay in bed till 11 o clock» [p. 34]. «Dined at ½ past 5 – Mr. Simpson dined & drank tea with us. We went to bed immediately after he left us» [p. 28]. «I had been in bed in the afternoon» [p. 88]. «We did not go to bed till 4 o clock in the morning» [p. 8]. In part, this pattern – or rather lack of pattern – is the result of Dove Cottage's pre-modern relation to time. The Wordsworths were living an experimental existence at Grasmere in which they were free from either industrial or agricultural clock time, able to stay up late, sleep late, alternate in-bed-time and out-of-bed-time as they chose. It is also symptomatic of a cramped house in which bed may have afforded a rare escape from other people.

For the patterns of bed use at Dove Cotttage also indicate strongly the rhythms of a life in which somatic and emotional currents pull one up and down. «I was very unwell – went to bed before I drank my tea» [p. 109]. «I was unwell & lay in bed all the afternoon» [p. 39]. «William very nervous – after he was in bed haunted with altering the Rainbow» [p. 100]. «I was cheerful & happy but he got to work again & went to bed unwell» [p. 66]. There was physical illness of course, but many of these instances of unwellness in bed are heavy with somatized emotion. The Wordsworths seemed to suffer from emotional gravity attacks, pinning them to their beds, sending them there often, and at all hours. During the summer of 1800 when the poets were home at Grasmere, and Wordsworth suffering from something and spending more time in bed, Coleridge opined that he was just being «lazy» [quoted in WU 2002, p. 170]. The period of the *Grasmere Journals* was a period of anxiety for all: William's impending marriage, conflict between the poets, hopeless loves. Their lives were also an experiment in living that involved being alive to micro-adjustments of bad feelings – anxiety, guilt, shame – as well as good feelings, and in which such adjustments were completely on the surface of life, pulling them around. They were living moods of their own minds.

My point in rehearsing some of these biographical facts is to set the scene for a rereading of Wordsworth in relation to some of the insights of recent affect theory. Wordsworth and the Romantics have long been central to the study of the emotions: to our understanding of emotion as excess, agony, energy, interruption, to our grapplings with the aesthetics of the sublime, of melancholy, trauma, even of joy [POTKAY 2007]. But recently some of Wordsworth's best critics have begun to move away from those bold print passions in order to consider minor affects and ugly feelings such as, for example, disappointment [QUINNEY 1999]; ongoing moods rather than passions [PFAU 2005]; feelings that are barely there, that don't move, or, alternatively, don't last, like a low-grade, minor fever [FRANCOIS 2008; JACOBUS 2012]. Reading for bad feelings, mixed, or minor feelings may

mean reading Wordsworth differently. As Deidre Lynch notes, scholars associated with the newest «affective turn» often turn away from canonical texts. Speaking of Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings,* Lynch writes:

> In her study of the affects that are awkward to accommodate to conventional accounts of aesthetic emotions, Sianne Ngai speculates that «something about the cultural canon itself seems to prefer the higher passions and emotions», by which she means eruptive moments of upheaval, rage or fear or grief. She muses that the ongoingness of certain moods – entirely opposed to the suddenness of Aristotle's catharsis or Longinus' sublime – appears to disable the texts that those moods drive «from acquiring canonical distinction». [LYNCH 2014, p. 273; see NGAI 2005, p. 11]

Examining the traces in Wordsworth of less canonical feelings – not the sublime, but weird moods, not melancholy, but lightweight passing excitements – may mean shifting the Wordsworth canon, observing less observed corners of his writing.

Focusing on mixed or bad feelings in Wordsworth may also involve being willing to dwell with modes of reading and poetic practices – even poems – that feel bad to us. In a reading of the poetry of another Dorothy, Dorothy Parker (who could be more different?), Lauren Berlant writes of the poet's strategies for managing ambivalence and «staying in the room with» disappointment and other bad feelings [BERLANT 2008, p. 213]. The following pages seek to stay in the room with – perhaps even stay in bed with – odd feelings in a poem Wordsworth wrote, during the period of the *Grasmere Journal*, about staying in bed. Is staying in bed, or even in the room, with a poem too close for comfort? Perhaps it would be better to say, these pages will take a chair next to the feelings in Wordsworth's 1802 manuscript poem, «These chairs they have no words to utter»? Staying with, on, in, or near a poem that yields such odd feelings – both poet's and critic's – is a way to think about the surfaces where poetic passions lie, and a way to ask about what feels «close» about «close reading», perhaps too close for comfort.

«Poetry is Passion»

We can know Wordsworth's prose statements about poetry and passion by heart, and never feel we know for sure what they actually mean. «Poetry is passion»; «it is the history or science of feelings» [«Note to *The Thorn*»; WORDSWORTH 1992, p. 351]; «all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow

of powerful feelings» [«Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*»; WORDSWORTH 1974, I, p. 126]. We may worry about semantics: about whether Wordsworth and his contemporaries would have discriminated clearly among terms such as «passion», «feelings», «emotion». According to historian of emotion Thomas Dixon:

> during the period between c.1800 and c.1850 a wholesale change in established vocabulary occurred such as those engaged in theoretical discussions about phenomena including hope, fear, love, hate, joy, sorrow, anger and the like no longer primarily discussed the passions or affections of the soul, nor the sentiments, but almost invariably referred to «the emotions». [DIXON 2003, p. 4]

Wordsworth's writings fall in the middle of a long story of the transition from an early modern understanding of emotional life as play of unruly passions, to a modern psychology of emotion [GROSS 2007; REDDY 2001; SACCAMANO and KAHN 2006]. But at this point in the story, around 1800 – as well as long before and after – there was significant fluidity among these terms. Here, for example, is an 1806 passage from the anatomist Charles Bell, characteristic in the way it uses «affections», «passions», «emotions», «sensations» as near synonyms, and sees them all as mental conditions:

> In the affections which we call passions or emotions, there is an influence which points to the breast as the part where they are felt. Some have asserted they are seated in the bowels; and the sensations I am about to describe have been arrayed as proofs that the affections exist in the body. But that, I affirm, is impossible. They are conditions of the mind. [quoted by STEDMAN 2002, pp. 26-27]

While some late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writers did make stricter taxonomies, Wordsworth, like Bell above, in general did not.

Furthermore, in Wordsworth's propositions about passions, the hazy overlap in the semantics of emotion terms is productive, not debilitating. It pushes their function from reference to performance. Another historian of emotion has suggested that because of the looseness of definition of nineteenth-century emotion words, such words in general:

> do not merely, or perhaps even predominantly, serve as vehicles of expression for specific emotion concepts. To a large extent, they fulfill a performative role. […] Just as the discourses on emotion do more than just represent an already existing subject, the emotions, the use of

> keywords and phrases does not simply reflect pre-existing notions about the feeling: it may have actually brought about emotional experience. [STEDMAN 2002, p. 45]

These are instances in which «words», as Wordsworth claims in the «Note to *The Thorn*», function «not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things* active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion» [WORDSWORTH 1992, p. 351, emphasis in original]. Wordsworth's writings on poetic language and passion constitute an incomplete but crucial theorization of what Stanley Cavell, in an account of «speech as passion», identifies as the affective, perlocutionary aspect of language that J. L. Austin shied away from [CARLSON 2004, p. 15; see also MASON and ARMSTRONG 2008, p. 3]. Excluding poetry from his analysis of genres of performative discourse, Austin's speech act theory not only excluded emotion, but also erected a distinction between the constative and the performative dimensions of language: a distinction that dissolves in poetry. In Wordsworth's passionate poetics, for example, poems, words, things, passions slide into one another, gathering each other's force.

But the most perplexing word in such statements as «poetry is passion», and «poetry is the history or science of feelings», and «poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings», is «is». Wordsworth's «is»es sit uneasily, but curiously compel consent. Here for instance we see Andrew Bennett grappling with the «is»:

> Poetry just *is* the «spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings». A poem is not contemplation and recollection but feeling, the feeling itself, or at least its overflow. Poetry is a kind of emanation of feeling. Recollection and contemplation, by contrast, constitute ways in which the original emotion is reimagined or reconceived […] what is retrieved and then re-experienced is, in a certain sense, the poem, prior, original, non-linguistic experience that *is*, in fact, however paradoxically, a poem. [BENNETT 2010, p. 24]

The only way to make statements such as «poetry is passion» work is to suspend or transform our definitions of the terms on either side of the copula. They are like mathematical equations we must struggle to add up, adding, subtracting, or altering what is on either side. In order to make it work, one either has to change what «poetry» might mean, or change what the emotion words might mean: either dematerializing the former, or materializing the latter. Either poetry becomes non-linguistic, or passion becomes an artifactual, conventional thing [in a similar spirit see REGIER 2010, p. 72; UHLIG 2010, p. 40]. Like the Arab/Quixote in *The Prelude*, of these was neither, and was both at once.

> Punctuation is a business at which I am ashamed to say I am no adept. [WORDSWORTH 1967, p. 289]

What is the material form of passion in Wordsworth's poetry? If we de-materialize, or subtract words from the balancing act of «poetry is passion», what are we left with? For many of the poems of 1802, especially those grouped as «Moods of My Own Mind» in *Poems, in Two Volumes*, what we are left with would look something like this:

> !
> !
> !
> !
> !

In *Poems, in Two Volumes,* emotion is indicated with a thicket of exclamation marks, reminding us that Wordsworth's poetics of passion is not exclusively about speech, or about words, but about marks on the page. In her account of the poetics of punctuation, Jennifer DeVere Brody sees the exclamation point as fundamentally perlocutionary: a mark, that is, that makes something happen. «When encountered», she observes, «audiences almost invariably react – widening their eyes, raising an eyebrow, skipping a heartbeat, rushing in (to the text) to help. […] It is […] resolutely emotional» [BRODY 2008, p. 150]. Writing about Wordsworth and the passions must include thinking about Wordsworth's place in the history of eighteenth and nineteenth-century discussions of the marks of passion on the printed page. How best to mark was a subject of considerable debate, so much so that it left Wordsworth feeling bad: the poet acknowledged being «ashamed» at not being certain about punctuation.

Perhaps this was because, as Julia Carlson's recent work has shown, one can tell the whole story of Wordsworth's materialization of passion through the history of the exclamation point. Originally introduced into European punctuation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and associated by eighteenth century grammarians with passion and wonder, the meaning of the exclamation point or mark was hotly debated in the later eighteenth century as printed English spread its cultural and commercial dominion over the British Isles. In Carlson's account, later eighteenth-century typographical discourses took sides on the issue of the marking of passion through punctuation in the following ways. On the one side were grammarians who saw the exclamation point as a reliable mark guiding the voice of a speaker in a state of passion; on the other were elocutionists, concerned to emphasize communication to a reader. The grammarian Joseph Robertson, in his 1785

Essay on Punctuation, enthusiastically endorsed the use of the exclamation mark for «any kind of emotion», especially in «the higher poetry, in which all of the sentiments and passions of the human mind are usually described with energy and pathos» [ROBERTSON 1785, p. 103]. While Robertson cautions «the young and inexperienced writer against the immoderate use of exclamation» [ROBERTSON 1785, p. 113], his catalogue of the passions properly marked with the «points of admiration», as he also calls them [ROBERTSON 1785, p. 113], is all-encompassing, comprising «Expressions of joy, transport, love, admiration»; «Expressions denoting pity or anxiety, an ardent wish, or a pathetic farewell»; «Terror, lamentation, despair»; «contempt, abhorrence, indignation, threatening, imprecation»; «vociferation»; «tenderness, love, respect, anger, disdain, etc» [ROBERTSON 1785, pp. 104-109]. The elocutionists for their part were more aware of the limitations of the printed page. Wondering whether it is possible for one point to mark so many passions, the elocutionist John Walker put it like this: «Whether a point that indicates passion or emotion, without determining [which] emotion or passion is meant, or if we had points expressive of every passion or emotion, whether this would in common usage more assist or embarrass the reader, I shall not attempt to decide» [quoted in CARLSON 2014, p. 235]. As the eighteenth century turned into the nineteenth, moreover, all treatments of the exclamation mark treated the mark less as a stage direction or cue for vocalization, and more as a direct conduit to passion. The question of where the emotion «really» is – whether inside the author, the speaker, the reader – falls away; passion lies on the surface of the page.

We may read Wordsworth's «ashamed»ness about punctuation as an acute response to his era's controversies concerning affective markings. It is hard for us to read Wordsworth's intensely exclamation-marked poems without some embarrassment, as it is a poetic practice whose historical moment is long past. But the study of passion in Wordsworth's poetry must stay in the room with textual and editorial scholarship. And closely tracking the exclamation marks reminds us that when we talk about the role of affects in Wordsworth's poetry and poetic practice, we are considering artifacts that unfolded over time, the product of many hands. The massive exclamation pointing of *Poems, in Two Volumes* may strike us as frantic:

> Stay near me—do not take thy flight!
> A little longer stay in sight!
> Much converse do I find in Thee,
> Historian of my Infancy!
> Dead times revive in thee:
> Thou bring'st, gay Creature as thou art!
> A solemn image to my heart,
> My Father's Family!
> [«To a Butterfly» ll. 1-9, WORDSWORTH 1983, p. 203]

We know, from consulting the *Cornell Wordsworth*, that many of these exclamation marks did not exist in some of the many earlier manuscript versions of «To A Butterfly» in different hands; though many do appear in an early version in Sara Hutchinson's hand [WORDSWORTH 1983, p. 488]. The editor of the Cornell volume, moreover, painstakingly infers that Wordsworth made the important decisions about punctuation in the final printer's copy [WORDSWORTH 1983, pp. 51-58]. Do the presences or absences of the points indicate different theories of the marks of passion, among the different members of the Wordsworth circle who copied out this poem between 1802 and 1807 (Dorothy even pointed her record of William *writing* the poem with an exclamation mark: «while we were at Breakfast […] he, with his Basin of Broth before him untouched & a little plate of Bread & butter he wrote the Poem to a Butterfly!») [WORDSWORTH, D. 2002, p. 78]. Does the emotional balance of the poem change, if the points are left in or taken out? Does the speaker seem less desperate to «converse» with the butterfly without them? Does the balance of the butterfly's «gay»ness versus the «solemn» nature of the remembrances it occasions, change? Do shades of feeling and meaning bloom and fade with points that appear and disappear over time in the transitions between different versions of the poem? One hardly knows how to read this closely!

Staying in the room: «These chairs»

> Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and «felt the atmosphere»? [BRENNAN 2004, p. 1]

> So we may walk into the room and «feel the atmosphere», but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. [AHMED 2010, p. 37]

> The task of a new definition of close reading is to rethink the power of affect, feeling, and emotion in a *cognitive* space. […] A refusal to assert to closeness may produce a traumatized reading. [ARMSTRONG 2000, p. 87]

How close is close? If we want to stay in the room with poetry's mixed feelings, where does that put us: how close in do we get? How could reading for recalcitrant, hard feelings in Wordsworth reflect on how we define «close reading»? This essay turns now to a minimal manuscript poem that dates from the period of Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journal* and of «To a Butterfly»: spring 1802. It is a poem that lets readers into – invite would be

the wrong word – a room in which Wordsworth appears to be in bed. The setting is not so much *Home at Gramere* as «My bedroom in Dove Cottage»:

> These chairs they have no words to utter,
> No fire is in the grate to stir or flutter,
> The ceiling and floor are mute as a stone,
> My chamber is hushed and still,
> And I am alone,
> Happy and alone.
>
> Oh! Who would be afraid of life?
> The passion the sorrow and the strife,
> When he may lie
> Shelter'd so easily?
> May lie in peace on his bed,
> Happy as they who are dead.
> [WORDSWORTH 1983, pp. 579-580]

The affect expressed in this little song seems a bit off, a bit inscrutable. The poet asserts he is happy, but at best it is a dysphoric kind of happiness. It seems to consist in the sheer refuge that holing up at home, in one's room, in bed, provides from «the passion the sorrow and the strife» of life. And even the happiness of holing up in bed – delightful under some circumstances as we all know it to be – does not seem particularly pleasant. The word «happy» is sandwiched in between two «alone»s first time around, and then between «bed» and «dead» in the second. It is the happiness of the dead.

The bed's eye view of the room, moreover, leaves little to see. The deixis of the opening phrase «these chairs» – a species of pointing that is often associated with visual particularity – instead opens up a vista of almost nothing, a sequence of negation. The chairs have no words to utter, no fire is in the grate, the ceiling and floor are «still», «mute». The singularly empty, inert, unmeditative feeling in this room can be usefully contrasted to the room at the beginning of Coleridge's «Frost at Midnight», where the speaker's fireplace – as Wordsworth knew well – contains a «film» «which fluttered on the grate, / Still flutters there» [COLERIDGE 2008, pp. 15-16]: a sympathetic, «companionable form». The echo marks «These chairs» as part of the ongoing, intimate conversation between Wordsworth and Coleridge. But it is a strange, mordant, even aggressive contribution to that conversation: «These chairs» seems to reject outright the companionable flutterings, intimate familial breathings, and pensive mood of Coleridge's room.

What is the mood of «These chairs»? The poem's combination of inwardness and self-exposure, self-pity and self-congratulation – and perhaps

self-mockery – can be sharpened though another comparison, this time to a twentieth-century poem. The poem in the English language canon it most resembles is William Carlos Williams' «Danse Russe» (1927). In this defiant, alone-in-my room poem, the poet seems to celebrate a similarly aggressive loneliness:

> If when my wife is sleeping
> and the baby and Kathleen
> are sleeping
> and the sun is a flame-white disc
> in silken mists
> above shining trees, –
> if I in my north room
> dance naked, grotesquely
> before my mirror
> waving my shirt round my head
> and singing softly to myself:
> 'I am lonely, lonely.
> I was born to be lonely,
> I am best so!'
> If I admire my arms, my face,
> my shoulders, flanks, buttocks
> against the yellow drawn shades, –
> who shall say I am not
> the happy genius of my household?

In this poem, Williams' naked (literally) self-exposure makes the leap from shameful to utter shamelessness through the poem's theatricality, its way of inviting the reader into the private room with the drawn shades, and its dare to the reader at the end. In contrast, «These chairs» hardly seems like a poem addressed to any one at all (in spite of the rhetorical question in line 7), but rather very private thoughts: mind-chatter organized into lines. The «Oh!» of line 7 is the lone exclamation point, the syllable it marks a pure vocalization of the point. It embodies what Roman Jakobson called «the emotive function» of language at its most basic [JAKOBSON 1960, p. 354; see also JOHNSON 1987, p. 187]. It is hard to know where in Joseph Robertson's list of exclamation points this one would fall: it marks rather a syllable of what J. H. Prynne called, with deliberate oxymoron, the Romantic «mediative exclamation» [PRYNNE 1988, p. 143]. Relatively unmarked by points, the weird admixture of loneliness and happy-claims in «These chairs» has perhaps less of the verticality of the passions of the point «!» and more of the horizontality (—) of the bed on which the poetic speaker lies. Perhaps such

odd, unmarked, non-categorizable, non-canonical, horizontal feelings are more like the flow of experience.

There are a number of reasons why «These chairs» may strike some readers as a cringe-makingly bad poem, from the lazy rhyming (life/strife, bed/dead) and repetitions, to the aura of shame that clings to such disclosure of a weird bed mood. Wordsworth was not a stranger to mobilizing shame for poetic ends: in poems such as «Nutting», «A Narrow Girdle of Rough Stones», he made a career of making poems about feeling bad about himself. In contrast to those poems, however, in which the poet retrospectively narrates and moralizes about moments when he felt shame, in «These chairs», shame – shame that perhaps we think Wordsworth feels, that we feel *for* him – clings because the bad feelings seem so unframed, so unselfconsciously exposed. Here is Wordsworth in bed, bragging about how happy/lonely he is! In contrast to shame poems such as «Nutting» and «A Narrow Girdle» in which the reader is implicitly aligned with the present Wordsworth looking back at bad feelings, where are we here?

The cringe we may reflexively feel at Wordsworth's mood in «These chairs» must be distinguished, however from the embarrassment we may sometimes feel in relation to Wordsworthian exclamation-pointed excitement: the Wordsworth who exclaims, for example, «O joy! That in our embers / is something that doth live!» [«Ode», ll. 132-133; WORDSWORTH 1983, p. 275]. But though the flat happy/lonely mood of «These chairs» is quite removed from the intensities of the «Intimations Ode», the two poems do, improbably, mirror each other. The metrical form of «The chairs» resembles nothing so much as the free-form stanzas of the Ode. There are verbal connections as well. If in «these chairs» the bed is a kind of grave, in the Ode, the grave «is but a lonely bed without the sense or sight / Of day or the warm light, / A place of thought where we in waiting lie». Embers of the odd, bad/bed feelings of the manuscript poem cling to the canonical poem, which comes trailing clouds of its imagery and its emotional strangeness [for an account of the affects in and occasioned by the «Ode» see JARVIS 2007, pp. 195-200].

Furthermore this manuscript poem, «These chairs», does not actually end with «Happy as they who are dead», as above. In both of the two existing manuscripts of the poem, that line is followed by a bar, and then the words «*Half an hour afterwards*»:

> *Half an hour afterwards*.
> I have thoughts that are fed by the sun;
> The things which I see
> Are welcome to me,
> Welcome every one:
> I do not wish to lie
> Dead, dead,

Dead, without any company;
Here alone on my bed,
With thoughts that are fed by the sun
And hopes that are welcome every one,
Happy am I.

O Life, there is about thee
A deep delicious peace;
I would not be without thee,
Stay, oh stay!
Yet be thou ever as now,
Sweetness and breath with the quiet of death,
Peace, peace, peace.
[WORDSWORTH 1983, p. 580]

The mystery of this poem lies in the temporal break. Wordsworth is still in bed (line 20). The sun, perhaps, has risen, or has entered the room, feeding his thoughts. However, the break between sections does not mark any significant difference of mood or tone or event. «*Half an hour afterwards*» sounds like a status update, creating the expectation that something has happened, or at least that what happened thirty minutes ago will now look, in retrospect, like an event, now recollected in tranquility. While the opening of the second section «I have thoughts which are fed by the sun», might seem at first to be introducing a new idea, in fact the second half manifests the same combination of contentment at a minimal kind of living, and anxiety about loneliness and death. On the one hand, he does not wish to die; on the other hand he desires a life that has the quiet of death. Formally it is the same, highly repetitive simple song: in Mary Jacobus' words, «a pellucid self-rocking utterance» [JACOBUS 2012, p. 120]. This phrase suggestively captures the infantile quality of «These chairs»: the sense of being stuck in a good feeling that is also a bad feeling; the mixture of self-pity and defiance; the odd combination of inwardness and naked exposure. The marker of time only stresses the ongoingness of the odd feelings of this poem. Wordsworth is staying in the room with them.

Whatever were the emotional dynamics of the frequent retreats into bed of all of the inmates of Dove Cottage – particularly vexed as the complex dynamics among William Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, Coleridge, Mary Hutchinson, and Sara Hutchinson, were in play – getting some space for oneself to be alone with one's feelings must have been one of them. The beds were used for all kinds of things, including poetry: Dorothy reads poetry to William in bed [WORDSWORTH, D. 2002, pp. 80, 88, 96]; William writes his poems in bed. One of the things that the Wordsworths were reading (perhaps in bed?) in 1802 were selections from *The Canterbury Tales*. William was working on his translations from Chaucer, and Dorothy

mentions «The Knight's Tale» twice – once noting she read it «with exquisite delight» [WORDSWORTH, D. 2002, p. 137; see also WORDSWORTH 1967, p. 641]. In his explanatory notes to «These chairs» in the Oxford *Major Works*, Stephen Gill notes that lines 18-19 echo «The Knight's Tale's» vanquished, dying knight, Arcite. In his valedictory monologue, Arcite laments (in the version from Robert Anderson's *A Complete Edition of the Poets of Great Britain*, which the Wordsworths were reading): «What is this world? What axen men to have? / Now with his love, now in his colde grave / Alone withouten any compagnie» [ANDERSON 1795, I, p. 24]. In her own notes to her discussion of «These chairs», Jacobus speculates that the love triangle of «The Knight's Tale» – in which Arcite and Palamon vie for the love of Emelie – may have had particular resonance in the context of the tangled, crowded relations among the friends at Dove Cottage in 1802 [JACOBUS 2012, p. 200 n. 19]. Noting that the poem was written a day after Coleridge read the «Dejection Ode» to Sara Hutchinson, Gene Ruoff views «These chairs» as a rejection of that poem's higher melancholy strain, Wordsworth's ambivalent misanthropy directed specifically at Coleridge [RUOFF 1989, p. 127]. It may be worth pointing out that the phrase «Wordsworth in bed» is likely to evoke the infamous episode in which Coleridge had a nightmare vision of Wordsworth in bed with Sara [WU 2002, p. 275].

However, the truest significance of this literary allusion lies in its staging of a confrontation between two emotional registers: the noble knight's heroic, existential lament on the one hand, Wordsworth's bad feeling on the other. As different as these to seem – Arcite's stoic, battlefield account of life, in which we each must die alone, versus Wordsworth lying in bed complaining that he doesn't want to die – their conjunction here should prompt us to meditate on the fine, fluid, and productive gradations between ugly feelings and beautiful ones, ones you might be ashamed to cop to, and ones you'd be proud to feel. Ugly feelings and canonical aesthetic emotions can, in fact, exist together. Similarly: «These chairs» may be a bad(ish) Wordsworth poem, barely a poem, but the allusion to Chaucer provokes us to think about this 1802 manuscript's composition during a highly productive period in the poet's life. As we know from the evidence of Dorothy Wordsworth's journal and elsewhere, the months surrounding «These chairs», while often fraught with interpersonal stress, were crucial months for the germination of some of the great poems of *Poems, in Two Volumes* and of the five-book *Prelude* as well: months of intensive living, writing, and reading, in which the reading and processing of Chaucer may have been particularly generative [GRAVER 1998, p. 3; RUOFF 1989, pp. 42-27; HEATH 1970, pp. 22-26].

This reading thus far has, I hope, demonstrated that, as Sara Ahmed put it, the way we feel the emotional climate of a room – or a poem, or a room in a poem – depends on our angle of entry. The study of literary affect necessarily involves transferences, triangulations, and projections of feelings – what Eve Sedgwick called (speaking specifically of shame) the «transformational

grammar» of affect [SEDGWICK 2003, p. 61]. So, for example, the feelings I have about the poem are entangled with the feelings represented in the poem, which are in turn inflected by the way in which the poem is oriented, or not, towards an audience. But the feelings I may have, and the readings I do of the feelings in the room of «These chairs», also depend on more contextual and material aspects of our angle of entry into this poem.

Our angle of entry may for example be shaped by Dorothy Wordsworth's curious account of the second half of this poem in the *Grasmere Journal*. On a walk with Dorothy, William and Coleridge go ahead to get close to a waterfall swollen with recent rains:

> I saw them there & heard Wm flinging Stones into the River whose roaring was loud even where I was. When they returned William was repeating the poem 'I have thoughts that are fed by the sun.' It had been called to his mind by the dying away of the stunning of the Waterfall when he came behind a stone. [WORDSWORTH, D. 2002, p. 89]

How could such an «inside» poem come to be composed, or perhaps repeated, in such an outdoor setting? Why was this poem brought to mind by the silence on the other side of a roar? It seems so unlikely that one is tempted to think that perhaps Dorothy got this all wrong: this poem seems so claustrophobically an «inside» poem that it's unimaginable that anything outside – especially air «filled with pleasant noise of waters» [«Resolution and Independence» l. 7; WORDSWORTH 1983, p.123] could call it to mind.

Dorothy's account, however, reminds us that poems create their own insides and outsides. The poem is its own room: nothing about «These chairs» depends on Wordsworth really being in bed, in him really being anywhere. Poems are surfaces that get made – by poets and readers – into containers for feelings. Poets can fret not – or fret, as the case seems to be in «These chairs» – in their narrow rooms. And, just as poets can fabricate or trouble the distinction between insides and outsides, so too can readers trouble the distinction between a poem's surface and depth. Perhaps reading for unsettling feelings requires a mode of reading which is close, but not deep: where the surface of the pages is a bed for meaning, «a place of thought where we in waiting lie» [«Ode», l.123, WORDSWORTH 1983, p. 275].

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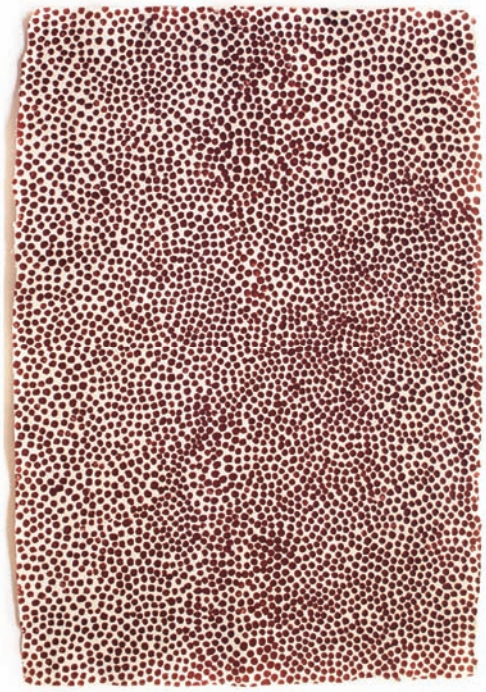
Marginalia



Wordsworth in Italian Translation

Abstract

Wordsworth's modern lack of pomp and focus on the material world and everyday events was not attractive to the Italian generations that responded to the English Romantics from 1850 to 1950 who translated and worshipped his contemporaries. Despite the poet's neglect, the 1990 Italian translation of *The Prelude* was followed by a series of translations that responded to a need and addressed the more limited readership of students of English poetry and poetics. The article traces the history of the Italian editions of Wordsworth's poetry since the 1970s and reflects on the intellectual and emotional experience of translating *The Prelude* for an Italian readership that has always tended to be oblivious of its author. By translating Wordsworth, it is suggested, the scholar encounters the power of the poet's use of rhythm and is struck by the significance of the most simple phrases and by their capacity to embody feeling and represent the human condition with fidelity and vigour.

Massimo Bacigalupo

Wordsworth has been rather slow in catching on in Italy, though two doyens of twentieth-century English studies, Emilio Cecchi and Mario Praz, especially the latter, wrote extensively and perceptively about him in their books. Though Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats have always had a following, albeit uncritical at times, and are recognized names commercial publishers respond to if approached with a translation project, Wordsworth remains a vague figure in the average cultivated reader's mind. Thus the first appearance in book form of Wordsworth's poetry was in 1979, when Attilio Brilli edited and Franco Marucci translated the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. The frontispiece read «William Wordsworth – Samuel [sic] Coleridge – Ballate liriche». This paperback edition has remained in print over the years, probably because it was required reading in a number of university courses. The same can't be said of my translation of the 1805 *Prelude*, which appeared in the same Mondadori series in 1990, thanks to the foresight of the then chief editor Ferruccio Parazzoli. The first book of Wordsworth's work to appear in Italy

with his name alone on the cover, it received much attention in the press (and even a notice in the *TLS*), and was awarded Italy's major translation prize (Premio Monselice). Indeed, for a book of poetry it was a success: it was reprinted in a slightly different format (always with Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* on the cover) in 1994, 1996, 1997, and 2000, proving that it fulfilled a need and was recognized as a classic with which to be reckoned. However, when 2001 struck the Italian and world publishing markets, sales dwindled and *Il preludio* was allowed to go out of print. Did Wordsworth have less to say to the tragic times of the third millennium? I used the opportunity of the bicentenary of the 1805 *Prelude* to write about it in the journal *Poesia* [BACIGALUPO 2005], where I had introduced my version back in 1990, hoping to raise interest. But clearly the main readership for such a volume is university students, and also the changes in the format of our courses with the introduction of the three-year college system discouraged the few academics who were interested enough in the Romantics from making *The Prelude* required reading. *Lyrical Ballads*, perhaps. But Wordsworth alone? Besides, some would encourage students to use a British edition, though more expensive and lacking the crutch of the translation. Moreover, the general publishing situation remained bleak. Years ago I had revised and edited for a paperback edition an old translation of another Romantic masterpiece, *Moby-Dick*, and when I asked the publisher why this edition was not in the bookshops with other competitors, I was told that they had many unsold copies in storage. That is, even *Moby-Dick* was suffering from the current crisis. (In this case also because there are about ten translations to choose from.) To conclude this bit of publishing history, after much insistence and perhaps even blackmail (I had been assigned another major undertaking), Mondadori finally reprinted *Il preludio* after ten years, in the fall of 2010: 1730 copies, of which 1172 had been disposed of by December 2012. According to the publisher's statement of that date, since the second edition (1994), *Il preludio* had sold a total 6,481 copies. My edition of Emily Dickinson's poems for Mondadori has done much better, selling 24607 copies from 2004 to 2012, though only one of many currently available, and in spite of the recession in publishing. Still, it is satisfactory to know that Wordsworth's deep confrontation with the great and small givens of life may have reached a good number of discerning readers, and there is hope that «what we have loved / Others will love». And the translator believes or knows that it is his own words that have to convey all that passion and vision: «ciò che abbiamo amato / altri ameranno».

This leads us to the question of how to translate such a work. If we look at the lines just quoted (from the close of the 1805 *Prelude*, XIII, ll. 444-445), we can see that there is a near perfect equivalence, the effect in both instances being based on the repetition of the verb *to love* in different tenses. Curiously, the most famous example of a similar rhetorical device is Dante's use of the same word in Italian: «amor che a nullo amato amar perdona»

(«Love, who to none beloved to love again / Remits» – Byron) [*Inferno*, Canto V, l. 103]. This shows that the proximity between these two Western languages allows effects to be carried across nearly intact. But in Wordsworth as in Dante the greatness of the utterance is dependent on the emotional investment, rendered by the repetition. Actually, I don't think that what Francesca says is true, and perhaps Dante was using a form of dramatic irony: she is justifying her lapse by saying that it is impossible to resist love (but we know from many stories of unrequited passion that it is very possible). Wordsworth is expressing a fond wish in *propria persona*, and we know it to be true, because readers through time have shared his passion for the world, its phenomena and its people, and have been made more aware of themselves as living beings by reading *The Prelude*. So they have loved what he and Coleridge loved, but have also very much loved the verse itself as a source of inspiration and insight. Wallace Stevens once warned a correspondent:

> It is not the simplest thing in the world to explain a poem. I thought of it this way this morning: a poem is like a man walking on the bank of a river, whose shadow is reflected in the water. If you explain a poem, you are quite likely to do it either in terms of the man or in terms of the shadow, but you have to explain it in terms of the whole […] the thing and its double always go together. [STEVENS 1966, p. 354]

Similarly, we have the interrelation of Wordsworth's wish to find kindred spirits and the shadow of his expression of this, which however are one and the same and cannot be disjoined, since it is the force of his conviction that makes so simple a statement so powerful. The reflection in the river suggests that there is an unpredictable context, continuously changing (always alike?). What did these words mean to their English and Italian readers in the context of historical and personal events? Do they mean the same as they did when I translated them over twenty years ago? Perhaps they have acquired a patina of melancholy, since their truth is always being questioned. Yet the writing carries its own strength and conviction, and cannot be denied. Its love (how, where?) does not allow the loved one to «remit» her love. It does not imagine this possibility, while being based on the notion that possibly very few will join the poets' visionary company. There is a sense of election, and a truly democratic impulse. It is there to be loved, and I have given it to you as such.

Actually, not many people get particularly excited over Wordsworth, or their relationship to the poet, since it is really our own vision (the shadow in the water) that is being expressed. The 1990 Italian translation of *The Prelude* was followed by a series of translations that responded to a need but addressed the more limited readership of students of English poetry and poetics. In 1992, not long after the appearance of *Il preludio*, some of Wordsworth's prose writings were collected as *Sul sublime e sulla poesia*,

edited by Franco Nasi and myself and published in an academic series («Materials for the Study of Aesthetics»). This was the first Italian appearance of such central documents as the 1802 «Preface», the 1814 «Prospectus», «The Sublime and the Beautiful», and extracts from *A Guide to the Lakes*. It can't be said that this volume was much noticed. But the 1990s were a good decade for the Italian Wordsworth. Two selections of poems followed: *Poesie 1798-1807*, edited and translated by Angelo Righetti in a series addressed to students, with ample apparatus [WORDSWORTH 1997, pp. 239], and *Poesie scelte*, the work of Flavio Giacomantonio, who was later to translate *Paradise Lost* [WORDSWORTH 1999, pp. 342]. The 1999 volume has long discursive introductions to the 32 poems of various length that are included (as against Righetti's wider selection of 41 poems). However, while Righetti's edition is proof of continuing academic interest in the teaching of Wordsworth at the university, Giacomantonio's was a labour of love by a retired secondary school teacher and had small distribution. A new version of the 1799 *Prelude* with a commercial publisher intended for university readership appeared in 2013, the work of Giuliana Ferreccio of the University of Turin.

Thus the second decade of the millennium, anticipated by the reissue of the Italian *Prelude*, has already a second Wordsworth publication of note, and could still repeat the fortunate series of the 1990s, with its four volumes for academic and general readership. By the way, the 2010 reissue of *Il preludio* differed from the previous editions by including as an afterword a translation of Virginia Woolf's essay «Dorothy Wordsworth», titled for the occasion «William, la natura e Dorothy». This was my idea, since Mondadori had been reissuing classics with afterwords by well-known figures, and Woolf is a writer with a numerous following in Italy. The fine essay in question is largely about Dorothy, but also evokes the life and ideals she shared with her brother, so I do not think it was misleading to offer it to Italian readers as a suitable introduction to the wonders of *The Prelude*. (This also was the essay's first Italian translation.) Whether anyone noticed this I don't know. I haven't seen references to the new edition in print. Perhaps some of the readers of the 1172 copies sold in the first two years since the reissue have delighted in Woolf's moving depiction of the Grasmere world and followed its invitation into the mazes of the great poem:

> Thus giving to Nature, thus receiving from Nature, it seemed, as the arduous and ascetic days went by, that Nature and Dorothy had grown together in perfect sympathy—a sympathy not cold or vegetable or inhuman because at the core of it burnt that other love for «my beloved», her brother, who was indeed its heart and inspiration. William and Nature and Dorothy herself, were they not one being? Did they not compose a trinity, self-contained and self-sufficient and independent whether indoors or out? [WOOLF 1953, p. 168]

This is the passage I took my title from for the new afterword. But Woolf's essay is to be read in its entirety. It was published as part of a series, «Four Figures», and makes an extended comparison between Dorothy's wise passiveness and Mary Wollstonecraft's insatiable searching spirit. Woolf concludes:

> If, then, the passionate cry of Mary Wollstonecraft had reached her [Dorothy's] ears – «Surely something resides in this heart that is not perishable – and life is more than a dream» – she would have had no doubt whatever as to her answer. She would have said quite simply, «We looked about us, and felt that we were happy». [WOOLF 1953, p. 172]

Here is expressed the power to provide contentment, indeed wise passiveness, that Stuart Mill found in Wordsworth, who is a poet of immobility, if one can say this of so compulsive a walker. He proceeds steadily, unwaveringly, and until his inspiration languished (after 1815 more or less), he was able to find within himself and Dorothy the capacity to «look about and be happy» – and communicate this in words.

In an instructive essay on the Italian translations of *Lyrical Ballads*, Franco Nasi cited Cesare Segre's notion of a «diasystem», a mediation between the system of which the original is part and the system in which the copy or translation is inserted. To evaluate a translation one must see it as part of a diasystem – the world of the original text and the culture of the copyist-translator [NASI 2004, p. 82]. Thus translations are illuminating examples of the conception of literary communication within a given culture, because of course they conform to this. Also, they illuminate the individual copyist's understanding of the diasystem, which may have all kinds of peculiarities. Even the reception of a given writer within another culture is an important index of what that culture believes relevant or acceptable, as well as of commercial trends and many other factors. Thus the second place given Wordsworth in Italy's reception of the Romantics is an expression of a certain view of poetry and Romanticism. In Shelley, Italians found the heroic and the angelic, in Coleridge the fantastic (his conversation poems are ignored to this day by the majority of readers), in Keats a sensual dreaminess, in Byron exotic passion and the poet-as-hero. Wordsworth's very modern lack of pomp and concentration on the material world and everyday events was not attractive to the generations that responded to the English Romantics, say from 1850-1900, who translated and worshipped his contemporaries. Thus the *names* Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge entered the literary consciousness at a crucial moment. When the reader's sensibility would have been ready, after 1950 or so, for the sobering dose of Wordsworth's anti-illusionistic stance and somber visions, it was too late for his name to enter

among the shared patrimony. It could be argued that very rarely is a writer of the past discovered by a foreign culture after his contemporaries, or the time when he was discovered in his own country. Melville and Dickinson, for example, became popular in Italy at the same time that they acquired their present status in their own country and among readers of English.

The fact that Italian readers and writers were (and are) oblivious of Wordsworth is confirmed by the fact that in the late nineteenth century only two poets, both with an investment in the pastoral, offered versions of his work. Giacomo Zanella, from the Veneto region, published in 1886 a notable rendering of «Michael», a major text of which this is still the only Italian translation. Giovanni Pascoli, a key figure in the annals of Italian poetry, brilliantly translated around the turn of the century the seventeen quatrains of «We Are Seven» in fifteen rhyming quatrains (he omitted Wordsworth's first didactic stanza, and the third). As suggested above, these translations tell us much of the models of poetry current at the time they were penned. They are both successful in their terms and true to Wordsworth's spirit. Zanella translated the blank verse of «Michael» in the roughly equivalent Italian hendecasyllabic, which meant that his translation became about 70 lines longer than the original (Italian words are mostly longer than English words). «There is a comfort in the strength of love» becomes

> Stabil conforto è nell'amor, che quando
> L'intelletto minaccia d'oscurarsi e di spezzarsi
> Il cor minaccia, è sollievo dei miseri. Io conobbi
> Molti che conosciuto avean Michele
> Nei giorni amari in cui le infauste nuove
> Ebbe del figlio [...]
> [WORDSWORTH 1886, p. 725]

The text is condensed, therefore it renders in seven lines Wordsworth's six lines. The result appears today somewhat conventional, and there is demonstrably some padding («'Twill make a thing endurable» becomes «is relief for the miserable» – also the second line is Zanella's addition). Still, it is notable that this early masterpiece should have been rendered more or less adequately. (The repetitions of *minaccia* and *conobbi*/*conosciuto* may also be blemishes.) Pascoli as a major figure is distinctly more assured in rendering «We Are Seven», which attracted him because of the theme of childhood death, quite common in his work (see Seamus Heaney's translation of Pascoli's «The Kite», which closes with the image of a dead playmate). «You run about, my little maid, / Your limbs they are alive» becomes in Pascoli's able hands:

– Ma tu ti movi, tu corri: è vero?
tu canti, ruzzi, hai fame, hai sete:
se que' due sono nel cimitero,
cara bambina, cinque voi siete. —

– Verde – rispose – verde è il lor posto:
lo può vedere, lì, se le preme:
da casa in dieci passi discosto:
stanno vicini, dormono insieme.

Là vado a fare la calza, e spesso
vado a far l'orlo delle pezzuole:
mi siedo in terra, sotto il cipresso,
con loro, e loro conto le fole.
[PASCOLI 1920]

«I sit and sing to them» becomes «I tell them stories» – and Pascoli had added for good measure the funerary cypress. I also find it disturbing that the little girl should use the formal «lei» in addressing the narrator. The line about the green graves is interesting in attempting to replicate the original's middle rhyme: «Their graves are green – they may be seen». «Posto» (place) however is just acceptable as equivalent of «graves». Pascoli is notably attentive to the letter and responded to one part of Wordsworth's range. One could say, unkindly – to the sentimentality rather than the sentiment.

Since 1886 Italian poets have ceased to be concerned with Wordsworth, with the exception of our contemporary Franco Buffoni, a sometime professor of English, who finely rendered the Westminster Bridge sonnet and «The Reverie of Poor Susan» for a two-volume anthology of English Romantic poetry he edited [BUFFONI 1990]. This devoted nearly one hundred pages to Wordsworth (English and Italian), mostly translated by Franco Marucci, and included Book I of *The Excursion*. So at least in the academy and in anthologies by 1990 Wordsworth had taken his rightful place among his peers. (In fact the other four major romantics are somewhat less represented in this anthology.)

In a note to his 1979 translation of *Lyrical Ballads*, Marucci says that some of the poems are «not only uneven and linguistically flat and prosy, but also often sentimental and mawkish» – and that therefore it has been necessary for him to deflate some of the melodrama, while keeping close to the original [WORDSWORTH 1979, p. 35]. Though I don't agree with Marucci's assessment of the original, it is true that a modern translator will attempt to render expressions of strong feeling in a fresh way so as not to sound overblown. But this is required in all translations. If the original is a strong text, it surely did not sound mawkish to its author and readers. Though

we know that Wordsworth did seem very prosy to his belated contemporaries. Thus in my translation of *The Prelude*, the attempt is always to follow Wordsworth's reflections while making them sound true to experience: «nothing – nothing that you couldn't […] actually say», as Ezra Pound once put it [POUND 1950, p. 49].

There was a fascinating moment in the production of the Italian *Prelude*. I began translating it in 1978, and the first books appeared in little magazines, annuals, and poetry journals. Then in 1989 I sent the lot off to Mondadori, whose editor, after worrying about the unconscionable length of the thing, gave the go-ahead. In January 1990 proofs returned to me, so I had to reconsider the whole project. What happened was that within a week or so I extensively revised the translation. With the proofs I received the corresponding English, and this made me look more carefully at the two texts that mirrored each other. I discovered that I could often improve the Italian by hewing more closely to the original word order, sometimes even using words cognate to those Wordsworth penned. So the translation in some way rewrote itself. I did have the impression that I was writing, as it were, under dictation. Today, when I open the 1990 translation, I often find small inaccuracies that I will correct in reprints. But I do marvel at the spirit that informed the whole, and surely I could never replicate the performance. A translation is an event, a «translation act» if you will. With luck, one can watch it happen, remembering what Robert Frost (and Wordsworth before him) wrote about the spontaneous creation of poetry. Nothing is less spontaneous than translation, yet Wordsworth's rhythm takes hold, and his masterful word choice compels.

I print here, as an example of my work on the proofs of *The Prelude*, the celebrated passage about the crossing of the Alps [Plate 1]. A particularly grand visionary moment, it required a translator's full attention. One notices how much of the draft was revised at this stage, and how the changes usually bring the Italian closer to the English. Thus «Our destiny, our nature, and our home / Is with infinitude, and only there» read in the proof, quite unconvincingly: «Per noi destino, natura e dimora / sono nell'infinito, e solo in esso». As revised, the lines read: «Il nostro destino, la nostra natura e dimora / è nell'infinito, in esso soltanto» – which uses for its effect Wordsworth's own repetition of «our», whereas the change in the word order of «in esso soltanto» emphasizes the theme and provides the line with a strongly stressed close. The Italian lines are reminiscent of the Italian hendecasyllabic, but have a free strong rhythm. They respond to a poetry model that in 1990 clearly felt close to Wordsworth's original stresses, his slow but assured progress to the heights of vision on human destiny and beyond. This proof with its corrections is an instructive document on the processes, material and poetical, of poetry translation, and will be interesting to consider at a time when proofs and perhaps even material writing will be a

thing of the past. One can see that the translator's work approaches the poet's slow search for the right word:

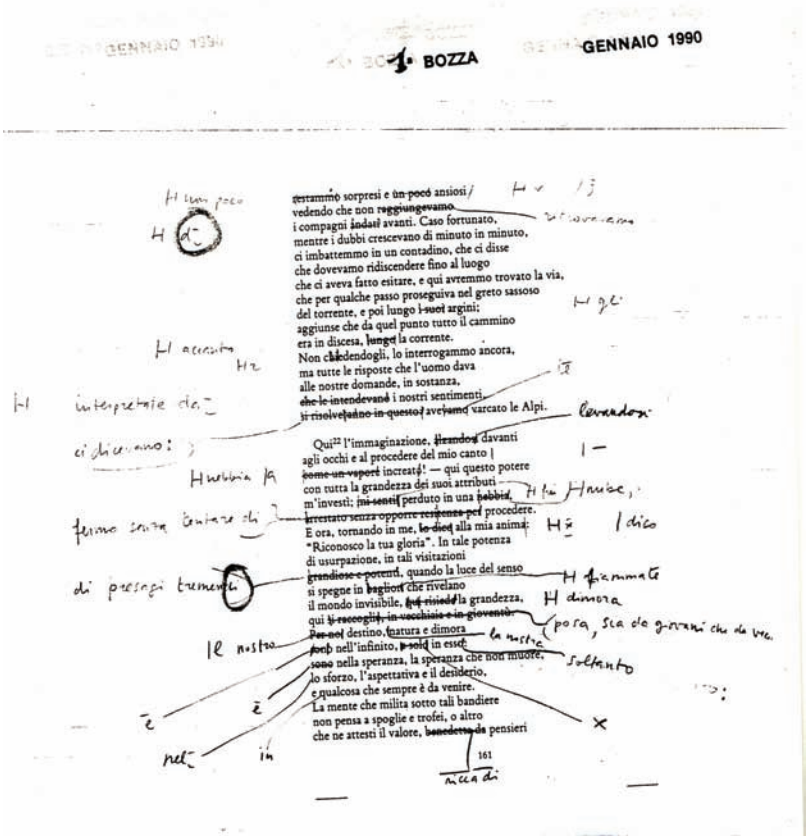


Plate 1. Recreating *The Prelude* 1805, VI, 509-545. Proof of WORDSWORTH 1990, with revisions (January 1990).

The text is again alive, in search of a final form, or, to return to Robert Frost, «a momentary stay» [FROST 1995, p. 777]. This much has been understood and fixed, for others to peruse.

By translating Wordsworth one learns about the power of his rhythm, which carries over passages that are wrongly said to be unpoetical. There is scarce one line in *The Prelude* that does not resonate with power. Besides being carried along by the overall rhythm, and the sense of the poet slowly but surely making his way, one is struck by the justness and monumental significance of the most simple phrases – their capacity to embody feeling and represent the human condition with utmost fidelity and vigour: «Our destiny, our nature, and our home».

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Wordsworth and Italian Criticism

Abstract

Despite his fervent past and present advocates, Wordsworth remains a fleeting presence in Italian scholarship on British Romanticism. The article outlines the different stages of Wordsworth's critical reception in Italy and reads the connection between Wordsworth's poetry and Italian Romantic scholarship as an intermittent dialogue. By focusing on the gap between two distinct eras of Wordsworthian criticism that runs parallel to the establishment of English literature as a disciplinary field, the article argues that, despite significant changes in critical perspective, it is possible to detect in the Italian critical encounter with Wordsworth the persistence of patterns of thought associated with a long-standing difficulty to grapple with the elusive naturalism, as well as with the ostensible Protestant matrix, of his poetic language.

Elena Spandri

> I have one request to make of my Reader,
> which is, that in judging these Poems he
> would decide by his own feelings genuinely,
> and not by reflection upon what will probably
> be the judgement of others.
> [Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1974, p. 154]

Wordsworth visited Italy with Mary and Dorothy during his tour of the Continent in 1920 and again, more extensively, in 1837 with Henry Crabb Robinson. The belated Grand Tour conjured up memories of the Alpine rambles that had galvanized him and his lost friend Robert Jones in 1790, and left significant traces in *Memorials of a Tour in Italy* (1842). The poet appeared to have enjoyed it. Yet, he was likewise happy to go back home. Unlike other Romantics who had been passionately involved in the Italian Risorgimento over the two preceding decades, Wordsworth felt too old for either political or artistic fervour, and engaged with beautiful Italian spots such as Rome, Florence and Venice in a more cursory and less committed way than his contemporaries had done [see

SHACKFORD 1923 and BARKER 2000, pp. 453-455]. The mode through which he engaged with Italy was closer to that of an antiquarian spirit of modern tourism than to a spiritual or intellectual journey, and it was to «the moods and feelings and thoughts» of old age that he turned during his stay there [SHACKFORD 1923, p. 252]:

> Wordsworth's references to the political situation of the day are disappointing, because, perhaps, he had exhausted that poetic fire, earlier, in his patriotic sonnets. And yet Italy in 1837 was in a state which must have been well known to Wordsworth. Mazzini, three years earlier, had with Garibaldi roused the unsuccessful revolt in Savoy and had later fled to England. Ugo Foscolo living in exile in London had published in English Reviews various articles on Italian literature. [SHACKFORD 1923, p. 250]

Italy responded with equal aloofness. In the guise of Poet Laureate of Victorian England, Wordsworth was not endowed with sufficient charisma. Compared to Shelley or Byron, his personality appeared vague and unexciting, his biography uneventful, and even the juvenile transgressions that had inspired the «blessed age» of his verse – political radicalism and erotic passion – had, over time, transmuted into «false philosophy and didacticism» [CECCHI 1961, p. 205].[1]

Perhaps Wordsworth's and Italy's mutual remoteness explains why the story of his critical reception is interrupted, fragmentary, and somewhat difficult to retrieve. What emerges *prima facie* is a gap between two distinct eras of Wordsworthian criticism that runs parallel to the establishment of English literature as a disciplinary field, and to the gradual incorporation of the massive archive of English and American scholarship within a native tradition originally dominated by the neo-idealist aesthetics of Benedetto Croce. Accordingly, while the readings provided by the Italian forefathers of English Studies are freshly first-hand and unmediated by an Anglo-American lens, subsequent criticism has been marked by a theoretically-informed methodology. Still, despite significant changes in – and even reversals of – critical perspective, it is possible to detect in the Italian critical encounter with Wordsworth the persistence of patterns of thought associated with a long-standing difficulty to grapple with the elusive naturalism, as well as with the ostensible Protestant matrix, of his poetic language.

The watershed between the two eras is located at the core of the Modernist debate on Romantic poetry and its Miltonic legacy. Emilio Cecchi

[1] With the exception of Serpieri's article which is originally in English, all translations from Italian studies are mine.

and Mario Praz encountered Wordsworth's poetry at its nadir (the first decades of the twentieth century), when the English critical arena was hegemonised by T. S. Eliot's indictment of Romantic poetry and its alleged dissociation of sensibility. No wonder that, cultivated and insightful as they were, their readings sounded unsympathetic and demeaning. Cecchi, Praz, as well as Marcello Pagnini at a later stage, read Wordsworth's concern with psychology as an easy solution to the formal, ethical, and religious problems that impacted English writers at the turn of the nineteenth century. Intentionally or not, they continued the tradition of escapist interpretations which, starting from Wordsworth's contemporaries, had regarded the poet's thematic and stylistic choices as symptoms of political disengagement and ideological regression. The second generation of Wordsworthian scholars, by contrast, somehow revived the Victorian reception of his work by locating in the centrality of nature and the psychology of the self the articulation of the complexity and the elusiveness of the post-revolutionary Western subject. Thus, while Emilio Cecchi and Mario Praz were more appreciative of the short pieces than the long poems, which they deemed as unduly inflected with Protestant ethics and bourgeois individualism, critics such as Paola Colaiacomo, Giuliana Ferreccio, and Alessandro Serpieri insisted on the relevance of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* in the elaboration of the artistic protocols of nineteenth and twentieth century European culture. Interestingly enough, so far hardly anyone has engaged with Wordsworth's poetry published after *The Excursion* [see SPANDRI 2001 and 2004].

«Romanticism Turns Bourgeois»[2]

Cecchi's and Praz's Wordsworthian discourses pivot on the implicit assumption of the inherent reformist spirit of English Romanticism ascribable to its Protestant matrix. Despite the fact that French revolutionary ideas originally stemmed from the philosophy of Locke, Hume and Shaftesbury, their deterritorialization tinged them with a radicalism that rendered re-implantation impossible. Hence, Wordsworth's and Coleridge's tendency to replace the revolutionary spirit with abstract humanitarian ideals. English Romanticism eschewed the disrupting force of radical ideologies owing to the Protestant tendency to dramatize the inner life and perceive morality in terms of conformity and interiorized habit. According to Cecchi's uncompromising lens, Wordsworth never achieves full ethical life because he plies morality to the sphere of psychology and practical goals, and turns to nature and landscape to avoid personal crisis. In his autobiographical poetry the individual is never really endangered and cannot therefore attain the heroic standing that inspires all great epics. On this point, Cecchi takes overt

[2] See PRAZ 1956, Part I.

sides against Church, Wolff, and Bradley and their alleged attempt «to show him as an artist endowed with a fully developed interiority» [CECCHI, 1965, p. 205]. On the contrary, Wordsworth seeks in nature the moral law he cannot find in himself. Far from bearing *Sturm-und-Drang* overtones, Wordsworthian nature acquires in time the features of a controlling power, which, instead of promoting human emancipation, exacts pedestrian obedience. By 1807 the poet has already turned into a «teacher», and his didacticism is nothing but a misguided attempt at combining Kant and Rousseau.[3]

However, like Coleridge, Cecchi wavers between disdain and admiration. He laments the disproportion between sublime feelings and humble objects, maintaining that Wordsworth's poetry exhibits an involuntary comic vein which can at times breed vigorous narrative irony, as in the case of «We Are Seven». When it comes to *The Prelude*, though, with the exception of a few lyrical climaxes, Wordsworth's narrative irony has already turned into a lengthy exercise in psychological anatomy triggered by the poet's isolation, whose primary concern is not artistic form but autobiographical matter. Still, Cecchi concedes that in *The Prelude* Wordsworth tried «to unfold the new man, unbind him, move him, give him self-consciousness, heal him from his romantic errors, and restore him to social life and human relations after his revolutionary seclusion» [CECCHI 1965, p. 256]. The poet's theory of imagination understood as an active faculty embracing the moral as well as artistic experience of the writer naturalized in the English culture one of the chief achievements of Romanticism. Cecchi may have disagreed with Wordsworth's Crusoe-like urge to reconstruct an order out of emotional anarchy, but could not resist the magnetism of his «sublime figures» in which «a sort of arboreal eternity» verges on «the insentient stillness of the mineral» [CECCHI 1965, p. 263].

Given these premises, it comes as no surprise that Wordsworth is not even admitted to the rank of the hideous progeny tormented by «the romantic agony». Mario Praz's acclaimed 1930 study of the baroque and Sadeian vein at work in European Romantic sensibility does not even grant Wordsworth the dignity of a cameo [PRAZ 1930]. Although he would later acknowledge that the terrors of the French Revolution had been one of the forces looming behind his poetry, in the Thirties Praz saw Wordsworth as too bourgeois a poet to assign him a role in the «metamorphoses of Satan», as he had done with Shelley, Byron, Keats, Baudelaire, Poe, or Flaubert.[4] Indeed, he never

[3] «La sua solitudine non ha nulla di sentimentalmente anarchico, di ribelle, è una quieta solitudine contemplativa riempita dall'esercizio di una instancabile facoltà di osservazione. […] Il suo egoismo e il male inteso orgoglio mentale steriliscono la sua cultura e lo privano di contatti fecondi» [CECCHI 1965, p. 242].

[4] The title of the second chapter of *La carne la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica*. In 1933 the study was published by Oxford University Press with the title *The Romantic Agony*. For a modern Italian edition see PRAZ 1988.

really changed his mind on this, but he arrived at the conclusion that the gentrification of Romanticism (and the fundamentally Biedermeier spirit that animated Wordsworth and Coleridge) was a necessary stage in the process of democratization of the heroic that would reap its richest harvest in Victorian novelists such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot [PRAZ 1952].[5] In the now classic *Storia della letteratura inglese* [PRAZ 1937, 1960] Wordsworth's verse features as the first modern expression of natural feelings. His sentiment of nature is idyllic, as much as his enthusiasm for the French Revolution, and the pleasure he draws from it is purely organic. Praz admits that characters such as the leech-gatherer of Peter Bell achieve heroic monumentality, and that *The Prelude* could endure the metamorphosis from a Romantic to a Christian poem because it was the work of an imagination as powerful as Shakespeare's. Yet Wordsworth's democratization of the heroic conveyed by marginal figures soon ceases to be romantically liberating and backlashes into Burkean traditionalism. If for the other Romantics nature is employed as a symbol of revolt, in Wordsworth it ends up working as a symbol of obedience. The epitome of Wordsworth's reactionary turn is «Ode to Duty», in which Praz detects the same denial of passion and political quietism which permeate Victorian repressive ethos. However, Praz does not desexualize Wordsworth completely and buys into Herbert Read's speculation that his poetry after 1792 could be accounted for by the guilt feelings engendered in him by the love affair with Annette Vallon [READ 1930].

The first Italian book-length study entirely focused on Wordsworth was Marcello Pagnini's *La poesia di W. Wordsworth* [PAGNINI 1959]: a basically unsympathetic reading of Wordsworth's art, which combines Benedetto Croce's normative approach with M. H. Abrams's reappraisal of Romantic aesthetics and its relationship with modernity. According to Pagnini, Wordsworth's sentimental conception of the universe is rooted in the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility and in a tendency to transfigure personal feelings into universal truth. The scholar reiterates the idea about the fundamental composure of Wordsworthian feelings, reductively associating it to a poetics of memory in which the «recollection in tranquillity» is seen as a sort of defense mechanism, a device distancing and containing passion rather than the process whereby passion is translated into linguistic meanings. Moreover, Pagnini compares Wordsworth's interest in infancy with Giovanni Pascoli's intuitionist aesthetics articulated in *Il fanciullino* (1897), a parallel that, given Pascoli's controversial fortune, has proved fatal to Wordsworth's reception in Italy.

[5] See Praz 1952. More recently, Angelo Righetti has read Wordsworth's conservatory turn not in terms of betrayal of his radical years, but as a natural ideological evolution due to the belated acquisition of his originally lost aristocratic status [RIGHETTI 1997].

At the same time, ignoring phenomenological readings and critical trends that would henceforth increasingly highlight the relevance of emotions in both Wordsworth's poetological discourse and poetic practice, Pagnini upholds Coleridge's definition of Wordsworth as «a *Spectator ab extra*» [COLERIDGE 1835, p. 72] to build on it a theory of Wordsworth's spectatorial attitude to his poetical subjects. Wordsworth is too philosophically unsophisticated, too descriptive, too declamatory, as well as too self-centered, to engage in a truly compassionate interaction with his «low and rustic» characters. To him human pain is an objective fact and the subject matter for distant scientific observation. His tendency to the objectification of feeling points back rather than forward. Pagnini fails to realize the centrality of sympathetic imagination in Wordsworth's aesthetics because he polarizes Schiller's distinction between naïve and sentimental modes. It would take him more than two decades, along with a focus on different works – for example, *The White Doe of Rylstone* – to see that the markedly Wordsworthian coalescence of subject and object, activated by the poet's sympathetic imagination, modifies the status of the object bestowing on it complex and unexpected symbolic significance [PAGNINI 1984].

Palimpsests

The theatrical imagery sneaks back, albeit in different terms, in Paola Colaiacomo's book-length study on the Romantic theory of language, which reads Wordsworth's notion of poetic illusion as the foundation of a radically new and modern sensibility [COLAIACOMO 1984]. In Wordsworth's aesthetic theory and poetic practice language becomes a nucleus of energy in which the memory of the object coexists and overlaps with the memory of the word. No longer perceived as the result of a process of knowledge which has occurred elsewhere, the Romantic word achieves the status of a living organism and turns into a «microsystem geared to generate significance» [COLAIACOMO 1984, p. 25]. Wordsworth conceives of the poetical word in terms of a theatre: it places the reader in the position of the spectator and activates a sort of hermeneutic circle based on the physiological and affective categories of excitement and pleasure, rather than on the cognitive paradigms of taste and judgment. Only thanks to the dramatization of the interplay between the primary visual phenomenon and its verbal 'translation' can poetry provide the raw material for modern life and work as «therapy for feeling» [COLAIACOMO 1984, p. 21]. Wordsworth discovers a contact zone between description and emotion, superficiality and profundity, which enables him to overcome the picturesque and the sentimental mode at once, and to envisage the notions of unconscious and epiphany ahead of his time. «The relation of continuity with the natural world that the poet seeks is with nature's technique, or with the manifestation of nature as artistic technique»

[COLAIACOMO 1984, p.165]: thus, the natural object acquires narrative agency, as the series of natural forms which culminates in the human figure continues, so to speak, in poetic invention. Colaiacomo's implication is that Wordsworth's language should be regarded not only as the laboratory of nineteenth-century psychological realism, but also as one of the sources of the twentieth-century «sex appeal of the inorganic» [BENJAMIN 1982].

In keeping with a critical line conversant with both Hartman's phenomenological approach and de Man's idea of the intentionality of the Romantic image, as well as with more recent readings of «Romantic thingness» [JACOBUS 2012], Colaiacomo places Wordsworth in a mode of post-sentimental naiveté, whereby the sentimental retrieves the materiality of the object to accomplish and exhaust its own «perlocutionary» potential [see PINCH, 2014]. The privileged object that both soothes and haunts the poet's naturalized imagination is what Colaiacomo terms Wordsworth's "l'altra casa": a thematic cluster of biographical subject-matter and symbolic reverberation which is foregrounded in Wordsworth's most significant dwelling-place poems, namely *The Ruined Cottage* and *Home at Grasmere* [COLAIACOMO 1996]. These poems enact a struggle between memory and hope whereby the weight of time is expelled and the poetic subjects (Margaret and the poet), different as they are, appear as entirely focused on the absolute and opposing feelings of despair and joy, as well as on the pure contingent sensation of dwelling. Wordsworth depicts hope as a powerful time-denying force, which obstructs development and makes the self coincide with the natural environment he/she inhabits. Yet, in a typical Romantic paradox, the poet also shows hope reaching towards imagination, thus releasing memory from mere associative work. If, to borrow Giuseppe Ungaretti's words, «il mondo Petrarca ce l'ha scoperto come memoria» [«Petrarch discovered the world for us as memory», COLAIACOMO 1996, p. 236], Wordsworth takes this process a step further, as he marks the moment when memory starts being dislocated from the interiority of the subject to the exteriority of the form, and projected towards «the image of a *chosiste* human kind» [COLAIACOMO 1994, p. 221].

Home at Grasmere is also at the core of Giuliana Ferreccio's investigation on the legacy of Tasso and Milton in Wordsworth's poetry. The heterodox domestication of the myth of the loss of paradise, articulated by the poem, opens the possibility for poetic autobiography in that it elaborates a notion of the lyrical self as integrally connected with his dwelling-place. Wordsworth's localness is not the expression of agrarian idealism but of modern environmental consciousness, whose landmark poem, apart from *Paradise Lost*, is *La Gerusalemme liberata*, which the poet read in his Cambridge years under the guidance of Agostino Isola [see BARKER 2000, p. 37]. Ferreccio revives Praz's interest in Tasso's direct influence on English Romanticism (independent from the mediation of Spenser) and reads the Italian poet's psychological romance – grounded as it is on the contrast

between duty and desire, and on the creation of a Christian universe hybridized by Paganism – as one of the subtexts of *The Prelude* [FERRECCIO 2006]. Tasso and Wordsworth are both deeply iconic and, simultaneously, iconoclastic poets. In their epics the materiality of the obstacle (enchanted forests and mutilated bowers), which hinders the realization of the quest and is often linked to sexual desire, bears an allegorical dimension in which the human and the inorganic merge. Ferreccio contends that the rich intertextual network, in which the Italian connection features prominently and holds together Virgil, Dante, Tasso, and, to some extent, Ariosto, underpins the purgatorial dimension of Wordsworth's most troubled spots of time, and is constantly reworked by the poet from *The Vale of Easthwaite* and *The Salisbury Plain* poems, down to Books XI-XIII of *The Prelude*. By incorporating Tasso's baroque allegorism and Counter-Reformation sensibility within Wordsworth's literary unconscious, Ferreccio proves two points at once: that Cecchi's idea of Wordsworth's ignorance of classical models was ungrounded (even tendentious); and that Praz's exclusion of Wordsworth from the tradition of the romantic agony was, to say the least, hasty.[6]

A further articulation of the memory theme in *The Prelude* focuses on the multiple texts associated with its lifelong revisions. In a recent essay Alessandro Serpieri speculates about the sense «to choose *one* text and interpret it – as criticism has done, from the nineteenth century till the present day, first taking the 1850 version as the privileged text, then the 1805 one, and, finally, and more recently, turning backward to the 1799 version» [SERPIERI 2008, p. 59]. By contrast, he analyses the poem of the genealogy of the mind as a «palimpsest of memories» and self-interpretations which fosters palimpsests of critical readings. Readers may pursue one way through the multiple texts; or, as an alternative, they may decide to surrender to the «inevitable temptation to work stereoscopically on the poem's various versions» [SERPIERI 2008, p. 59]. The essay focuses on «the most crucial instance of structural *displacement* in the poem»: namely, the relocation of childhood memories from the 1799 version through 1805 and 1850 whereby «the entire sequence of these more formative episodes, all imbued with death, explodes to be later re-shaped into another, possibly more innocent meaning» [SERPIERI 2008, p. 49]. In doing so, Serpieri provides a psychoanalytic interpretation of such relocations, according to which nature becomes the displaced figure of Wordsworth's lost mother, turning, in Melanie Klein's terms, into a figure of restitution or reparation. Besides the import of its hermeneutical conclusions, Serpieri's essay is relevant in that it highlights the potential puzzlement entailed by Wordsworth's many revisions, thus

[6] G. Ferreccio argues that revolution and epiphany in *The Prelude* epitomize two different representation of time: the apocalyptic time, that erases place and distance, and the time of return that measures the *durée* [see also FERRECCIO 2014].

implicitly providing another reason for the poet's intermittent critical fortune in Italy. «In my experience, captivated as I was by Wordsworth's childhood memories, I have discovered that, over a period of more than ten years, my own critical encounter has itself become a palimpsest!» [SERPIERI 2008, p. 59]

«What thou lovest well remains, / The rest is dross»

One of the most lasting interpretative keys to Wordsworth has been Massimo Bacigalupo's reading of Romantic poetry through a Modernist lens. Undoubtedly Italian readership owes much to his reconsideration of the alleged anti-Romanticism of Pound and Eliot, as it is primarily on his firm belief in the «modernity of the Romantics» [BACIGALUPO 1988] that Bacigalupo engaged in the arduous task of translating *The Prelude* [BACIGALUPO 1990, 2010]. He invites readers to enjoy the poetry of Wordsworth and Pound against the grain of received critical traditions that radicalize their differences, as well as tune into the undercurrent of epistemic, speculative, and poetic matter that connects them. Bacigalupo contends that Wordsworth's poetic practice is animated by the same principle of exclusivity that inspires Pound's artistic activity. Both poets highlight the quality of the emotion and the crucial role of memory, and their aesthetic programs converge on significant points. They both call for natural language and for direct sense experience; they refuse academic criticism and uphold an anti-intellectualist rhetoric of common sense; they both promote poetry as an inclusive form. Furthermore, Pound and Eliot retain the function of the «numinous place and, along with it, the moment of the encounter and of uncanniness» [BACIGALUPO 1988, p. 113]. Their spots of time are as situated and accurate as those of Wordsworth. They may not imply the same type of encounters, but they retain a magical quality the sacredness of which is rooted in a Wordsworthian space refracted through the intensity of the consciousness that perceives them. In Eliot «there is a nostalgia for a pre-lapsarian nature (The Mississippi in *The Dry Salvages*, the rose garden in *Burnt Norton*); in Pound there is never a detachment from the natural world, but perhaps a journey from nature to culture» [BACIGALUPO 1988, p. 16].

From a similar perspective of continuity and cross-fertilization between Romantic and Modernist poetry, Franco Nasi investigates Wordsworth's category of the sublime highlighting the inversion of the traditional pattern which, in Wordsworth, appears not rooted in the objects' novelty but in their familiarity [NASI 1990]. Nasi argues that Wordsworth's aesthetics are located at the juncture between an eighteenth-century empirical sensibility, whose conceptual equipment is drawn from Addison, Dennis, Home, Burke, Burnet, Shaftesbury, and Hartley; and a Romantic language of emotion and affect that lays emphasis on mental processes (although the poet never conforms to

Kantian transcendentalism, or to Burke's anti-humanism).[7] Moving from Giuseppe Sertoli's distinction between the empowering and disempowering sublime, Nasi pinpoints in Wordsworth's aesthetic theory the coexistence of an individualizing and self-referential principle of the «egotistical sublime», and a de-individualizing principle of coalescence of subject and object that appears as highly conversant with the experience of «dolce naufragar» evoked in Giacomo Leopardi's poem *L'infinito* [SERTOLI 1987].

A further articulation of the Italian debate on Wordsworth's aesthetics underlines the inversion of the trajectory from the beautiful to the sublime at work in the *Guide to the Lakes*, in which, replicating the evolution from childhood to maturity, the aesthetic apprehension of nature moves from sublime to beautiful. Stefania D'Agata D'Ottavi argues that while sublime feelings are stimulated by the primary and primordial work of nature in ways which evoke the immediacy of youthful experience, the sense of the beautiful originates from the perception of a multiplicity of symmetrical parts uniting in a consistent whole, one that parallels the operations of the adult mind. If in Kant the sublime dynamic involves the magnificence of both nature and the human mind, in Wordsworth the aesthetic tension concerns two distinct modes of the human mind that can perceive the same object in terms of sublime or beautiful in accordance with its own degree of maturity. She thus concludes that the inverted trajectory symptomatizes Wordsworth's uneasiness about those unmediated and totalizing experiences which virtually threaten the integrity of the artist and his unflinching commitment to memory [D'AGATA D'OTTAVI 2000].

Millennial Wordsworth?

The Bicentennial of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* ignited critical interest in the generic features of the collection, as well as in its place within the Wordsworthian canon. In a sweeping study that joins together textual criticism and meta-critical discourse, Laura Bandiera retraces the critical history of *Lyrical Ballads* through an analysis of the reception of its controversial title [BANDIERA 2001]. Bandiera shows how, in contrast with the myth of originality circulated by Hazlitt and partially endorsed by the Victorians, recent scholarship on Wordsworth's «experiments» has relocated its generic affiliations within the context of the Romantic and European ballad revival, understood as a commodity of suburban culture. From this renovated perspective, what had initially appeared as a tautological title, advertising a somewhat tautological philosophy of composition, came to be perceived in terms of generic and discursive hybridity underpinned by a

[7] For an investigation of Wordsworth's aesthetics in connection with the German Kantian and post-Kantian tradition see VOLPE 2006.

problematic association of lyricism and subjectivity drawn from Hegel's *Aesthetics*. The kind of phenomenological and historicist readings offered by critics such as Geoffrey Hartman, Stuart Curran, Paul Hamilton, and Anne Janowitz, perceptibly prove how in the *Lyrical Ballads* subjectivity is not portrayed as a process of absolute and autonomous individuation, but as a deeply fragmented, elusive, and unstable construction that follows two interdependent routes: the overlapping of the lyric voice with those of the characters' voices, and the affective circularity that is activated between the poet and his readers [see HARTMAN 1964, CURRAN 1986, HAMILTON 1986, JANOWITZ 1998].

On similar grounds, my book-length study of the *Lyrical Ballads* attempts a reading of the collection against the grain of the «Great Decade» critical trope and its teleological implications, through an investigation of the nuanced and fractured «anthropology of narrators» which is inscribed in its different textual typologies [SPANDRI 2000]. Wordsworth's narrators are neither impersonal nor entirely personal, and fluctuate between Smithian sympathy and Romantic irony. They at once inhabit and create a contact zone between folklore and lyricism, whose most manifest result is a redistribution of agency from the individual to the community to a localized affective memory that, while assigning the poet the role of «upholder and preserver», acknowledges the existence of places outside the human perspective and independently from their functional destination.

Overall, Italian scholars have shown no great interest in purely theoretical issues related to Wordsworth's poetry and they appear less inspired, as well as inhibited, by theoretical fashions. At any rate, they can be said to have been more conversant with post-structuralist and phenomenological stances than with neo-historicist and materialist ones. A great deal of attention has been paid to Wordsworth «revisionary aesthetics» [see KELLEY 1988], which seems to invert the Burkean and Kantian categories traditionally associated to Romantic culture, as well as address the poet as a figure of transition from empiricism to idealism, with a strong hold on realism that he never discards. The latest contributions applaud the post-ideological shift in Romantic studies advocated by eco-poetics and theories of affect.

Despite his fervent past and present advocates, Wordsworth remains a fleeting presence in the Italian scholarship on British Romanticism.[8] To account for the reasons of such intermittence is no easy task. It might be conjectured that the poet's markedly Protestant version of Romanticism – with its emphasis on ordinariness of experience, confessional style, and a tension towards transcendence which, in keeping with a Unitarian sensibility, never gets rid of the claims of materiality – has not fared well in a country with a solid Catholic tradition and a feeble middle-class ethos. Italian

[8] I would like to thank Rosaria Valenza of the Arezzo University Library for her invaluable support in bibliographic research.

Romanticism was the offspring of a manifold sense of cultural oppression and political impotence, which may have brought later critics to sympathize rather with the heterodox, titanic, or sensualist sensitivities embodied by the other canonical Romantic poets than with the matter-of-fact and moderate version of Romantic agon offered by Wordsworth. Perhaps Wordsworth's relative critical misfortune is the persisting legacy of Emilio Cecchi's and Mario Praz's aversion to Protestant piety and artistic activity conceived in terms of self-inspection and self-surveillance. Yet, it is to be wished that the selfsame features that in the first part of the twentieth century gained Wordsworth the reputation of the «false philosopher» will orient the Italian critical debate towards a reappraisal of his poetry in relation to the compelling and unavoidable concerns which confront contemporary scholarship of Romanticism, in Italy as well as elsewhere.[9]

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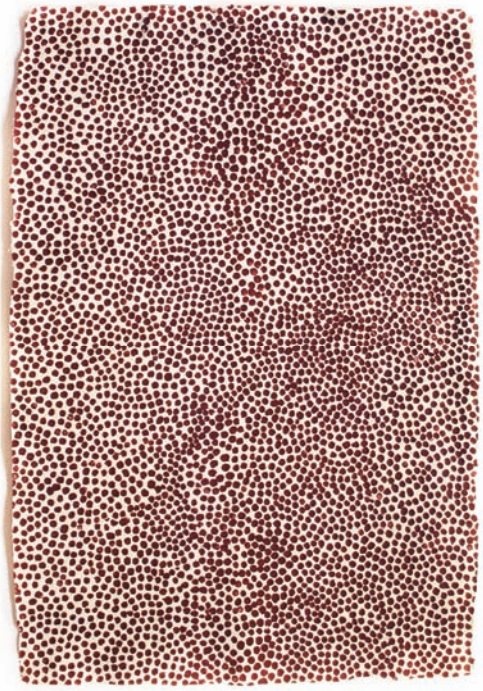
Poet's Corner



Introduction

Emma Mason

The three poets compiled in this section of our issue are all associated with «Ecopoetics@Warwick», a research and creative group associated with the Writing Programme in my home department, English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. As Jonathan Skinner, director of the group and one of our poets included here, states, ecopoetics is the «original 'home ec'», «the question of how creative endeavours can contribute to learning how to be at home on the planet, learning how to be better neighbours to our fellow species on the planet» [HETMAN 2013]. This, as an emergent infantry of ecocritics point out, takes poetry beyond nature writing even as it invokes the pastoral and the wilderness, generating an «applied poetics» able to map out urban and rural environments as well as poets' responses to how humans impact on these spaces. Skinner has been instrumental in establishing the field of ecopoetics: he founded his journal of the same name in 2001; and has had his work featured in several pivotal anthologies including Brenda Iijima's *The Ecolanguage Reader* (2010); and Anne Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street's *Ecopoetry Anthology* (2013). As the work featured in both anthologies attests, ecopoetics signifies a practice inclusive, not just of those who write poetry, but also of those who are willing to critically comment on questions related to the environment, from Kate Soper, Jonathan Bate and Lawrence Buell's early work on ecocriticism, Greta Garrd and Stacy Alaimo on ecofeminism, Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton on thing power, Kate Rigby and Laurel Kearns on ecotheology, Cary Wolfe and Timothy Clark on speciesism to the politico-poetic explorations of Bruno Latour, Rhian Williams and Donna Haraway. Any such list is obviously extensive and I do not offer a survey here [see instead MARLAND 2013; and SKINNER AND IIJIMA 2010b]. But by naming a few figures in the field, it becomes clear that whatever the approach, critic and poet alike are invested in foregrounding ecological concerns in their work both as a way to address other political, religious and social questions, but also as a way of focusing readers on the specific and the local, their own habitats, locales and homes. As Skinner

writes, «ecopoetics isn't about getting to go to Alaska or Yosemite. It's really about observing what's happening in your backyard» [HETMAN 2013].

The particularity of space and place ecopoetics encourages readers to reflect on effectively removes the usual barriers between 'academic' and 'non-academic' thinking on backyards. Despite warnings from critics like Morton that «forms of individual and local action» can turn into «ways of fending off the scope of the crisis», he also admits that the «experience of the local» evokes a «profound experience of strangeness» that demands discernment and attention [MORTON 2010, p. 50]. Examining anything close up changes our experience of it. For Wordsworth, close reading, thinking, listening and observing invites an attention to there-ness that results in care, relationship, compassion and renewal. Linguistic attempts to express such there-ness abound across disciplines. For Heidegger, we feel safeguarded and preserved in being once we learn how to «dwell» as if at «home»; for Zen master D. T. Suzuki, such dwelling is a «no thinking of thinking» that sanctions a feeling of «absolute 'is-ness'»; for the Christian mystic Simone Weil, attention is pivotal in creating «*necessary* connections»: «(Those which do not depend upon attention are not necessary)», Weil concludes [HEIDEGGER 1951/2001; SUZUKI 1955, p. 52; WEIL 1970, p. 90]. Ecological criticism echoes these concerns that environmental change must be as much motivated by care and emotion as scientific reasoning. As Eugene Anderson argues in *Ecologies of the Heart: Emotion, Belief and the Environment*: «Any management strategy that does not take human feelings into account simply will not work […] systems of thought that seem strange to modern scientists – *feng-shui*, spiritual kinship with animals, and similar beliefs – have worked effectively in preserving the environment, while modern 'rational' political economy has not» [ANDERSON 1996, pp. 13, 177]. And from a poet, Judith Wright, speaking at the National Parks Association in Canberra in 1968: «we must regenerate ourselves if we are to regenerate the earth […] [our] feelings and emotions must be engaged, and engaged on a large scale» [qtd. in RIGBY 2009].

This focus on the emotional content of environmental responsibility is not, however, equivalent to «some misty 'union with nature'» [ANDERSON 1996, p. 10]. Despite the kind of worry expressed by Dana Phillips that ecological thinking threatens to collapse into an «overly devotional» commitment, ecopoetics in fact locates readers in the historical and specific precisely by bringing emotion into dialogue with the material [PHILLIPS 2003, ix]. An example: Anderson, like Heidegger, Suzuki, Weil and Skinner, all write in the direct shadow of «Trinity», the first nuclear weapons test on July 16, 1945 in the White Sands deserts of New Mexico, a now notorious event that exposed civilians to thousands of times the recommended levels of radiation exposure. That the name «Trinity» was taken from a poem reveals the urgency of attending to and caring about language as an articulation of our relationship with the environment. Here is what J. Robert Oppenheimer,

lead scientific director of the test, answered in response to a query about the name of the test site:

> Why I chose the name is not clear, but I know what thoughts were in my mind. There is a poem of John Donne, written just before his death, which I know and love. From it a quotation: «As West and East / In all flatt Maps—and I am one—are one, / So death doth touch the Resurrection». […] That still does not make a Trinity, but in another, better known devotional poem Donne opens, «Batter my heart, three person'd God» [RHODES 1986, pp. 571-572].

Citing Donne's «Hymn to God, my God, in my sickness» (or possibly his poem «Litany»), in addition to his fourteenth *Holy Sonnet*, Oppenheimer's statement is suggestive of almost semi-conscious «thoughts» «in my mind» that are not reflected on or attended to even though they point directly to Donne's sense of the oneness of life across the globe that any weapon of violence annihilates. Critics usually zone in on «Batter my heart» in the context of Oppenheimer's role in developing the atomic bomb, partly because it ostensibly gestures towards a redemptive destruction («Your force to breake, blowe, burn and make me new». But Donne's spiritual call to God has no parallels with a missile that would a few months later exterminate hundreds of thousands of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and produce injuries and illness that would effect what Rob Nixon calls 'slow violence' on those communities for decades to come [NIXON 2013].

In fact Oppenheimer's recourse to Donne, and later to the *Bhagavad-Gita* from which he solemnly quoted during a 1965 documentary («Vishnu is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty and to impress him takes on his multi-armed form and says, 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds'») is indicative of the knotty relationship between the spiritual and ecological already signaled in Phillips' anxious reference to the «devotional». Wordsworth's hallowed invocation of nature is directly echoed by the «Earth Charter», written by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 to outline a set of «fundamental ethical principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st century» [EARTH CHARTER]. As the main page of its website declares: «The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust». The «sacred» is a site that brings together poetry, theology, philosophy and ecology to gesture towards a way of thinking about being that we find in Wordsworth, a poetry that counters the «soporific effects of economic convenience and normalized greed» with the «supernatural world, a world beyond decay and death» [KEARNS AND KELLER 2007, XII]. As Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller argue in their pioneering anthology, *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*,

«spiritual language and religious actions» are «indispensable parts of the repertory in the struggle to awaken commitment to a just and sustainable planetary future», and are as much part of the «anthropocene» as recycling and resource management [KEARNS AND KELLER 2007, p. 3]. Ecopoetics is a site wherein Kate Rigby's «ecoprophetic witness» meets David Dunn's acoustic ecology and Cecilia Vicuña's reimaginings of debris and decay underpin the poetic echoes of bird songs from Rumi to Ronald Johnson. The poets we include here – Skinner alongside colleagues Peter Larkin and George Ttoouli – cannot be elided as «ecopoets», but their poetry does share a refusal to simply «represent» the world in verse, preferring what Skinner calls «the study of words in entropy at work» [SKINNER 2010b, p. 24]. Skinner's thinking of «entropology» seeks what he calls «a better balance between production and neglect» in writing, conceptualization and ethics, and engenders what Peter Jaeger calls a «non-dualistic» relationship between language and the natural world in which form responds to decline, disintegration and loss [SKINNER 2010b, 13; JAEGER 2013, p. 65].

In the poems featured here, we witness meditative mappings of the human and non-human that incarnate the woods, whale songs, radio transmissions, swifts and deer to think them again through politics, anthropology, myth, cartography and our relationship to observing and listening. Skinner, Larkin and Ttoouli create phenomenologies of the world from which the ego is removed to enable a «contemplation, activism, and self-reflexivity» that «enacts through language the manifold relationship between the human and the other-than-human world» [FISHER-WIRTH and STREET 2013b, xxx]. In doing so, their poetry speaks also with the work being done by Warwick's Critical Environments group, a cross-disciplinary collective that seeks to bring together environmental studies, critical theory, literary studies, creative writing and the visual and sound arts to reflect on our relationship to energy, food cultures, natural disasters, unemployment and world ecology. It also spotlights a genre that this issue in its entirety foregrounds as urgently central to continual conjurings of ways through an anthropocenic imposition of scarcity and shortage. Wordsworth, far from the caricatured liberal environmentalist to which some critics reduce him, was painfully aware of the poetic as that which demands its reader be present with its ruined form and discover there a tranquillity in incompletion and decay. As a way of concluding, I quote such a moment below, followed by a second comment from Larkin that at once echoes and animates Wordsworth:

> I well remember that those very plumes,
> Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,
> By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,
> As once I passed, into my heart conveyed
> So still an image of tranquillity,
> So calm and still, and looked so beautiful

Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,
That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
That passing shows of Being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream, that could maintain,
Nowhere, dominion o'er the enlightened spirit
Whose meditative sympathies repose
Upon the breast of Faith.
[*The Excursion* I. ll. 942-955]

When it comes to spiritualizing our capacity to be in this world, our window or interface is the merest chink, but it's through such a narrow defile, a startling glimpse between the enfilades of trees, that all genuinely rare answerability, the glade of participation, comes. [LARKIN 2010, p. 58]

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George Ttoouli

Something hurtling across the woods,
which you try to record

> *if I were a swift cloud to fly with thee*
> —PB Shelley

Positioned by the hundred of paces
the speakers taut pockets of range
at clearings among the sycamores,
porous barriers within which speech
recedes. The birds launched vectors
at the recording transect by months
and he waited in all rains and suns
every range of weather pockets and
whatever else the climate pitched
between that summer and into autumn.

ossif[ied] eons [and] soft aces
[if] spears [s]ought poets' orange
alea[tory] song the sigh [of] amours
poor harrier sin which spe-
c[i]es etherise haunched seconds
[b]ather orange eyes moan
an eu[logy] way e[v]en arraigned ones
veer in [o]range heath poet sound-
hover [silently] [ ]
e[v]en a humming [bird] an io[ta] [of] awe

And then one day the vector catches
to a perfect coincide; the bird launches
along the path of the recorders
and the song takes off just at the metre
of the third microphone. What wonder!
Between the third and fourth you hear
her trill fading just briefly into the far
sky then returning as she reaches
the next node in you: transect. How much
have you earned in so brief a life?

Ossified eons land their soft aces
as spears which seek the poet's ranging,
aleatory song. The sigh of amorous
poor harriers, in which species
etherise their haunched seconds
at the orator's eyes and morning
is an eulogy, a way of evening arraigned once
verse inaugurates the angels' heathen poetry.
Windhover silence [here again]
this even humming bears an iamb of awe.

If I could just bring you back with love
then thought wouldn't be so painful

so many already instituted concepts, practices, and values
are saturated with contempt for the earth and the well being
of its inhabitants
—Lorraine Code

The white tail up deer flees
from a train too far perceives
rumble in the tussocks
perceives speed from and in
the higher plane

I sit up I train
my eyes down track around
receive identify
shape but not type in the turning
a perhaps muntjac and fear
in the same motion in the same
deep grass

In this I'm sure there's wonder
the animal needs not
consider: how sense
in neural networks
geopositions eye and skull
deer and train
passing passing

Can I even remember what happened
without repainting the scene in brighter colours?

And if i could
train without thought
i would respond
with love and only love
to the deer that flees
with its white tail up

Jonathan Skinner

Listening

the sonic delay
a sampling strategy
a tremolo call
an app for listening
to the whales
in dramatic decline
feeds back on itself

an ethics as revolutionary
today as in another time

you don't have to go far
afield, singing in a different
key playing a clarinet
having a bird respond
recreating a New World
soundscape

the radio on the fridge says
here is noise and here is whale
signal, a prompt, a release
a story about almost dying
that takes us beyond intuition

into the iron mountain
of memory, immediacy and blame
wondering whose fault it was
when the oil spilled

In Step

The processing in
human airborne
listening drills down
to individual acoustic
performers

the clear thrush voice
speaking

to the effects of oil
exploration: “hey,
anybody out there?”

the time delays, rewinds,
early impressions
leave us fictions, bass

drops—out in central
Africa where the cultural
heritage of ivory bill
imitations

changes our lives
repeats a cycle,
a commercial
definition of noise

the recording is
physical not neural

a floating territory
liquid, reedy

bringing us the continuous
hot whistling sound
of working at our desks

Subsonic

only hearing the upper registers
we look for elephant calls
investigating the given sounds
of upland sandpipers' slurred whistle
the impact of commerce on the oceans
the system that crosses species groups
putting our electronic skills to work
in the service of nature

duetting is a major component
in the upstate NY gorge country
where the cardinals we never recorded
are backed up on tape
to create space outside a human construction
a whale song in a wooden boat hull
changing in the same way at the same time

it's so loud you can hear
Homer with his rosy-fingered dawn

how the two organs of his syrinx
were overloaded and damaged
how absolute the law of impermanence
like him we can stop listening stop
putting our microphones under the water
our mice into the floorboards

Peter Larkin

Hollow Allow Woods, 2: pit / hollow/ trees [extract]

Can this gouging (how stone goes apart) be hollow enough, not shut down on its assault signals of alien servicing, unsown for unthrown? can it recede enough to sense the bowl of itself, draw back on its damage? which a restoration (metacontortion) by no companionable content might infill? not to crouch behind off-laded space but engage in the stiff verticality of its blank obsession nearest redressed texture mirrored toward what the skies wouldn't shed were it any flat sink

expectant deep void but
harrowed out shallower
to be an offer to
hollowant free-standing

bared to area acutely
susceptible successional
rages of bristling endowment
raw base pitted out
for a play of hollows

a hollow infilled by tree
refraction achieves its narrow-
ing stage,concave waves
jogging a crescent to apex
amid pre-tabular
amples of sky

Trees prick a way for attentive cross-ply but are not the fallen into area serious with hollow is what out-jets its landzero with negative rump but nothing *overtly* moundal could ever be steeped from uptake of trees this way woodland compares itself to ceilings of admission, prepares its hollow for a well-set gone missing

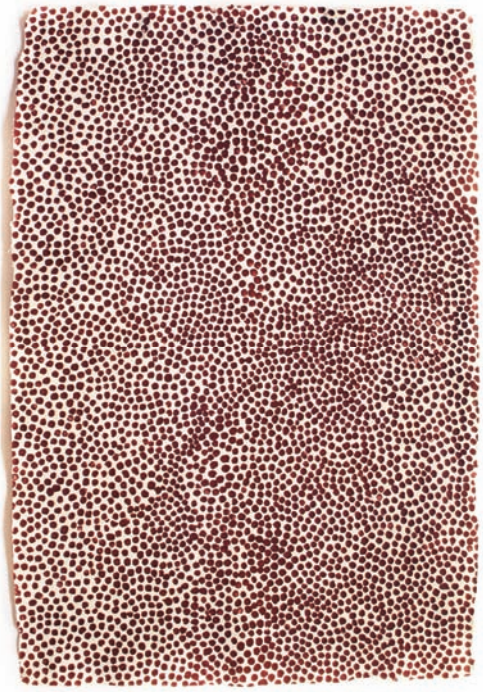
Where secondary woodland inducts a diversionary infill scabs after void via scoops of stem plugging into the depression enscripted with a fore-bowled it scribbles an assignment vertical in peripheries of resectioning smooth rigs of assuagement the hollow itself more like a bag-drop onto counter-assailment

no mouth for trees
a hollow is deserted
transience crossing (too
thickly creasing)
absence

foreground frond strumming
the wires until they distend
unable to occupy except
along vertical brittle-
ness of extreme shelter
in the midst its con-
denser drumming

Until a hollow is further stuck (studded) the earth as friable tree-layer slaps departure aright in short deepages then swaps every escape for a root of the crushed deposit no longer stubby if much more scarcely stocked now at last it can be baulked as hollow among woods branches try out the giving pieces able to rub in even the micro-violated dazzle of descent almost no remainder as blunt finder but sharply open to transverse colonization taper towards the inference a relationally lacking thing and attract vernacular burnishings to its reserve

Recensioni



Mary Jacobus, *Romantic Things: A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2012, pp. 211. ISBN 978-0226390666

Mary Jacobus' *Romantic Things* is an impressive book, highly recommended for a wide literary and interdisciplinary audience. It is a collection of essays written in the light of recent developments in «thing theory», some of which were originally presented at conferences, or published in special issues or edited collections. The eight chapters reveal the author's subtle meditations on the relationships between poetry and the life/death of things. Jacobus evokes the world of objects and phenomena in nature as expressed in Romantic poetry, alongside the theme of sentience and sensory deprivation in literature and art. She explores the liminal spaces opened up by lyric poetry – especially by its attention to things that solicit the understanding of a subject – emphasizing the extraordinary psychic and material vitality of objects.

«An inanimate world is not a dead world» – Jacobus argues – «things give meaning to the world; they are not merely given meaning by the uses we make of them, or by the symbolic significance we attach to them in our systems of exchange» [p. 5]. This lyrical reflection on the profound communication among poetry, the psyche, and the life and death of things goes deep into philosophy and poetry, painting and literary theory, nineteenth-century British literature and twentieth-century psychoanalysis. For Jacobus both things and language shape physical and social relations. *À propos*, the author reminds us that matter, materiality, objects and things never lose sight of questions of language as chapters on clouds, trees, stones, paintings, apple orchards, epitaphs, silence, but also literary phenomena such as citation, translation and theories of language, illuminate.

Jacobus' engagement with poetry and matter is a challenge for those interested in New Materialism, Speculative Realism, and Object Oriented Ontology. As a scholar of the Romantic period, Jacobus certainly shows a sustained interest in poets like Wordsworth and Clare, but she nonetheless discusses objects and attributes that test our perceptions and speak as much to contemporary philosophy as Romantic poetry. Helping us think more deeply about things that are at once material and immaterial, visible and invisible, seen and unseen, felt and unfeeling, *Romantic Things* provides a fruitful dialogue with a wide range of poets and thinkers. While Jacobus thinks through trees, rocks, clouds (as the title, taken from McCullers' eponymous story, suggests), she also imagines breath, silence, loss and blindness through John Constable, Rainer Maria Rilke, Gerhard Richter, John Cage, and W.G. Sebald, all of whom make appearances around the central figure of William Wordsworth. Other privileged texts include the posthumously published

writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the later writings of Jacques Derrida, the poetic philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy, as well as references to Christopher Stone's and Thomas Nagel's works, and recent Heideggerian ecocriticism. As the author points out in her Introduction, she forgoes the de Manian tradition of rhetorical deconstruction in favour of a post-Derridean reading practice. Derrida's reflections on tact, self-portraiture, ruins, his theory of the gift, and his last interview on how to die emerge as illuminating moments in the dialectic tension between things and persons held by lyric poetry.

The intellectual energy of this book is palpable and pervasive. It flows through the dialectics visible/invisible in the cloud studies of Clare and Constable in chapter one, which Jacobus reads in the light of Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, as well as through the speculations about the knowable and the unknowable in often failing human tactile perceptions, as is in Wordsworth's *Nutting*, in chapter three. In chapter four, the same powerful energy is released through the peculiar analysis of sign-systems in the silent visual world of Wordsworth's deaf Dalesman, where the mimetic theory of signs taken from the nature of the object they represent allows Jacobus's keen insights into the dialectics between muteness and the new figurative voice given to things. A likewise vivid exploration of how to speak to the dead through the lyric «gift» of the epitaph in Wordsworth's elegy «Distressful gift!» in chapter five, provides Jacobus with the opportunity for a memorial tribute to Derrida himself.

All the essays in *Romantic Things* move steadily towards eclecticism and itinerancy, while the author thinks − and also thinks about the thinking − of things. Her chapters are eclectic and vagrant, reflecting an immensely rich reading itinerary in themselves: «I have let my things take me where they seemed to want to go» [p. 4]. It would be impossible to do justice to the subtlety of the conceptualizations and arguments offered by Jacobus's close readings. Her astute reflections on the insistence of the object, the creative associations she discovers among things, life, death, thinking and sensing, and the engagement with all her privileged interlocutors make her volume a significant contribution for anyone interested in lyric and lyric theory.

Valeria Pellis (Università di Firenze)

Peter Larkin, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Promising Losses*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 280. ISBN 0230337368; 978-0230337367

Wordsworth and Coleridge have long been considered philosophical poets and this collection of essays further demonstrates the philosophical

importance of their poetry. By bringing together his essays, written over the last 30 years, Peter Larkin achieves an argument for the possibility of philosophical poetry, that is, poetry that engages in the activity of philosophical thinking rather than merely having philosophical themes. As Larkin's writing captures, both in his close readings and his own poetry (demonstrated by the inclusion of an extract from his sequence of poetry «Brushwood by Inflection») – this activity is something an attentive reader of their work is invited to share in. In illustrating the role for the reader and the impact of engaging in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetic-philosophic projects, Larkin shows that reading the work of these Romantic poets is just as relevant to our philosophical concerns today as it has ever been.

With particular reference to nature and ecocriticism, Larkin shows through critical reflection on these canonical writers that their poetry is not straightforwardly philosophical; it also provides a challenge, a critique of philosophical inquiry and the insights we gain from such inquiry: «here is a poetics liable to probe the resilience of contemporary ecological insights, even while confirming their general stance» [p. 77]. The experience of the poem, engaging in its imaginative world tests our own capacities and possibilities for thought and feeling. In discussing «The Ruined Cottage», Larkin writes: «As her garden becomes overrun with weeds, we read nature in its eighteenth century garb as a presence of underlying harmony nonetheless in a constant need of being curbed by human order to keep it true» [p. 82]. And such a vision provides us with a metaphor for the nature of belief and the importance of continually testing our beliefs and character through our engagement with such poetry; as our minds become cluttered with our everyday experiences, we need such imaginative experiences to help us weed unwanted beliefs to keep us true.

Through the central themes of promise and loss, this book also explores the tensions between philosophy and poetry. Larkin notes Wordsworth's own worry about the relationship between the personal and the philosophical in his poetry; a tension between the particular and the universal, which sets the main question reviving in the background throughout this book, *what is the value of promising losses in their philosophic-poetical offerings?* What Larkin shows is that it is a philosophy based in human experience that acknowledges the «relativity of promise and loss in terms of the unaddressable unknown (enigma) or the already addressed unknowable (the mysterious)» [p. 6]; questioning the nature of time and memory, the relationship between youth and age, and exploring the limits of language in capturing human experience, whilst demonstrating the need for a philosophy to be conducted by poetic means, one which fulfils promise through acknowledging loss.

Through Larkin's own critical response, we come to see the importance of the relationship between the poet and the reader in creating a shared dialogue. Take as an example, Larkin's extended discussion of the cloud

motif in Wordsworth's poetry which explores how «the image of a cloud works as something insubstantial but not indeterminate» [p. 4], getting the reader to think of the relationship of the metaphysical to the phenomenological: «If nature in Wordsworth is partly bruised by his precarious dissolving of the metaphysical within the phenomenal, it is cloud-texture which bodies forth that glow of friction in the prospects which result, and which in layering and occluding (absorbing) the sublime agencies also lightens and whitens that glow» [p. 57].

What Larkin shows is how both writers explore the philosophical through promising something unfulfilled. Wordsworth's approach was to pose questions and demonstrate the elusiveness of experience; Larkin shows Wordsworth's «weaving of questions into narrative: narratives which generate a questioning, and questions that devolve on narrative» [p. 64]. By bringing narrative and question together in this way acts to promise loss through on going deferral: «It is narrative including its question in itself in a way deferring release: the weathercock is held steady, the question cannot be turned upon itself to regain its own emergence from a visionary world of inscrutable event, which questioning has triggered and now shadows» [p. 73].

Coleridge suppresses questions by invoking the imagination that falls short of adequate description. The experience of engaging with such works is that we hear voices in their poetry that guides us but leaves the reader to attempt to carry on the philosophical project that occurs in the dialectic of Wordsworth and Coleridge. This gives us the reason for considering their poetry as part of a unified philosophical project. For instance, Larkin argues that «The Ancient Mariner» with its resistance to questions acts as an interlocutor to Wordsworth's poems, which dwells in questioning – the implicit questions bring tension to «The Ancient Mariner», causing feelings of uneasiness, which has the potential to give way to the most difficult questions of human existence.

For Larkin, the idea is that withholding promises furthers thought rather than blocking it. Such withholding is evident in both Wordsworth and Coleridge – and in both cases this leads to the philosophical in a way that (non-poetic) philosophical analysis seems unable: «for Coleridge, 'metaphysical incompleteness is mysteriously a ground of hope, because by recognising their insufficingness human beings leave room for it to be filled'» [p. 214]. In this way promising losses opens us up to the philosophical (and theological), to make room for finding those answers to what we do not know or acknowledging what we cannot know, which must be at the heart of any true philosophical inquiry.

This is an immensely important book for anyone interested in the relationship between poetry and philosophy. Larkin helps us to understand the relationship between the two poets, going beyond a friendship to a necessary philosophical relationship; the questioning of Wordsworth and the questioning of such questioning in Coleridge, which shapes philosophical

inquiry and critiques it, therefore moving us closer to discovering the truths of human experience.

Karen Simecek (University of Birmingham)

MARK LUSSIER, *Romantic Dharma: The Emergence of Buddhism into Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. xx + 231. ISBN 0230105459

The cover of *Romantic Dharma* shows an anonymous late eighteenth-century Tibetan *thanga* representing Amitahba (The Buddha of Infinite Light). This object – which belongs to Mark Lussier's own collection and hangs above the altar in his domestic meditation space – stresses the fascinating dialogue between the personal and the professional pervading the whole book, whose title juxtaposes the author's eminent scholarship with his dedicated practice of Buddhism. In his words:

> the thanga functions as an objective correlative for both the project's inspiration and the form that inspiration takes critically, in that it speaks directly to the scholarly concerns regarding the arrival of Buddhist knowledge to the West, the teaching and mentoring activities undertaken within the academy, and the personal commitment to embody in thought and practice engaged forms of Buddhism and Romanticism alike. [p. xiv]

Moreover, as Lussier points out in the Preface, «the coincidence of the directed and the accidental» [p. xiii] is crucial to the shaping of this volume, and – entirely in keeping with this – he opts for a synchronic approach.

In the first place, *Romantic Dharma* explicitly aims to examine the nineteenth-century emergence of Buddhist thought into European consciousness, focusing on the intellectual and ethical analogies between Romantic and Buddhist textualized discourses. Secondly, the author seeks to transmigrate these shared affinities into the contemporary world and real-life practices, articulating a sort of «integrated model», as he called it during a 2011 reading from the book at Arizona State University, where he is professor of English.[1]

After explaining the genesis of this compelling project and his methodological approach throughout the Preface, in the opening chapter

[1] <http://vimeo.com/33632004> [last accessed: 14 October 2013].

«Enlightenment East and West», Lussier explores the fruitful synergy between Buddhism and Romanticism, «mov[ing] from historical encounters through linguistic engagements to intellectual and spiritual resonances» [p. 2]. It is worth noting that his temporal span coincides with Raymond Williams's Romantic chronology – that is from the birth of Blake to the death of Wordsworth (1757-1850) – the periodic range in which, according to Lussier, Buddhism historically emerged into European awareness. However, this introductory section is not limited to the purely Romantic contacts with *dharma*, but also considers the beginnings of the gradual «process of encounter» [p. 10] between the Buddhist tradition and the West. In the following sub-sections, Lussier examines the first «British Entanglements with Tibet» [p. 15] and focuses on Sir William Jones – the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal – the earliest Orientalist scholar to export Indian culture and Hindu literature to Britain, «creat[ing] a linguistic and textual counterflow» from the periphery to the centre [p. 22]. Chapter one closes with the pioneering figure of Alexander Csoma de Körös, the Hungarian «Father of Tibetology» [p. 36], who will be the protagonist of the second chapter.

This philologist and adventurer played a crucial role in the encounter between Buddhism and European understanding in the first half of the nineteenth century. After graduating from Göttingen University in 1818, Csoma walked to Tibet to find the origins of his own language and spent several months at the Monastery of Zangla, where he undertook Tibetan studies under the tutelage of the lama Sangye Puntsog. He compiled and published his *Tibetan-English Dictionary* and *Tibetan Grammar in English* helped by the Asiatic Society. Lussier also mentions Brian Houghton Hodgson, a Haileybury graduate who travelled to India and Nepal and – like Csoma – contributed to the transmission of previously unknown Buddhist texts between 1827 and 1844. Then he examines the mainly positive reception *dharma* in the West and its dialogic exchanges with philosophy (Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche).

The next chapter entitled «Romanticism's Four Noble Truths» establishes a parallel between the core principles of all Buddhist schools and Romantic conceptual concerns through Nietzsche's idea of suffering. Lussier originally approaches Romantic authors backwards, «using the reception derivable from within Nietzsche's work (and filtered through Schopenhauer) and employing it as a hermeneutic tool to works by Blake and Shelley to bring shared philosophical and ethical commitments into view» [p. 56]. The second part of chapter three analyses *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, «Blake's *Sūtra* of Wisdom» [p. 69]. Lussier argues that Blake's work, both from a structural and thematic perspective, «operates like the unique combination of critique and affirmation located in the Buddha's sūtras generally and the literature of the *prajñāpāramitā* (Skt. the perfection of wisdom) specifically» [p. 56].

Chapter four – «Inner Revolution: The Luminous Mind of Enlightenment» – offers a detailed and contextual close reading of Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. Here, Lussier initially compares the adaptations of the Promethean story by Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*) and her husband, two examples of multi-layered modern appropriations which «similarly reconfigure mythic forms as a vehicle to explore, and ultimately reconcile, the operations of mind and its drive toward outer embodiment» [p. 86]. Subsequently, he focuses on Percy's mythical transmigration in Buddhist terms, arguing that the Romantic writer

> depicts a staged passage from selfhood to a no-self state manifested by the Titan (as opposed to Mary's deconstruction of an omnipresent self exhibited by Victor), which results in the emergence of the mind of enlightenment (Skt. *bodhichitta*) as the end of a process of gradual awakening. [p. 88]

After some further reflections on *Prometheus Unbound* – mental and material interactions and the transformation of a (personal) inner revolution into a (cosmic) outer one – chapter five juxtaposes Shelley's lyric drama with Blake's *Milton* in order to examine «the emergence of concepts in Romanticism analogous to, but not generated from within, Buddhist views of dependent origination and complementary operations at the location of consciousness and cosmos» (pp. 120-121). Even if Shelley's model is Greek while *Milton* adapts Hebraic and Christian mythemes, both poets choose a «similar assemblage method» [p. 123] with a view to merging individual awareness with the cosmos through self-eradication/annihilation.

The last chapter «The Romantic Book of Living and Dying» combines textual analysis with biographical references. Lussier starts with Blake's view of death, an event that – for the poet and his characters – «simply functions as a transition from one existential state to another, which profoundly links self-annihilation to an awakening into enlightenment in his writing» [p. 150]. The poet's painless and saint-like death shares strong affinities with Buddhist masters' attitudes towards demise. Shifting to the second generation of English Romantic poets, Lussier discusses the tragic life of John Keats (and his serene acceptance of death) and the Shelley's equally unfortunate existences, whereas the last section examines «the function of death» [p. 167] in Lord Byron's fascinating work and tangled life.

With the Afterword, *Romantic Dharma* comes full circle, as Lussier's Buddhist practice and professional interests/duties intersect and converge. After noting that English Romantic poets were deeply committed to various «forms of engagement, from the broadest possible international stage to intimate scenes of love and care» [p. 178], the author moves on to a reflection on the didactic attitude of Buddhist thought and the empathetic «shift from a pedagogy of compulsion to one of compassion» [p. 187] in higher education.

He convincingly argues that this model forms the basis for his own relationships with students, stimulating them and assuring greater attainment: «this approach strives to cultivate the maximum amount of self-direction while providing the maximum amount of emotional and intellectual support, conveying to them the view that ultimately they and they alone are responsible for their own scholastic enlightenment» [p. 186].

Wide-ranging, original and accurately researched, *Romantic Dharma* is a pleasurable and challenging reading experience for students and scholars interested in the unpredictable and as yet unexplored ways in which English Romanticism and Buddhism have been conversant, as well as mutually enlightening. Although the study may seem to suffer from a lack of historical basis, his author announces at the very beginning that his approach is voluntarily personal and synchronic and that «the case argued here […] is not one of direct influence or parallel development, since most Romantic writers manifesting this coincidence of philosophical thought could not know with any specificity 'anything about Buddhism'» [pp. 5-6]. Lussier's concern is not with «direct contact and subsequent influence but rather […] the confluence of analogous views of mental operations and social commitments» [p. 94]. The value of *Romantic Dharma* lies in its inspiring combination of academic research and intimate exploration. As such, it should be read not merely as a scholarly investigation based on hard textual evidence but also as an encounter of different kinds of wisdom sharing subtle and intriguing affinities.

Maria Elena Capitani (Università di Parma)

Adam Potkay, *Wordsworth's Ethics*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 2012, pp. 254. ISBN 978-1-4214-0708-1

> If Wordsworth had lived a little in London, and felt the presence of some one who was manly and differed from him, it would have done him service
> [Theodore Parker, on Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoires of William Wordsworth*]

Adam Potkay ends his eloquently written and beautifully designed monograph on Wordsworth with this 1851 letter from Theodore Parker to Miss Hannah Stevenson, at once addressing «the now-familiar assumption of Wordsworth's anti-climax» [p. 202] and the oft-heard criticism that the poet himself was a domesticated recluse who lived a life of seclusion and disengagement with the sort of society he wrote about. Perhaps Parker is right – some masculine company and the realities of the metropolis would

have turned Wordsworth's eye and mind to different subjects. Instead of vagrants, he would have written of the moody, tongue-tied tramps as in Matthew Arnold's «West London», or of Thomas De Quincey's female peripatetics in Soho. But are these characters really that different from Wordsworth's own idiot boy, or Martha Ray, or the Cumberland beggar? When considering Wordsworth's ethics, his own semi-secluded, rural position towards those around him and towards mankind is crucial in helping to establish his own ethical ideas. Though criticised for being «too fond of 'the least attractive portions' of mankind» [p. 202] by Parker, Wordsworth's consideration of vagrants, discharged soldiers, single mothers and wanderers shows a foundational interest in other human beings in general.

Potkay, intentionally or not, bookends his study of Wordsworth's ethics with two questions. One, a response perhaps to the increasing modern pressures of the «value» of the humanities, demands a semi-pragmatic answer, while the other, a question the poet poses to one of his most famous characters, is posed also to us: «How is it that you live, and what is it that you do?» That reaching out, that concern for the other which is the quiet undercurrent in Wordsworth's «poetry of encounter» [p. 31], is the starting point for all ethics.

Wordsworth's Ethics begins by putting into writing what many students have at some point considered: «Why read Wordsworth? Why read poetry at all?» For a book about ethics, this is a bold question to begin with, a question gnawing at humanities scholars in particular over the past twenty years. Tracing the notion of ethics through John Stuart Mill, Matthew Arnold, Levinas, Aristotle, Kant, Hazlitt, Shaftesbury and Roman Stoicism, Potkay does not constrict himself to a single ethical model, as Wordsworth was also selective with models that suited his poetic needs. He does, however, read modern ethical thinkers retrospectively into the poetry, using only what suits his argument. By not subsuming Wordsworth to one school, he allows the poetry and its embedded ethics to read itself, not the other way around. Yet if there is one critic whose theories underpin the work, it is Levinas, who appears in six out of the ten chapters. The bedrock for his thesis – «how ethics can be done in poetry, and especially through the *music* of poetry» [p. 4] – is laid down with two crucial conditions. First, that the ethics he discusses are not particular to Wordsworth; and second that he is not assessing Wordsworth as a man or biographical subject. Steering sharply away from a post-Victorian and further, post-Auschwitz moralising criticism, Potkay sets his mission clearly: to show how poetry's imperative «is to attach us to a world that is always [...] scarred by history and the poet's own complicity with it» [p. 9]. This he achieves by taking his readers chronologically through Wordsworth's entire oeuvre via numerous ways of thinking about ethics and morality, beginning with hearing, or in his word, audition. From Biblical imperatives rooted in Old Testament duty and obedience to absorbing oneself in one's environment in the way of

eighteenth-century loco-descriptive poetry, Potkay shows how the first step to many of Wordsworth's ethical ideas began in listening, not the seeing it is often in tension with, as in:

> A heart that vibrates evermore, awake [...]
> Sees sense, through Nature's rudest forms betrayed,
> Tremble obscure in fountain, rock, and shade;
> And while a secret power those forms endears
> Their social accents never vainly *hears*. [p. 23]

Yet the vehicle of musicality is not the only means by which he provokes his readers. He moves from the ear to the eye in his examination of Wordsworthian ethics before the face of another, relying on Levinas as the fulcrum upon which post-modern ethics turns. With his keen eye for connecting characteristics, he moves on to «thing theory» to convey Wordsworth's brilliant and broad engagement with the term. But rather than continuing on a Heideggerian trajectory, Potkay proceeds to explore the history of «thing» from an etymological and linguistic perspective. Looking into «things» as they once were opens a plethora of interpretations and as such, expands the sorts of relations and their ethical parameters that men can have with them. Yet in considering «things» as a unified whole, he extends the idea of ethics beyond the «facialised» other to the face of Nature, bringing Wordsworth into the modern realm of ecological ethics through both sight and sound.

Further, he takes twentieth-century criticism on the sublime to task on the lack of consideration of what he calls «love ethics» (so often seen in Wordsworth's poetry), that is, the mind's transcendence of the natural/social world that finally cannot fulfil its desire. Morality, Potkay argues, «is for Wordsworth partly immanent in nature» [p. 126] as nature can teach by accidents. He argues against the masculine-feminine dichotomy in feminist readings of nature, but remains firmly of the view that Wordsworth's sublime was a feminist one, with its emphasis on the fragility and vulnerability of humans. His «feminized Wordsworth», thus, is not one of negative connotations. Instead, he successfully answers the problem of living in solitude and being socially engaged by using the female «kindred independence» of «Home at Grasmere», as demonstrated by the Leech Gatherer in *Resolution and Independence.*

Employing his knowledge and past studies of the Bible and literature, Potkay maintains the Biblical ethic as a *basso continuo* throughout his book. In particular, he offers several new and illuminating readings of Old Testament echoes in Wordsworth's poetry. In his reading of *Peter Bell*, for instance, he hears the resonance of the Biblical story of Balaam and the ass in the Book of Numbers, as both characters experience a moral change after mistreating a donkey [p. 68]. Never quite letting the theme of music escape

his range, he engages with an analysis of one of Wordsworth's lesser-known works, his last musical poem, «Stray Pleasures». He traces the poem's use of the unusual phrase «loving-kindness» to the Hebrew word *hecedh* [p. 12] as seen in Psalm 26. The Biblical, however, provides only one part of the infrastructure of thinking about 'common good' that concerned Wordsworth and is balanced with other meta-ethical readings.

Well focused, brilliantly organised and intelligently argued, Potkay's book is the sort that serves not just as a guide and reader for those interested in Wordsworth's moral thinking and philosophy, but as a humane and thought-provoking study of the author and his or her place in the literary canon. Potkay does not omit any major works yet finds the space to dive deep into the Wordsworth oeuvre, drawing on examples from lesser-known works while presenting the classics in a new light, all the while clearly distinguishing between the poet's use of different ethical theories without fear of the «antihumanist excesses» [p. 204] that have come to shape modern criticism. And although his efforts in attempting to answer the question he set off with are fruitful and erudite, it remains open as one that invites us to ask both why, but also how we read Wordsworth, both inside and outside of ethics.

Judyta Frodyma (St Catherine's, Oxford)

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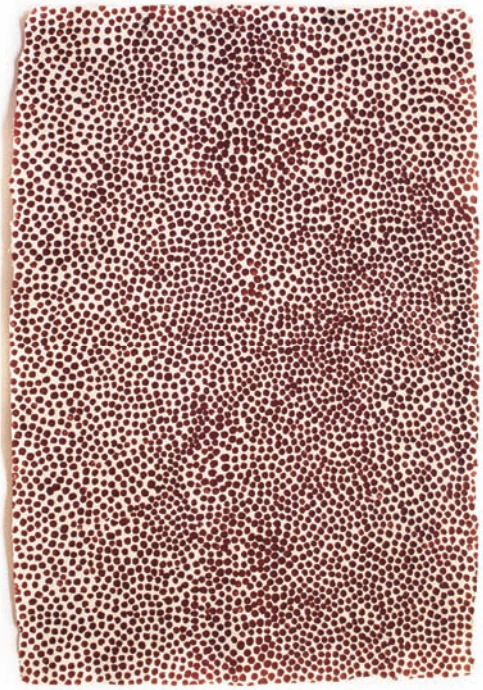

International Conference

NASSR 2014: Romantic Organization – The 22nd Annual North American Society for the Study of Romanticism Conference
Washington (DC), July 10-13, 2014.

SPONSORED by: American University, George Mason University, Georgetown University, George Washington University, John Hopkins University, The University of Maryland, and The Library of Congress.

TOPICS include: societies (erotic, political, scientific, artistic, radical); bodily organizations (organs, anatomy, physiology, affect, emotion); mental organizations (phrenology, psychology, imagination, brain); knowledge (taxonomy, discourse, categories, philosophical, historical, literary); encyclopedia (forms of knowledge).

SPEAKERS AND SPECIAL SESSIONS LEADERS include: Srinivas Aravamudan, Alan Bewell, Marshall Brown, Fred Burwick, Julie Carlson, David Collings, Jeff Cox, Adriana Craciun, Nora Crook, Joel Faflak, Mary Favret, Libby Fay, Marilyn Gaull, Kevin Gilmartin, Steven Goldsmith, Kevis Goodman, Nick Halmi, Diane Hoeveler, Theresa Kelley, Jonathan Kramnick, Jacqueline Labbe, Marjorie Levinson, Mark Lussier, Michael Macovski, Jerry McGann, Anne Mellor, Robert Mitchell, Timothy Morton, Daniel O'Quinn, Peter Otto, Alan Richardson, Charlie Robinson, Sharon Ruston, Jonathan Sachs, Jane Stabler, Andrew Stauffer, Rei Terada, Michael Tomko, Clara Tuite, Orrin Wang, Julia Wright.

SPECIAL EVENTS: tour of the Library of Congress and plenary and exhibition of Romantic holdings at the Library; plenary at the Hyatt Regency Bethesda; sessions organized by such affiliate organizations such as ICR, the Gothic Association, ERR, the Keats-Shelley Association, the NASSR graduate student organization; a session run by the National Endowment for the Humanities on getting funding.

https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/nassr2014/category/uncategorized/

Making, Breaking and Transgressing Boundaries: Europe in Romantic Writing, 1775-1830

Postgraduate and Early Career Researchers Interdisciplinary Conference
Newcastle University – 15 July 2014

From William Blake to Germaine de Staël, Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Thomas Robert Malthus, the Romantic period is fraught with attempts to

define and redefine concepts of European boundaries. This one-day conference invites papers which consider the making, breaking and transgression of boundaries in response to revolution and national struggle across Europe between 1775 and 1830. As the borders of political territories move, expand and collapse, how is this then translated into political, philosophical and literary discourse? What does it mean for a writer in this period to cross boundaries as an exile and travel in a way distinct from the Grand Tour? How are the boundaries of Europe represented as national borders or poetical spaces?

The full program and further details are available on the conference website:

http://romanticboundaries.wordpress.com/

International Conference

Coleridge Summer Conference 2014
Cannington, Somerset, 28 July-1 August 2014

The Coleridge Summer Conference meets again this year in the lime-tree bowers of Cannington College, among the beautiful Quantock Hills a few miles from Nether Stowey and Alfoxden. The College's garden grounds will be available for all participants, and there will be walks on the Quantocks and to the sea. The Rose and Crown inn will welcome us in the evenings. The Abyssinian maid will be flying in; bring your own dulcimer and join us for drinks and talk under the stars on long balmy summer evenings.

ACADEMIC DIRECTOR: Tim Fulford.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS: Marjorie Levinson, J. C. C. Mays, Damian Walford Davies.

http://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/summer-conference

Keats-Shelley House, Rome

In order to mark the bicentenary of the composition of «Imitation of Spenser» (1814), John Keats's earliest known poem, the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association and the Keats Foundation are jointly hosting a day academic seminar on 31 October, Keats's birthday, at the Keats-Shelley House in Rome.

Proposals for papers are invited on any subject focusing on, or relating to, Keats's early poems, from «Imitation of Spenser» itself up to the publication of his first full-length volume, *Poems* (1817).

Papers discussing poems by Keats published later than 1817 may, of course, be accepted, but only by means of comparison with earlier poems. Papers may be given in English or in Italian, and abstracts accepted in either language.

Deadline for submission of abstracts (c. 200 words): 30 June 2014. Registration fee €25.

For further information on registration, and to send your abstract, please contact in the first instance:

Dr Giuseppe Albano, Curator, Keats-Shelley House, Rome
giuseppe.albano@keats-shelley-house.org

International Conference

Edward Rushton and Romantic Liverpool: A Bicentennial Conference
University of Liverpool, November 14-15, 2014

2014 marks the bicentenary of the death of poet Edward Rushton (1756-1814), Liverpool's most radical voice in the Age of Revolution. Rushton was an uncompromising abolitionist and antislavery fighter, as well as a champion of human rights at large. In a varied career, he also kept a tavern, became a bookseller, edited a newspaper, campaigned against the use of the press gang and, as a blind person himself, he initiated local efforts to support the visually impaired. Liverpool is planning to celebrate his life, writing, and legacy through exhibitions at National Museums Liverpool and the Victoria Gallery & Museum, a theatrical production of a specially-commissioned biographical play, new publications from Liverpool University Press, public lectures, and other events. To coincide with these activities, University of Liverpool, in association with Università degli Studi di Bari "Aldo Moro" (Italy), is hosting a two-day academic conference (14-15 November 2014) which aims to evaluate critically Rushton's life and works, and foster a new sense of the Romantic and radical writing that emerged within his home town during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The conference is centred upon Rushton but seeks to encourage more generally the study of Liverpool during the period of his life, when the town emerged as a place of importance in an international network of trade in objects, ideas and cultures. The conference will seek to expand our understanding of the relationship between cultures of writing, reading, publishing, bookselling, journalism and education in Rushton's Liverpool,

and explore the role of imaginative writing in the formation of local, global and civic identities.

PLENARY SPEAKERS include: Professor John Oldfield (Director of the Wilberforce Institute for the study of Slavery and Emancipation, University of Hull), Professor John Whale (University of Leeds), Professor Lilla Maria Crisafulli (Director of the Centro Interuniversitario per lo Studio del Romanticismo, Università degli Studi di Bologna), and Professor Paul Baines (University of Liverpool).

http://www.bsecs.org.uk/events/EventDetails.aspx?id=154http://www.bsecs.org.uk/events/EventDetails.aspx?id=154

New Essays on Felicia Hemans

Kate Singer and Nanora Sweet have guest-edited *Beyond Domesticity: Felicia Hemans in the Wider World*, a special issue of *Women's Writing* (21.1). This first journal issue devoted to the prolific and influential Hemans is available free to all throughout 2014 for a 7-day trial: www.tandfonline.com/r/rwow-special.

The issue's seven contributors challenge Hemans's association with the domestic and the familiar, finding her instead a speculative thinker and innovative artist immersed in the Revolutionary, Napoleonic, and reform eras of her lifetime (1793-1835).

Contributors include Barbara D. Taylor on power struggle over 'the domestic' in Hemans's juvenilia, Michael T. Williamson on Winckelmann and Pindaric ode in Hemans, Helen Luu on the deconstruction of 'woman' in *Records of Woman*, Amy L. Gates on Bentham's Auto-Icon and Hemans's effigies, Michael O'Neill on posthumous Shelleyan swerves in her verse, Christopher Stokes on extremity and residue in the late 'prayer' poems, and Diego Saglia on the adroit international poetics of her late secular work.

Books by Yaël Schlick, Ann R. Hawkins and Maura Ives, Orianne Smith, and Noah Comet are reviewed respectively by Margaret Higonnet, Eric Eisner, Deborah Kennedy, and Shanyn Fiske.

BARS

The British Association for Romantic Studies (BARS) is the UK's leading national organization for promoting the study of Romanticism. With over 400 members worldwide, BARS acts as a hub for scholarship by supporting conferences, disseminating news and events, providing bursaries and prizes

to early career researchers, publishing a Bulletin, and establishing links with sister organisations.

In recent years, BARS has also extended its activities into a number of important new fields. It supports a series of biennial Early Career and Postgraduate Conferences, which provide an informal arena in which scholars can give and listen to academic papers and discuss their work with contemporaries. BARS funds the Stephen Copley Postgraduate Bursaries; applicants can apply for sums of up to £300 to help them with research expenses. There is an electronic mailbase for BARS members, informing them of worldwide conferences, events in the field and relevant new publications.

The *BARS Bulletin & Review* is published in pdf format twice-yearly and informs members of upcoming events and publications as well as offering an extensive reviews section reflecting the research interests of BARS members. The reviews from previous editions can be accessed through the Bulletin section of this site.

The 14th International Conference, *Romantic Imprints*, will be held at Cardiff University in 2015.

We hope that you will consider becoming a BARS member and telling colleagues and postgraduates about BARS.

For information on becoming a member of the Association, go to
http://www.bars.ac.uk/

BARS Blog

News and Commentary from the British Association for Romantic Studies

The blog of the British Association for Romantic Studies (BARS), the UK's leading national organization for promoting the study of Romanticism is now live at http://www.bars.ac.uk/blog/.

The blog is maintained by the society in order to share news about developments in the field. If you would like to draw attention to an event, project or conference, or if you're keen to offer any other kind of contributions, please contact the editor, Dr Matthew Sangster (mjrs3@cantab.net).

NASSR

The North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR) was founded at the University of Western Ontario in 1991 by a group of faculty members and graduate students. NASSR was established to provide a forum for the discussion of a wide variety of theoretical approaches to Romantic works of all genres and disciplines. NASSR members from North America, Asia, Europe, and Australia work in a wide range of disciplines, including History, Art History, Women's Studies, Philosophy, Music, Political Economy, and Literature; their interests encompass American, Canadian, English, French, German, Irish, Italian, Russian, Scottish, and Spanish Romanticism.

The 23rd Annual Conference, *Romanticism and Rights*, will be held at the University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg, in 2015.

Members will receive the NASSR Newsletter, information about NASSR conferences, the annual Members' Directory, and a subscription to the interdisciplinary journal, *European Romantic Review*. Members with e-mail accounts also have access to a computer network for Romanticists through which they can exchange information with their colleagues. Memberships are effective from 1 January to 31 December.

To get a membership form, visit the NASSR website at http://publish.uwo.ca/~nassr/

NASSR Graduate Caucus

www.nassrgrads.com

Join your Romanticist graduate peers and become part of the caucus by emailing the organizers at: nassgrad@colorado.edu. Please include the following information in your email: your name; institutional affiliation; the degree you are working toward and year; email address; and research interests.Your name will be added to a master database of graduate student NASSR members that is currently being collated. You will also receive emails with news updates, upcoming events, announcements, and organization activities. For more information, visit the website listed above.