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“TRANSMUTING SORROW”: EARTH, EPITAPH, AND WORDSWORTH’S
NINETEENTH-CENTURY READERS

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“Transmuting Sorrow”: Earth, Epitaph, and Wordsworth’s Nineteenth-Century Readers

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This study examines the ways in which nineteenth-century readers experienced Wordsworth’s poetry as wisdom literature—ways of reading the poetry which have been largely lost in the twenty-first century. Considered as disciples, these men and women of letters had lifelong relationships with the poet and poetry which paralleled Wordsworth’s own ritual of returning to the text and to the consecrated place in nature. By examining the reading practices of these Wordsworthians in the light of interpretive methods dating back to monastic readers, I show how such practices went hand in glove with the poet’s epitaphic aesthetic.

Wordsworth’s theory of poetry derives from his “Essays Upon Epitaphs” which privilege the sympathetic relationship of the epitaph writer to the deceased and to the mourning survivors. I trace the evolution of this aesthetic in Wordsworth’s poetry through his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, considered as the poet’s own epitaph, and through his turn to the frugality and rigid lines of the sonnet as the form most conducive to fulfilling his prophetic duty in later years. I follow this aesthetic as poetic persona and readers enact the sincerity between epitaph writer and mourners in a mutually sympathetic relationship. This bond between writer and reader assisted in

transforming suffering into an attractive if unattainable ideal which yet inspired readers to social duty. I use psychoanalytic theory to show how the persona modeled the “transmutation” of sorrow for readers by ordering the mind and cultivating self-forgiveness by means of this ideal.

The ritual of reading and revising sorrows which incorporated the persona’s mental discipline importantly depended on the “counter-spirit” or deconstructive quality inherent in language which has its analogue in the cycles of renovation and decay in nature. This instability of language contributed to an ambiguity at the heart of Wordsworth’s poetry which opened up a range of possible interpretations. Depending on the individual, such ambiguity made it possible for nineteenth-century readers to apply the poetry to their lives methodically, both as an aid to mourning and to religious reflection.

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for my mother and sister

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Many attachments taken up in early life and which are warm
and pleasant while they last, drop off and are left behind us
in the necessary course of things; but there are others which not
only grow with our growth and strengthen with our strength,
but are also bound up with us in our decay.

—Sir Henry Taylor (“Poetical Works” 51) ¹

Introduction

It is hardly surprising that long before Wordsworth’s long life ended on April 23, 1850, critics were hard at work ranking his poetic legacy. No doubt discerning in his Prefaces the poet’s nervous desire to inherit the mantle of Chaucer, Spenser and Milton, reviewers seemed to take on anxiety, for or with the poet, even as he lived. In Wordsworth’s later years and Victorian after-life, critics not only worried over how to situate the poet’s greatness—often below Shakespeare and Milton, and occasionally alongside the latter—they differed as to the constitution of that greatness: to what degree was Wordsworth a poet, philosopher, or teacher of morals; a poet of passion or cold remove; a poet of man or nature; a pantheist or theist? One aspect of the poetry less subject to debate was its tangible effect on the reader, namely its profound spiritual qualities. Indeed, it was not a rare event for readers of divergent backgrounds to converge on Wordsworth, as Stephen Gill’s study thoroughly documents. After the first wave of the “construction of Wordsworth” concluded in the 1860s (Gill, *WV* 41), came witness after witness to the poetry’s “spiritual power,” an “almost infinitely elastic term” (40). My study re-focuses our understanding of Wordsworth’s audience then and now by showing how the poetry’s “elastic” power was bound up in nineteenth-century spiritual reading practices which valued returning to the text.

I begin with the breadth of spiritual encounters on view in this “parade of testimony” (Gill, WV 58). The range of “spiritual power” was great because readers turned to the poetry not only when they were in mourning, but also when they simply sought wisdom. By putting aside thorny questions about the poetry’s content and greatness, and clinging instead to the gratitude it cultivated, nineteenth-century readers lived with the verse over the course of a lifetime. As the dramatist and critic Sir Henry Taylor observed in 1834, Wordsworth was one of those “attachments” which “not only grow with our growth” but are also “bound up with us in our decay” (“Poetical Works” 51).

Although their responses were various, one can detect among the poet’s most loyal readers an aesthetic of reading which constituted a practice of returning to the poetry. I hold this practice to the light of the theories espoused in Wordsworth’s “Essays Upon Epitaphs” (1810)² in which an epitaph is “not a proud writing shut up for the studious: it is exposed to all—to the wise and the most ignorant” (EE1 399-401).³ As this study makes clear, however, Wordsworth’s best nineteenth-century readers in print were careful to take a studious approach to the poetry. The poet’s point is that his epitaphic poetry is not available only to the “studious;” it is not “proud” or “shut up.” He emphasizes instead the openness of the epitaphic aesthetic. As advocated in the “Essays,” the epitaph writer’s relationship with the mourner as well as the deceased was essentially an open and sympathetic one, and importantly, took full account of the natural setting in which the epitaph was “exposed.” The epitaph is “concerning all, and for all:—in the church-yard it is open to the day; the sun looks down upon the stone, and the rains of heaven beat against it” (EE1 406-08).

By analyzing how the contested reception of Wordsworth as poet, teacher, prophet, and philosopher resolved itself in separate but compatible interpretations of the poetry's "spiritual power," I demonstrate what this epitaphic aesthetic meant to nineteenth-century readers. The poetry worked for religious and doubting readers alike because it developed a disciplined, though indirect path toward suffering. Through Wordsworth's verse, readers learned the art of "'transmuting' sorrow into strength," in the words of Leslie Stephen ("Ethics" 222).⁴

In "Wordsworth's Ethics" (1876), Stephen observed: "Other poetry becomes trifling when we are making our inevitable passages through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Wordsworth's alone retains its power" (209). Exactly how did Wordsworth's poetry "alone" assert its hold on readers like Stephen facing loss? Judging by readers in a Victorian culture obsessed with mourning and death, Wordsworth's epitaphic aesthetic was as much concerned with life as it was with the death it obliquely answered. For Christians that life may have meant the future life, but Wordsworth's poetry spoke to other kinds of believers and non-believers as well. For all parties, the verse labored to return the reader to life in the present by continually pointing to signs of earth. The reader's direct experience of an animated nature was thus one component of this return. The poetry itself uplifted, but its special power depended on the life of the poet behind the poem.⁵ In the pages ahead, I show how the Wordsworthian persona, based on an ascetic recluse who valued "plain living and high thinking,"⁶ enhanced the efficacy of the poetry in representative readers.

The poet's work and life merged in a mythic persona which encouraged the reader's returns to the text in a gradual process of mourning. This persona provided a

distant, firm, and sympathetic character and demonstrated a more severe approach to controlling emotion than the reader was invited to take. By appreciating how the poetic persona and other formal structures elicited the reader's responses in a complex ritual of reading, I complicate our notion of Wordsworth's "spiritual power" and of the readers who allowed his poetry to do this "work of mourning" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 245). For a number of those readers, the stable persona which made mourning possible also helped to realign religious faith. That is, the poetry was pliable enough that the process of return which enabled mourning also made room for religious meditation, depending on the individual reader. The Wordsworthian persona helped readers to resituate their sorrow or faith within existing Victorian values—fulfilling one's duty and continual self-refinement. They did so through a rich process of returning to the page and to the meaningful place both in memory and in person.

What defines the poetry as epitaphic is the quality of thought it continually develops, a quality which corresponds directly to the willing attitude required of poet and reader. This attitude and the practice of return may be understood as the "epitaphic mode" in the words of Frances Ferguson (155), wherein the epitaph becomes "less a genre than a mode of thought" (166). For Ferguson, Wordsworth's epitaphic way of thinking consists of a "complex series of reciprocal relationships—between the poet and the stranger, between the stranger and the deceased through the poet, and between a dead human and a newly reinvigorated nature—lead[ing] him to the echo as a structural incarnation of the thoughts linking 'origin and tendency' inseparably" (166).⁷ Ferguson's study does not extend to the later sonnets, though, where the epitaphic mode infuses Wordsworth's poetry as a "mode of thought" even as it settles into the generic form of

the sonnet. The “epitaphic mode” as I read it is based on an idealized notion of both a written and an unwritten epitaph, transmitted from person to person, in which the mode of interaction is as important as the message being transmitted. In some fundamental way, the sympathetic mode of interaction *is* the message of the epitaphic aesthetic.

In tandem with this sympathetic disposition, I stress the way the poet marshals the “counter-spirit” of language, that aspect which “derange[s]” and “dissolve[s]” (EE3 186-88), to move in the direction of its healing “spirit.” My approach differs from Ferguson’s primarily in her meditation on the subversive element which necessarily coexists with the spirit of language for Wordsworth:

The life of language in poetry, like the life of the individual, is radically implicated with death; and out of the discontinuities of both language and life, Wordsworth wrests a poetry of memory which enacts and reenacts the impossibility of constructing one individual self which would be ‘there’ for language to imitate. Language need not be an aggressor for Wordsworth, but just as surely language is not a salvation to the perplexities of individual consciousness. (xvi)

I agree with the basic instability of the individual self and the words used to communicate that self. In their own ways, some perceptive Victorian critics also sensed the presence of the deconstructive properties of the “counter-spirit.” Wordsworth’s poetry worked to the advantage of nineteenth-century readers despite that instability, and in some ways, because of that instability, although at great cost to the person behind the saintly persona. A reader inclined to find this spirit in the poetry was moved toward self-awareness and gratitude if not toward “salvation,” precisely by means of these same “discontinuities of language and life.” In this way, death served as the Archimedean point which allowed the reader, more successfully than the poet, to tip his or her mourning back into the stream of life.

In my interpretation, the aesthetic that grows out of Wordsworth's "Essays upon Epitaphs" coheres in a double epitaph defined by marks inscribed on the grave or page, and the more elusive and idealized "soft records" which correspond both to the signs of nature and the deeds of a lifetime in collective memory. I use the phrase "soft records," which refers to the "murmuring" River Duddon in Wordsworth's 1820 sonnet sequence, to specify the epitaphic imprint left on the reader's imagination.⁸ These "soft records" are not legible in the usual ways, just as the "authentic epitaphs" in *The Excursion* (1814) are not legible on the blank earth which marks all graves the same in the Pastor's churchyard (5: 653). Only the location identifies graves to local parishioners. Invisible "authentic epitaphs" thus rely on human memory instead of words on a monument to speak for the deceased. Wordsworth lifts up the latter version of memorial perhaps because it appears to come closest to what might be considered a "natural" epitaph—one impressed upon others by the life as it is lived. Such "soft records" are realized in fireside conversations which perpetuate the lives of the dead because those lives still matter. This form of epitaph is the only kind needed in rural communities such as the one in "The Brothers" (1800) to which Leonard Ewbank returns after two decades at sea. Spoken epitaphs do nothing to relieve the mariner's foreboding and frustration when he cannot tell if his brother lies among the dead in his native burial grounds, however. The lack of a written record makes it necessary to speak to someone (in this case, the Priest), in order to learn if his brother lives. But Wordsworth complicates this ideal notion of the "soft record" by heeding another ideal voice—the one which simultaneously calls him to prophesy in writing.

Other critics make stricter distinctions among the different kinds of epitaphs in the poetry.⁹ I argue, however, that the interplay between written and spoken words appears less significant than the return to conversation in all its forms with those who remain behind. This is the epitaphic motion supporting the “Essays Upon Epitaphs,” a return to the “land of transitory things—of sorrow and of tears” (EE1 147) which maintains a sense of the sacred, but also embraces a kind of materialism even when the poet’s language of spirit and matter suggests the two can be separated. Rather than a medium for displacements marked by absence, as New Historicist critics have argued, the natural world is a presence whose renovation and decay, like the renovation and decay of language, can be joined to the sufferer’s pain, offering at least temporary relief.

The poet’s epitaphic aesthetic involves a ritual of return to meaningful texts, geographic and poetic, a process which doubles in yet another sense when Victorian readers enacted a similar dynamic in lifelong engagements with his poetry as a form of wisdom literature. The process of transforming sorrows—both garden-variety and catastrophic—is of a piece with these returns to Wordsworth’s texts for Victorian readers, and for the poet whose own returns to *The Prelude* constitute the creation of an ongoing epitaph. The “counter-spirit” of language which makes the writer’s task especially fraught, also effects whatever cure it can, not unlike Plato’s *pharmakon* in its elaboration by Derrida (*Dissemination* 98). “Transmuting sorrow” describes the linguistic process whereby a poison edges toward a cure. It works in part through the emotional imprint created by abstract language and concepts.

According to the “Essays Upon Epitaphs,” the “first requisite . . . in an Epitaph is, that it should speak, in a tone which shall sink into the heart, the general language of

humanity as connected with the subject of death—the source from which an epitaph proceeds—of death, and of life” (EE1 305-308). The word “life” comes almost as an afterthought, as if the poet’s abstraction of death temporarily had led him to forget that death is always partnered with life. And yet Wordsworth’s language recalls to the reader the openness of the “general, and operative” truth for which his poetry strives in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: “[truth which is] carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives strength and divinity to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal.”¹⁰ As F.W.H. Myers characterized it in his critical biography, *Wordsworth* (1888), “unless [Wordsworth’s] tone awakes a responsive conviction in ourselves, there is no argument by which he can prove to us that he is offering a new insight to mankind” (129). For Myers, who was a classical scholar and a founder of the Society for Psychical Research, as for many receptive nineteenth-century readers, Wordsworth’s “general language of humanity” registered the right tone.

This tone prepared the way for the poetry’s “enstranging”¹¹ techniques.

Although they might spar on the differences between poetry and prose, or the idea that “[t]he artifact itself is quite unimportant,” Wordsworth might go more than halfway with Viktor Shklovsky on the following principle:

in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By ‘enstranging’ objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and ‘laborious.’ The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. (6)¹²

Like the “long and ‘laborious’” perception which makes the “stone feel stony,” the reader was slowly made to feel his own pain through the indirect path of the Wordsworthian

persona. This trustworthy voice carried the reader to familiar pain through an unfamiliar territory where sorrow could be generalized.

In Wordsworth's body of work, the "epitaphic mode" allegorizes the "transmutation" of individual suffering by re-contextualizing it, and thereby "enstranging" it, within the sphere of all suffering. The frugal process of "transmuting sorrow" resonated with critics as a means of naming their own losses. They did so by answering a perceived call to duty beyond the self, travelling the path of the persona and the man behind the semi-transparent mask. Forms of the word "transmute" show up consistently in the periodical literature as it concerns the poet's ability to transform the ordinary and the insignificant, to paint the real with the ideal. The word also appears more pointedly on the subject of Wordsworth's dictum of turning sorrow to serviceable ends. For all of the attention I pay to the word "transmute," which is used as an organizing term in this study, Wordsworth does not himself use it that often, although he does use the verb in two poems consistently referenced by Victorian readers —*The Excursion* and "Character of the Happy Warrior" (1807).¹³ Additionally, a number of important nineteenth-century readers employed the term in their writing on Wordsworth, including John Wilson ("Christopher North"), R. H. Hutton, Edward Caird, J. C. Shairp, Stopford Brooke, William Ralph Inge, and Walter Pater, not to mention critics writing on Wordsworth in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries.

The word "transmute" carried a range of meanings in the nineteenth century revolving around the transformation of one substance or kind to another—from the alchemical transmutation of base metals to gold to the controversial Lamarckian notion of the transmutation of species over time.¹⁴ The word also harks back to the Middle Ages to

refer to the ritual of the eucharist in which the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.¹⁵ Coleridge used it in his “Evidences of Christianity” to refer to a process of gaining knowledge through faith: “Believe, and if thy belief be right, that insight which gradually transmutes faith into knowledge will be the reward of that belief” (387). For my purposes, “transmute” serves as a nodal point for understanding how Wordsworth’s poetry harmonized social and biological sciences with religious attitudes. It also handily tracks the dynamic of mourning in verse, one which relies on the individual willing to play with perspective to bring about this transmutation, and on a disposition stripped bare of pride for answering his own conscience or his God or both.

In his study *R.H. Hutton, Critic and Theologian*, Malcolm Woodfield follows the path of the word “transmute” as it flowed through nineteenth-century criticism on Wordsworth. Specifically, he traces the word from Hutton, editor of *The Spectator*, through Leslie Stephen, to the Hegelian scholar Edward Caird, arguing that Hutton’s 1857 essay on Wordsworth which deploys forms of the word “transmute” “provided a vocabulary for discussing Wordsworth’s idealism which directly and explicitly affected the reading of Wordsworth for the rest of the century” (115). While I find Woodfield’s overall argument and close-readings of Hutton, Caird and Stephen on Wordsworth compelling, Woodfield’s interest stems from Hutton’s influence and does not consider an earlier critic such as John Wilson whose essay on Wordsworth also included the use of the phrase “transmuting power.”¹⁶ Known by the pseudonym Christopher North, Wilson was one of the first voices of approbation to contrast with the negative press dominated by Lord Jeffrey’s scathing reviews of Wordsworth for the *Edinburgh Review*. I am less concerned with influence measured by a “common vocabulary” (Woodfield 123),

however, than I am with using the word “transmute” to trace the reader’s encounter with the poetic persona as a means of bringing about his own transmutation of sorrow.

Because I interpret Wordsworth as his own reader and critic, and because his writing spans both Romantic and Victorian literary periods, I consider this a study of “nineteenth-century readers.” This terminology also reflects an overarching thematic tied to the capacity of Wordsworth’s poetry to “transmute sorrow” in his readers: it is a process which happens unevenly and by degrees. Likewise, the continuities and breaks between Romantic and Victorian periods are often measured in small changes. My aesthetic of reading Wordsworth’s poetry charts its changes across the poet’s lifetime while privileging the text as a material object, a shaped and shaping form, not unlike the forms of earth which slowly impress their characters on the poet’s mind. With this graduated approach to the poetry’s work of mourning and its formal shifts over the poet’s career, I extend the work of critics such as Peter J. Manning and William H. Galperin who look beyond the “Great Decade” of 1797-1807 codified by Arnold’s selection of the *Poems of Wordsworth* (1879). It is possible to take the catholic response of nineteenth-century readers as a guide to backread Wordsworth’s oeuvre. In this way we can value not only the two Wordsworths—the early and late, or the poet of the Great Decade and decline—but the many Wordsworths who can be read along *The Prelude*’s revisions.

I approach the many Wordsworths from two fronts: the first attends mainly to Wordsworth as a reader of his own texts which he continually revised. And while the second approach more directly concerns Wordsworth’s late Romantic and Victorian editors and critics, the entire study gleans the insights of those readers to interpret how Wordsworth’s epitaphic aesthetic is articulated through his devotional style and how it

affords his readers a similar textual engagement. In some cases, I have gauged readers' responses to Wordsworth based on their editorial decisions, letters, and journals, even if this data did not make it into the chapters explicitly. For the most part, though, these comments come from essays published by British critics in periodical literature and then republished in book form. In some instances where the literary conversation about Wordsworth crossed the Atlantic, I have included American voices as well.

Many of these readers were men and women of letters in the late Romantic and Victorian periods, a number of whom, like Stephen and Mill, fall into a group of social critics Stefan Collini has called "public moralists" (3).¹⁷ While some readers were in conversation with each other via the periodical press, others are only connected here by their enthusiasm for the poetry and the poet. These readers came from a variety of religious backgrounds, including High, Broad, and Low Church or Evangelical—even if they practiced a different form of faith by the time they were writing about Wordsworth. Stephen, for example, a positivist and utilitarian, was born into the Evangelical Clapham Sect and considered himself an agnostic. High Churchmen were Anglicans associated with the Oxford Movement, or Tractarianism, which centered on the liturgy of the medieval church and whose leaders included John Keble, John Henry Newman, and Edward Bouverie Pusey. Broad Churchmen, largely influenced by Coleridge, constituted a liberal strand of the Church of England who trusted reason to recognize Biblical truths. The Evangelical Anglicans and the Baptists, Presbyterians, and similar groups occupied a central role in British religious life, valuing piety, habits of reading Scripture, and the individual experience of the word of God. From these different spiritual practices came readers of Wordsworth's poetry who appeared as disciples of the poet. I take seriously

the styles of reading they demonstrated as their ardor led them to read more deeply than we might expect and in many cases, across a broader range of the poetry.

Victorian readers encountered Wordsworth's writing as a form of secular wisdom literature which worked in association with a religion of nature. To understand how the readers' returns to the text often served a spiritual purpose, sometimes alongside or in place of Holy Scripture, I look to monastic reading practices for ways of reading typologically and allegorically, the vestiges of which were still in evidence in Wordsworth's readers. I also turn to recent studies on hermeneutics to appreciate the epitaphic echoing between the poet and these readers. Paul Ricoeur's idea of the "world of the text" is itself a kind of echo of the real in an ideal imaginary (*Figuring* 43). As an interpreter of a variety of Biblical texts whose authors are divinely inspired, Ricoeur is not interested in the "psychological intentions that hide behind a text" so much as the revelatory intentions of the text itself (43). In Wordsworth's poetry, I am interested in both. Ricoeur's method of reading religious texts still usefully contributes to appreciating Wordsworth's poetry as a form of wisdom discourse. In his writing on the problem of evil and suffering, Ricoeur turns to Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" for a cathartic model which allows wisdom literature to assist in the "transmutation of the lament" (259) into a complaint against God. This complaint must rest finally in the affirmation that "we believe in God *in spite* of evil" (260). Thus wisdom discourse as Ricoeur sees it "does not so much speak of what ought to be done as of how to endure, how to suffer suffering" (227). Wordsworth's Victorian readers tapped this kind of wisdom by their active participation in making sense of the poetry as they made sense of their own sorrows.

In the chapters ahead, I show that Wordsworth's poetry worked to ease this suffering in more than one way. I do so through a psychoanalytic approach which employs Julia Kristeva, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Derrida on the intricacies of mourning and melancholy as it is slowly resolved, if only partially, in acts of forgiveness. With their insights, I argue that the poetry helped to comfort the sorrowing not only through the reader's relationship with the emotionally controlled persona, but also through various forms of allegories of mourning. In these allegories, as in the poet's own life, I argue that earth in its cosmic and microcosmic senses serves as the steadying force for the characters' suffering. Earth literally grounds sorrow. Determining the distinctions between man and material nature leads the sufferer to a heightened sense of self and of self-limitation which leads to self-forgiveness. As Onno Oerlemans has pointed out: "While it is virtually a cliché that Wordsworth imagines spirit and being in the external world of things, it is not fully recognized that his poetry reflects a struggle to ground this imagining in an awareness of the materiality of nature, the impenetrable reality of surfaces and appearances" (35). By means of allegories in responsive, and sometimes unresponsive, natural settings, the secluded poet modeled ways of knowing the world which "lighten'd" the "burthen of the mystery" (42, 39)¹⁸ long enough to merit his reader's return to the text.

Chapter 1 studies *The Prelude* as the poet's own private memorial to which he returned over a lifetime. By considering up close the privileged "spots of time," we can see how revision and return thereby become the rituals of the poet's "Religion of gratitude" (*Letters Later Years Pt 1* 351). "Theologians may puzzle their heads about dogmas as they will; the Religion of gratitude cannot mislead us," wrote Wordsworth to

Sir George Beaumont in 1825. “Of that we are sure; and Gratitude is the handmaid to Hope, and hope the harbinger of Faith” (351). This attitude permeated the poetry and inspired in his Victorian critics a similar posture which brought them back in their own rituals of return. Chapter 2 examines the “*active universe*” (Prel 2: 266)¹⁹ which also appealed to Wordsworth’s readers of the period and which was an essential part of the spiritual solace the poetry bestowed. In particular, I stress the tension between the various parts of this animated setting which correspond to the distinctions Wordsworth endeavors to make between divine and human and natural worlds, especially in later years, as a means of relieving sorrow. This process of separation is examined through the earth as a model for coming into language in Kristevan terms. Chapter 3 looks at Wordsworth’s turn to the sonnet form as a steadying embracement of both earth and his own materiality. Wordsworth’s respect for mortal limits and divine authority is represented formally in a shift to the rigid rules of the sonnet form in later years. In this regard I first explore the poet’s attachment to earth by looking to the little-read *River Duddon* volume of 1820, considering the sonnet sequence of the title poem as another private epitaph (more obscurely so than *The Prelude*), especially when juxtaposed to *A Topographical Description*, the prose guide to the Lake District which closes the volume. I read the river and rock of the *River Duddon* sonnets epitaphically, and I read Wordsworth at his most visionary, as geologically aware. As a container for the real and the ideal, the sonnet form holds in tension these blended states which parallel similar blendings from which the poet strives to precipitate out human and divine, and nature and art respectively.

Chapters 4 and 5 move away from Wordsworth as writer and toward the experiences of late Romantic and Victorian readers of Wordsworth. Chapter 4 examines Victorian critics who perceived in Wordsworth's poetry a call to duty, one which was spurred by their habitual returns to the poetry. This chapter highlights a variety of reader responses, but relies chiefly on those detailed records left by John Stuart Mill and Leslie Stephen to explore the workings of Wordsworth's idealized persona. Additionally, in Chapter 4 I situate Wordsworth's readers within a context of spiritual reading practices to suggest how the historical moment lent itself to reading Wordsworth in this way. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a negative example of a nineteenth-century reader of Wordsworth. I bring together Wordsworth and William Morris, who share an epitaphic aesthetic which deserves further excavation, even though the later poet was disinclined to acknowledge his precursor's influence. I unite these two figures not only through biography and allegories of mourning, but also through Ruskin's spirit of the gothic which I consider in the background of physical and spiritual touching in Wordsworth's lyrical ballad *The White Doe of Rylstone* and Morris's "morality" *Love is Enough*.

A dual approach is further reflected in my choice of texts. The first three chapters and the final one employ for the most part the Cornell editions of Wordsworth to allow detailed readings of the poet's revisions. Where I have leaned on readers' comments from later in the century to elucidate the poet's relationship to his own writing process, I compare the texts under consideration to the *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* and *The Prelude* edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire and note any major discrepancies between this edition and earlier versions in the endnotes. I have chosen the de Selincourt and Darbishire edition because it is based on the 1849-

1850 text, the last edition of the poems that Wordsworth oversaw in his lifetime.

Victorian readers had access to a number of different versions of Wordsworth's poetry, however Thomas Hutchinson, William Knight and Edward Dowden all used the 1849-1850 text as the basis for their editions of Wordsworth. Because Chapter 4 emphasizes Victorian responses over the poet's own process of composition, there I mainly rely on the de Selincourt and Darbishire edition.

Insofar as I depend primarily on elite intellectual responses to the poetry as indicative of responses of middle- or working-class readers, I am called to account for sharing assumptions with Wordsworth's democratic theory of poetry. Similarly, to the degree I seek to understand the responses of readers designated by Arnold and others as "Wordsworthians," readers who were devoted to the poet and his philosophy (fervently in some cases), I may appear to sympathize too heartily with the poet's healing agenda and thus take a "lyric turn" as Clifford Siskin describes it, one which fails to recognize that literature "invented and was the invention of a self that both uses it to establish hierarchical difference and requires it as a cure" (67). Striving for vigilance and wary of blindspots, I aim for a fuller accounting of what are now benign critical commonplaces to describe the "spiritual power" conferred by the poetry upon nineteenth-century readers. As much as we may see Wordsworth's "healing power" (63)²⁰ as shaping the nature of literary studies, an uncritical process on the accounts of Jerome McGann and Siskin, we may also want to consider what formal aspects of the poetry evoked this set of responses. If subsequent critics have followed in the footsteps of the Victorians reading Wordsworth, looking back to these readers may reveal more about the nature of this identification as well as what makes (over)sympathetic critical practice problematic in

our own time. If Matthew Arnold's generation needed to take a certain feeling from the poetry, we may ask why we no longer need to read in the same way.

What can we gain by reading Wordsworth as his nineteenth-century disciples did? By following the rhythms of these readers in the twenty-first century we can retain our critical edge without losing an intimate knowledge of the text through sympathetic reading practices. We can better appreciate a wider body of the poetry which benefits from repeated consultation by means of a method of reading and return that allows for stringent self-examination, and for transmuting one's sorrows if the reader is so inclined. But more significantly, such reading practices allow the power of Wordsworth's poetry to be felt the only way it can be, with a learning disposition and an investment of time.

Notes

¹ Taylor is quoting Pope's *An Essay on Man*, Epistle 2: 136, "Grows with his growth, and strengthens with his strength." I owe this reference to Susan J. Wolfson.

² The first of the "Essays upon Epitaphs" appeared in Coleridge's periodical *The Friend* for 22 February 1810. The second and third essays on epitaphs were written for but not published in *The Friend* of 1812. Owen and Smyser note that Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* (1851) includes passages from the two essays, but otherwise they remained unpublished until the *Prose Works*, edited by Grosart, in 1876 (45). Introduction, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, Vol. 2. "*Prose Works*" will be used to refer to the Owen and Smyser edition.

³ "Essays Upon Epitaphs," *Prose Works*, Vol. 2. All future parenthetical references to the three Essays will be indicated by either "EE1," "EE2," or "EE3" and line numbers.

⁴ Leslie Stephen's phrase derived from "an agonizing sorrow to transmute" in *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (4: 167).

⁵ Gill makes a similar point in *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, 40-41.

⁶ "Written in London, September, 1802" ("O Friend! I know not which way I must look"), Poems in Two Volumes, and *Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis, 164-65. All future references to this volume will appear as "P2V."

⁷ "Origin and tendency are notions inseparably co-relative" comes from the first of Wordsworth's "Essays Upon Epitaphs," *Prose Works*, ll. 66-67.

⁸ I take the phrase "soft record" from Sonnet 8 of Wordsworth's *River Duddon* sonnets series. The final lines of that sonnet read as follows:

And Thou, blue Streamlet, murmuring yield'st no more
Than a soft record that whatever fruit
Of ignorance thou might'st witness heretofore,
Thy function was to heal and to restore,
To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute!

Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1849, ed. Geoffrey Jackson, 60. This edition is hereafter indicated by "SS."

⁹ Esther Schor, for example, distinguishes between epitaphs of "sincerity" and "authenticity" in Wordsworth which represent traditions native to eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively: the "sincere" written epitaph emphasizes the general and moral qualities of the deceased in "Essays Upon Epitaphs," reflecting eighteenth-century neoclassicism; the spoken "authentic epitaphs" of *The Excursion* stress the psychological and particular (179), *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria*. See 173-186. Kenneth R. Johnston identifies Wordsworth's move to biographical representations in the form of the graveyard stories of *The Excursion*, "lives without 'spots of time,'" as the move to a new epitaphic form: "Instead of arresting visionary moments expanded into lifetime significance, these stories represent whole lifetimes compressed into a single summary account, or epitaph, in Wordsworth's new idiom" (297), *Wordsworth and The Recluse*.

¹⁰ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, ll. 343-345, pp. 751-52, Appendix 3, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. Butler and Green. I use this text because the 1802 additions are marked clearly. *Prose Works*, ed. Smyser and Owen, offers an 1800 and 1850 version of the Preface, but no 1802 version. Future references to the *Lyrical Ballads* volume will be indicated by "LB."

¹¹ "Enstrangement" is Benjamin Sher's translation for Victor Shklovsky's term *ostraniene*, which has been translated as "defamiliarization" elsewhere (Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis's *Russian Formalist Criticism*, 1965). Sher prefers his own term "enstrangement" to "defamiliarization" because he says, "Shklovsky's process is in fact the reverse of that implied by this term. It is not a transition from the 'familiar' to the 'unknown' (implicitly). On the contrary, it proceeds from the cognitively known (the language of science), the rules and formulas that arise from a search for an economy of mental effort, to the familiarly known, that is, to real knowledge that expands and 'complicates' our perceptual process in the rich use of metaphors, similes, and a host of other figures of speech" (xix).

¹² Shklovsky writes: "The life of a poem (and of an artifact) proceeds from vision to recognition, from poetry to prose, from the concrete to the general . . . As the work of art dies, it becomes broader . . ." (6). "Recognition" comes from moving beyond perception to a more familiar understanding of the object under scrutiny. As I understand it, when art draws attention to this process of encountering the object, it is thus "enstranging."

¹³ The word "transmute" appears in "Character of a Happy Warrior" as follows: Towards "Pain, / And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!" the Happy Warrior "exercise[s] a power" that "Controls them and subdues, transmutes, bereaves / Of their bad influence, and their good receives" (12-13; 15; 17-18). *P2V*, 84-86. Wordsworth also uses the word in his prose tract *The Convention of Cintra*, *Prose Works*, Vol. 1.

¹⁴ The OED gives the following primary definitions for "transmute": "1.a *trans.* To alter or change in nature, properties, appearance, or form; to transform, convert, turn; and b. *Alch.* To change (one substance) into another, esp. a baser metal into gold or silver." Further down in the definitions for "transmutation": "f. *Biol.* Conversion or transformation of one species into another; *spec.* applied to the form of evolution or development propounded by Lamarck." *The Imperial Dictionary of The English Language* (1883) cites both "transmutation" and "transmute." For the latter term, defined as "to change from one nature, form, or substance into another; to transform," the editor cites examples which range from metals being transmuted to the religious connotation of "A holy conscience sublimates everything; it *transmutes* the common affairs of life into acts of solemn worship to God" (417). Marguerite Harkness studies the particular usage of the word "transmute" in the context of Aesthetes like Pater, Oscar Wilde and Yeats for whom it meant to change "in a more specific sense: to change the substance, the essence" (47), *The Aesthetics of Dedalus and Bloom*.

¹⁵ J. H. Srawley's article on "The Eucharist (to end of Middle Ages)" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* indicates the phrase "*substantialiter transmutare*," used in the 11th century by Witmund, Alger of Liège in his response to Berengar's controversial comments about the eucharist, "is a close approximation" to the term "transubstantiation" which had "not yet appeared" (557). Edward B. Pusey used the word "transmute" in his sermons to refer to the power of the eucharist (43-44), *Nine Sermons*. The word also appeared in nineteenth-century hymnals in association with the eucharist.

¹⁶ John Wilson, *The Recreations of Christopher North*, 293.

¹⁷ Collini focuses on members of "those overlapping political, social, and intellectual circles which might be loosely referred to as the 'governing' or 'educated' classes of their day" (3), in the period from 1850-1930.

¹⁸ "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798." *LB*, 116-20. In *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and Darbishire, Vol. 2, the phrase occurs in l. 38, pp. 259-63. Further references to the *Poetical Works* will be indicated by "PW."

¹⁹ The 1850 text of *The Prelude* does not italicize "active" *PW*, 2: 254.

²⁰ "Memorial Verses 1850," *Matthew Arnold Poetical Works*, 270-272.

'tis thine,
 The prime and vital principle is thine,
 In the recesses of thy nature, far
 From any reach of outward fellowship,
 Else 'tis not thine at all.—
 —W. Wordsworth (*Prel* 13: 193-197)¹

Chapter One

The Prelude as Memorial: Revision and Return

When it comes to William Wordsworth's autobiographical epic, critics seem to concur with the poet's forecast based on how often they quote it: "[It will be] a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself" (*Letters Early Years Pt 1* 586). The less-often cited lines which follow prove just as telling for the reader wishing to plumb the mysteries of *The Prelude*, however. The subsequent passage from his May 1805 letter to Sir George Beaumont suggests a self-assessment as embarrassed as it was bold: "it is not self-conceit, as you know well, that has induced me to do this, but real humility; I began the work because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject, and diffident of my own powers" (586). While *The Prelude* exudes great confidence in the "powers" of Wordsworth's mind, that confidence is continually shot through with the self-doubts from which the poem arose: "Was it for this / That one, the fairest of all rivers . . . sent a voice / To intertwine my dreams?" (*Four Texts* 1-2; 5-6).² The tension which results from and temporarily resolves itself in habitual self-critique is born of warring voices—the one which is "sent" and calls the narrator to prophesy publicly, and the voice of his "dreams" or private ambition with which the sent

voice “intertwine[s].” The tender source of Wordsworth’s self-questioning informs *The Prelude*, but I argue further that this open and ultimately grateful disposition forms the crux of his epitaphic aesthetic. Wordsworth’s returns to the pivotal “spots of time,” the traumatic childhood moments burned in memory in *The Prelude*, chart a complex history of revision and return discernible in the poem on his own life and across the entire oeuvre. This pattern of mourning in verse defines an aesthetic whose theoretical groundwork rests in Wordsworth’s “Essays Upon Epitaphs” and relies on the continual laying bare of the poet’s vulnerabilities, not only as a man talking about himself, but more importantly for his nineteenth-century readers, as a human talking about and to other humans.

By looking closely at the poet’s revisions of the “spots of time” in Book 11 where the narrator seeks to “enshrine the spirit of the past for future restoration” (342-43), we can better appreciate this frugal process of return by which Wordsworth carves out a mature poetic identity against a godlike public role. We can also understand why the poet later calls these spots “memorials” in the Fourteen-Book version of the poem (12: 287), as well as how the human species factors into this epitaphic aesthetic. The “renovating Virtue” (260) of the “spots of time” and the reason they are analogous to epitaphs proper are one and the same: the spots and epitaph both work in their separate ways to emphasize the differences between the poet’s God and humankind. This chapter explains how Wordsworth’s heightened awareness of his limitations made evident in the act of revising serves to contrast with divine autonomy and paradoxically rehabilitate his own genius. In large part that genius resides in an opening out of his affective and sensual faculties so as to receive the impressions of the natural world. The self-doubting

documented by *The Prelude* ensues over how best to give back this gift. And while the poet's exact understanding of the deity, as distinct from his own prowess, remains one of the poem's most compellingly ambiguous relationships, one can find ways in which the poet's obscuring of that relationship in the early versions of *The Prelude* implies the degree to which godly authority intertwines uneasily with his own. The blurring of boundaries works formally to invite Coleridge, the poem's addressee and "joint-laboure[r]" (13: 439) in prophecy, as well as the poem's future readers, to explore independently the precarious intersection of human and divine. For the adult poet, the act of returning in revision to affecting memories of childhood rekindles the mix of lostness and shame which characterizes the "spots of time." This act of returning provides a way for the maturing poet to measure his prophetic mission against his private gain.

The Prelude thus functions as a private taking of stock and an "extended epitaph." I borrow Geoffrey H. Hartman's term for the well-known Boy of Winander scene and the narrator's mute reflection on the boy's grave afterward in Book 5 (WP 20).³ Paul de Man modifies the phrase by reminding us that in the seed of the Winander scene, discussed in depth in the next chapter, the poet explicitly identifies himself as the "boy" who in subsequent revisions is "taken from his Mates" and dies young (*Prel* 5: 414). De Man observes: *The Prelude* "is written by the poet for himself, from a perspective that stems, so to speak, from beyond the grave. This temporal perspective is characteristic for all Wordsworth's poetry—even if it obliges us to imagine a tombstone large enough to hold the entire *Prelude*" ("Time and History" 82). Focusing on the poet's proleptic cast of mind, de Man extends the "extended epitaph" of the Winander scene not only to *The Prelude* as I use the term, but to Wordsworth's corpus as well. Rather than emphasize the

back to the future movement that de Man does, however, I stress the epitaph as both a material space or place and an experience in time—a page, a poet’s writing hand, and a natural setting to be interpreted by the poet and his audience again and again. In my reading, this very large tombstone consists of both mental and physical landscapes which correspond to earlier scenes of trauma and of joy which require continual visitation and which are represented most vividly by the poet’s returns to the “spots of time.” Whereas these spots record “accidents” (*Prel* 5: 381) and occurrences often beyond the young poet’s control, the adult poet’s work of revision names these events by the willed act of returning to the memorable scenes, generating the tone of Wordsworth’s epitaphic aesthetic in the process.

Crucially for Victorian writers, Wordsworth’s practice of going back to the text (in all its forms) resembles a religious ritual that appealed for the very reason its exact contents remained unknown.⁴ The novelist William Hale White, for whom encountering Wordsworth’s poetry helped to redefine his conception of God, spoke of this unknown religious aspect in a tract defending the poet against apostasy. Hale White saw the poet’s lack of doctrinal specificity as an opening for the reader’s imagination: “[Wordsworth] believes that there are presentations, perceptions which if we like we can reduce to nothings, but are nevertheless realities—in fact, the essential realities of life. He goes very little further than this: for him it is enough, and he leaves to each man to obtain for himself what increase of definiteness he needs” (33). If vague language leaves much unknown for the reader’s determination, what can be known from the patterns of composition and the poetic allegories of wandering and return is a disciplined separating out of reality and fantasy to determine what was, and is, and what could be.

While Wordsworth's poetry provided "healing power" in Matthew Arnold's famous phrase, the distinction between reading and harsh reality, as well as the portability of this aesthetic as praxis, was not lost on his readers. In fact, critics consistently noted Wordsworth's juxtaposition of the real and ideal, often citing "the light that never was, on sea or land" (15) from "Elegiac Stanzas" (1807) ⁵ to register their awareness of the poet's manipulation of the real to reach it from another angle: "[T]his light is a truth of the human spirit, which reveals, as nothing else can, the meaning of the phenomena around us" observed Edward Dowden, the noted Shakespeare scholar who oversaw the seven-volume Aldine edition of Wordsworth (1892-93) ("Introduction" xliii). The aesthetic space made available in this way "is not a region of illusion; on entering it, we only come into possession of our rightful heritage. For [Wordsworth] no opposition can exist between imagination and reason; they operate together in the search for the truth of things" (xliii). Victorian readers grasped this form of enlightenment based not only on spiritual encounters with Wordsworth, but also on similar experiences reading hugely popular works such as John Keble's *The Christian Year* (1827) and Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850). In a century of swiftly advancing technologies in which believers and doubters increasingly found spiritual relief in the same texts, it follows that Victorians would lift Wordsworth to the status of "England's Samuel" (Gill, WV 40). His ideal artform as ritual was amenable to both kinds of readers for the way it never lost sight of the real.

Although early critical reception of *The Prelude* took note of the poet's disenchantment with the French Revolution, historically analysis of the poem has centered on deciding which of the many texts to call *The Prelude*, and the restorative

value of the epiphanic “spots of time.” Critical emphasis on the “spots of time” has been the trend since Thomas De Quincey quoted another much-discussed scene, the Dream of the Arab in Book 5, and described other passages of the poem from memory in his 1839 series of articles for *Tait’s Magazine*. As *The Prelude* remained unpublished until July 1850, three months after the poet’s death, early nineteenth century critics with the exception of Samuel Taylor Coleridge⁶ and De Quincey, did not of course have access to the “poem to Coleridge” as it was known to Wordsworth’s intimate friends (Gill, *Prelude* 15).⁷ Even upon publication, the poem on Wordsworth’s life never quite captured the Victorian imagination in the same way as did *The Excursion* (1814), the more public part of Wordsworth’s projected masterwork, *The Recluse*.

Critical reception of *The Prelude* turned out to be more of a twentieth-century phenomenon than a Victorian sensation, but the reason did not lie completely in the poem’s phenomenological bent. While Victorian readers never embraced *The Prelude* as they did *The Excursion*, it is well to remember that a complex publishing history delayed critical response of the autobiographical poem (Gill, *Prelude* 94-5). For starters, Moxon issued two thousand copies of the first edition of *The Prelude* in 1850 (Merriam 148), the same year Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* saw print in over twice as many copies (Lindenberger 204). A reissue of *The Prelude* followed with the 1851 edition of Wordsworth’s poetry (Erickson 48). Another factor slowed wide distribution of *The Prelude*: the poem did not enter the public domain until 1892 pursuant to the Copyright Act of 1842. By contrast, *The Excursion* came into the public domain seven years after the poet’s death, which meant more copies were available to Victorians from a variety of publishers. Even so, Wordsworth’s most articulate readers knew and quoted *The*

Prelude—Walter Pater, R. H. Hutton, Leslie Stephen and the like. Notably, Arnold's paradigmatic essay in his 1879 Golden Treasury selection of Wordsworth's poetry argued against *The Prelude* in favor of the shorter poems for the sake of perpetuating the poet's name: "To be recognised far and wide as a great poet, to be possible and receivable as a classic, Wordsworth needs to be relieved of a great deal of the poetical baggage which now encumbers him" ("Wordsworth" 42). For Arnold and for generations of readers who set their sights on the Wordsworth he envisioned, that "baggage" included both *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*.

In claiming that Wordsworth's returns to *The Prelude* constitute a pattern of mourning in verse which also serves his spiritual purposes, my study marries two critical traditions in Wordsworth studies. It joins secular humanism associated with M.H. Abrams, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom which was inaugurated in the 1960s and early 70s, with critics such as Richard E. Brantley, Robert M. Ryan and William A. Ulmer who have revived the specifically Christian or otherwise religious elements in the poetry. Although Abrams, Hartman and Bloom are attuned to the centrality of the salvific in Wordsworth and place their interpretations within Old and New Testament traditions, that spirituality is godless. Abrams in particular takes Wordsworth's Prospectus to *The Recluse* as his primary text to argue for a romantic "spousal verse" (Preface *Exc* 57), an ideal union of man and nature brought down from heaven to earth as the distinctive literary legacy of the French Revolution (27-28; 1-140). In contrast to Abrams's influential analysis of the "Wordsworthian theodicy of the private life" (96), a "theodicy without an operative *theos*" (95), the deity is still "operative" in my reading, if rather subtly, in the earlier "Preludes."⁸

I build on these critics indirectly in my focus on the spiritual reading practices of Victorians which fit into both sacred and secular ways of thinking. This kind of flexibility was possible because the poetry's content was less important than was its habitual orientation of thankfulness. This open philosophy underwritten by the poet's ambiguous relationship to the deity made possible a wide range of interpretations in the nineteenth century, from High Church to agnostic.⁹ I further distinguish my view from Abrams's idea that Romantic poets internalized Christian theodicy in a process of secularization to argue that religion was too powerful and omnipresent in society to be solely absorbed and reformed in this way. I draw here on Colin Jager's study of how the argument from design, which finds in nature an analogy for sacred Scripture, sustained religious practices within a simultaneous process of secularization, from predominantly state-sanctioned forms of religion in Post-Reformation England to a multiplicity of religious and spiritual practices by the early nineteenth century (1-57). In a similar vein, I incorporate Talal Asad's definition of the secular as "neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred)" but the secular is instead evidenced in changing spiritual practices (25). In my view, then, Wordsworth did not internalize religion so much as set himself in a revisionary relationship to the deity. While this relationship was an outgrowth of conscience, it changed over time as a function of continual dialogue with the external world. *The Prelude's* revisions and the later poetry increasingly distinguish the deity from nature, even as Wordsworth's God appears both immanent in and transcendent of the order of nature.

I. Transmuting the Self

One scene of transmutation which allegorizes the multiple levels of return embedded in Wordsworth's poetry occurs in Book 4 of *The Prelude*. Using reading practices we have lost sight of, Victorian critics powerfully intuited these returns as applicable to their own lives—the psychological return to events in memory and the habitual return to the influences of nature. This scene in particular points up a tension central to Wordsworth's epitaphic aesthetic between what is known and unknown in the text:

Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked as in the presence of her God.
As on I walk'd a comfort seem'd to touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate;
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
At least not felt; and restoration came,
Like an intruder, knocking at the door
Of unacknowledged [weariness].¹⁰ (4: 140-48)

Here a transformative moment slips by the young poet unnoticed, but gathers meaning as the subject of later contemplation, illustrating a motif of unawareness across the oeuvre. In the next chapter, I look at similar allegories evidenced in other privileged moments that happen unawares and are known belatedly to the narrator and perhaps never to other characters in the poem. There I discuss the case of the Boy of Winander who receives the lake imagery “unawares into his mind” (5: 410) after his conversation with the owls in Book 5 of *The Prelude*. Similar circumstances can be seen in the *Lyrical Ballads*. In “The Brothers,” for instance, the Priest learns too late that the stranger with whom he has shared a history of the place was a Ewbank with a claim on his heart. In Book 4 of *The Prelude*, this instance of the young poet's “self-transmut[ation]” (4:141) as he travels the

public roads with his “rough Terrier of the hills” (4: 86) also turns on his lack of awareness. The scene has received little commentary compared to the “spots of time” in Book 11 and the Winander scene in Book 5. The subtlety of the scene may account for the critical oversight; it precedes two more dramatic moments in that book—the consecration of Wordsworth’s poetic career and the encounter with the “uncouth shape” (402) of the Discharged Soldier. The earlier walking scene warrants further examination as the poet’s gradual awakening shares much with the generalization of sorrow in Wordsworth’s epitaphic theory.

Despite his earlier lack of self-consciousness, the adult narrator believes his soul was “self-transmuted” as he walked in the “cold and raw” and “untun’d” evening with his canine companion while on summer vacation from Cambridge (4: 141; 135). In the act of recording his thoughts, the poet catches the contradiction between the implied agency of a self-transmuting soul and his delayed recognition of that power: transmuting the self ironically turns on unconscious attitudes. As writers on Wordsworth including Leslie Stephen have noticed, however, that unselfconsciousness must be in the conscious making for a long time: “The rightly prepared mind can recognize the divine harmony which underlies all apparent disorder . . . Everything depends upon the point of view” (“Ethics” 152). This theme resounded among Victorian critics who realized Wordsworth’s aesthetic called for the reader’s disciplined and yet flexible orientation. One might add to Stephen’s insight that retrospection enables the point of view which lends itself to deciphering both the unselfconscious transformations which may already perceive an order and the “disorder[ly]” ones in which perceiving order requires constant dedication.

In conjunction with the conscious and unconscious aspects of transmutation, there are at least two kinds of transmutation which entail a distant point from which to arrange events and to ascertain their import: a slow-motion form of self-transmutation which relies on an open disposition, and a harsher shift in perspective caused by uncontrollable events which subsequently requires realignment. Both procedures seek to shape and compose emotion. An example of the latter kind occurs in Wordsworth's pamphlet protesting *The Convention of Cintra* (1809). In this tract, the poet assigns great potential for tragic events to call forth allegiances like love of country which then impress order on disorder: the "power of injustice and inordinate calamity to transmute, to invigorate, and to govern . . . to reduce under submission passions purely evil—to exalt the nature of indifferent qualities, and to render them fit companions for the absolute virtues with which they are summoned to associate . . ." ultimately gives rise to hope in his calculation (3444-449).¹¹ R.H. Hutton described the more deliberate variety of transmutation as it applied to the poet's creative power in particular: "The voluntary element that we have noticed in Wordsworth's genius—the power of checking obvious and natural currents of thought or feeling in order to brood over them meditatively and bring out a result of a higher order, leads to many of his imperfections as well as his beauties. He had an eminently frugal mind" (Rev. of *William Wordsworth* 14-15). For Hutton, the poet's tendency to "fee[d] his genius" (15) on a grand and small scale monitored emotions as the poet turned each experience and subsequent musing on that experience into productive channels.

One of the ways Wordsworth forges these channels for transmuting sorrow is through generalized concepts and language, specifically the idea of mankind as an earthly

species, an anthropological and geological perspective which helps to “enstrange” the subject of pain and death. In re-routing the reader’s pain through the large-scale force of humanity and the generations of earth so as to achieve the epitaphic “tone which shall sink into the heart, the general language of humanity as connected with the subject of death” (EE1 306-07), the individual suffers a kind of death himself even as the detour anaesthetizes his pain until a new outlook on sorrow can be attained. Paradoxically, the expansive detour allows the poet and reader to detect boundaries where sorrow (like joy) might otherwise blur them. Such an “enstranging” event occurs when the young poet’s soul “stood” “self-transmuted” in Book 4. This moment gently prepares the way for the poet’s later vows of election when he becomes a chosen son, perhaps the most pivotal act of recognition in the poem.

I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit. (4: 341-344)

Together both passages—the making ready for election and the heady experience of accepting election itself—establish boundaries between human and divine and natural worlds. They do so necessarily through language that views all these categories from afar.

In order to represent the fine distinctions between worlds, the poet must uncover what is most primary as he shares a universal eye or “I” with the reader. Andrew Bennett’s study *Wordsworth Writing* (2007) seeks to understand this universal self in terms of the performative aspects of Wordsworth’s mode of composition as well as the “*writtenness* of the epitaphic form” (73). For Bennett, the poet is most exemplary when he is at his most “unique, singular, individual”(6)—in the act of writing. Wordsworth not

only asks the question ““Who am I?”” in *The Prelude*, he does so in a way that extends beyond the self writing, through a “process of making *and unmaking* the self in language” (6-7). It was a process that Victorians valued for the persona who spoke at once for the poet and for all men. The writer Aubrey de Vere compared the “true” and “false artist,” for instance, to explain how Wordsworth approaches the real through this idealized universal self. Whereas the “false artist” adds details and yet stays within the “merely individual,” “the true artist brings out in his portrait the great generic type of Humanity by subtracting from it the accidents ever found in flesh and blood, while at the same time he emphasises what is specially characteristic in the countenance copied. In other words, he creates while he copies, by seeing the Truth and representing it stripped of disguise” (“Wisdom and Truth” 228-29). More than one critic writing on Wordsworth echoed the sentiment that his stripped-down style represented ideal types of humankind. The Reverend Frederick W. Robertson, for example, observed in an 1852 lecture to the Mechanics’ Institution in England that Wordsworth “gives to us humanity stripped of its peculiarities; the feelings which do not belong to this man or that, this or that age, but are the heritage of our common nature” (795). For these Victorians, Wordsworth’s poetic self was necessarily a representative self.

Wordsworth’s spartan and self-questioning style takes the “common nature” of mankind into account at the beginning of Book 4 of *The Prelude*: “Why should I speak of what a thousand hearts / Have felt, and every man alive can guess?” (33-4) Such doubting grounds the poet all the more in the “common nature” he would represent. Susan J. Wolfson’s study of the “interrogative mode” in Romanticism finds that in composing *The Prelude*, “the poet’s ability to transform despair into hope is often figured

as a movement from questioning to resolution, or, at least, to a perspective from which irresolution may be managed” (*Questioning* 20; 135).¹² Through the delineation of human boundaries in his composition of the self-transmuting scene, the adult poet seeks the perspective from which to manage the questions that could not be asked by the young man on the other end of the “arc of retrospection.”¹³ For the narrator to speak for a “thousand hearts” means that the poet, then and now, moves in the company of the kind and shares their “common nature.” Yet on another level, to represent a “generic type of Humanity” (de Vere, “Wisdom and Truth” 228-29) requires that the poet see with the comprehensive vision of a god. In the self-transmuting scene in Book 4, the balance must be struck, it seems, by consciously humbling himself as if before his God before he can see like one. Yet the young poet cannot consciously take in the full impact of the divine influence which washes over him.

One of the defining features of Wordsworth’s epitaph permeates the scene; the epitaph is “exposed to all” (EE1 400) like the “soul” of the young man about to take his solemn vows. Just as the speaker of “Resolution and Independence” (1807) encounters the Leech-gatherer “unawares,” “Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven” (54; *P2V*),¹⁴ and images of the “naked Pool” recur in the “spots of time” (11: 304; 313; 321), here the narrator is both conscious as he reveals his naked soul, “unveil[ed]” like Moses before his God, and unconscious of much else. The state of the young poet who is thus exposed, yet unaware of his “weakness,” also brings to mind the girl in Wordsworth’s sonnet “It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free” (1807), who communes with God by virtue of just being:

If thou appear’st untouch’d by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:

Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not. (10-14) ¹⁵

In another echo of the sonnet, Wordsworth adds a line further down in the self-transmutation scene as it appears in the *Fourteen-Book Prelude*: "Then into solemn thought I passed once more" (190), lest there be any doubt he was earnest, even on summer vacation.¹⁶ Reflecting the proper attitude on the young man's part seems paramount. Yet if the poet writing *The Prelude* leaves the impression that the young man walking does not fully apprehend his lot, the Biblical allusion suggests otherwise. Moses's actions are deliberate: he unveils his face to speak with God on Mt. Sinai and then veils it before his people, because "the skin of Moses's face shone" afterwards (Exod. 34: 35).¹⁷ It is as if Moses had softened the shock of the divine encounter emblazoned on his face. Perhaps the young poet's limited self-knowledge serves a similar protective function to cushion for himself this holy exchange; he therefore covers over "weakness" where it "was not known to be / At least not felt" (4: 145-6).

If the young poet was unaware of "weakness" on the one hand, after the soul "put off her veil" (141), he was clearly aware of his abilities on the other: "[of] how on earth, / Man, if he do but live within the light of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad / His being with a strength that cannot fail" (4: 158-161). I argue that this ability to see with "something of another eye" (4: 200) enables him more sharply to define himself as part of the human species, which in turn helps to relieve his divine burden. The animal in this scene aids the poet in recognizing his humanness. In both the *Thirteen-* and *Fourteen-Book Preludes*, as the young poet moves down the public road "like a river murmuring / And talking to itself" (4: 110-11), composing as is his habit, his trusty terrier runs ahead

and warns of passersby so that the poet can compose himself and not appear “craz’d in brain” (4: 120). The narrator’s “off and on Companion” (4: 179) haunts the poet as he “again and yet again” (4: 177) mistakes the sounds of leaves for his dog’s panting: “Now here now there stirr’d by the straggling wind, / Came intermittingly a breath-like sound, / A respiration short and quick” (4: 174-76). And then: “I turned my head, to look if he were there” (4: 180). Although Jonathan Wordsworth notes these lines are revised for the better in the *Fourteen-Book Prelude*, he finds the 1805 lines “uncomfortably close to self-parody: readers are asked to take seriously that Wordsworth mistook the breathing of the earth . . . for the panting of his dog” (*Four Texts* 574-75n).¹⁸ I read the dog’s presence instead as eliciting a significant aspect of the allegory of self-transmutation: the poet imagines he hears breathing and keeps looking over his shoulder, figuratively, for the animal and the source of the sound. We are reminded of the first “Essay upon Epitaphs” in which Wordsworth points out the difference between the dog or horse who cannot imagine the sorrow of its companions upon its death (EE1 30-36) and humans who can imagine the mourning of friends we leave behind because we have “an intimation or assurance within us, that some part of our nature is imperishable” (EE1 40-41).

Within the context of the entire passage whose wavering pitch matches the “party-colour’d shew of grave and gay” of the poet’s mind (4: 347), the walking scene suggests a prelude to the more knowing tone of “Tintern Abbey” in which a young man bids farewell to the “glad animal movements” (75) of boyhood for good. He does so in order to attain a perspective from which he can hear the “still, sad music of humanity” (92) which he could not in “the hour / Of thoughtless youth (90-91).”¹⁹ The dog’s panting hardly qualifies as the music of humanity in the scene of the younger man’s crisis, but it

may rank with the music of life in which all animals participate, including *homo sapiens*. Traversing the path to adulthood at an earlier stage than “Tintern Abbey” necessarily means an even less certain tone for the lines in Book 4 of *The Prelude*. The young man’s “consciousness of animal delight” (4: 397), a line which is removed from the steadier Fourteen-Book version, mixes uncomfortably with the stern, yet comforting manner of seeing that slowly moves the poet outside of himself to think of humanity in both the 1805 and later versions of Book 4. If the comparison between dog and earth breathing strikes the reader as inapt, it only intensifies the “untun’d” and “raw” aspect of this transitional scene (4: 135): What exactly does it mean for the breathing of earth and animal to sound the same? From this very region of inquiry comes the sound of the poet’s next song, as the narrator reflects in Book 1 of *The Prelude*: “the mind of man is framed even like the breath / and harmony of music. There is a dark / Invisible workmanship that reconciles / Discordant elements, and makes them move in one society” (352-56). In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth looks to the “Invisible workmanship” of his natural surroundings for shared music to form and reform his state of mind. The young poet eventually finds his still sad music in Book 4 when he accepts his divine role. But he does so only after the “raw[ness]” of the self-transmuting scene registers the distress “not felt” (146) by the young poet for whom the burden of prophetic duty awaits.

The aesthetic that “reconciles / Discordant elements, and makes them move in one society” (1: 355-56) assumes the form of “species discourse” in Wordsworth’s autobiographical poem. I draw on Maureen McLane’s analysis of the changes in poetry as a category in the Romantic period, in which she notes that “poetry” as distinct from “literature,” “increasingly allied itself with a kind of species discourse” that joined the

literary with what it means to be human in a variety of ways (35). Here McLane chimes with Bennett's study insofar as Wordsworth represents a type: "the poet is special for Wordsworth not in his distance from other men but insofar as he embodies what is most human among them. Wordsworth offers the poet as the prototype of humanity, 'prototype' as defined by the life sciences. He bears those characteristics which most typify his kind" (29). McLane refers this larger tendency of "species discourse" to a passage from William Godwin's 1797 essay "Of an Early Taste for Reading" which so happens for my purposes to correlate the pedestrian scene to Wordsworth's divine task: "'Literature, taken in all its bearings, forms the grand line of demarcation between the human and the animal kingdoms'" (10).²⁰ In Book 4, composition and retrospection work to expose that "grand line." While McLane's study concerns itself with the human sciences rather than with prophecy per se, I argue for a strong connection between the two: "species discourse" lies at the heart of fulfilling Wordsworth's prophetic duty. In a profound way, *The Prelude* is about learning one's place in the order of things. Inchoate in the scene of transmutation is a movement from the individual to an awareness of human beings in the abstract and as inter-related to and yet distinct from animals.

After the poet's soul is "self-transmuted," he acknowledges a new way of seeing in which his interests lead straightaway to "plain-living people": "A freshness also found I at this time / In human Life, the life I mean of those / Whose occupations really I lov'd" (204; 181-83)—the "Woodman," the "shepherd" and his pious "grey-hair'd Dame" (206-08). But this "dawning, even as of another sense" (224), leads beyond the self and others as it manifests in a "human-heartedness about my love / For objects" (225) which had previously been the province of himself alone:

But now there open'd on me other thoughts,
 Of change, congratulation, and regret,
 A new-born feeling. It spread far and wide;
 The trees, the mountains shared it, and the brooks;
 The stars of Heaven, now seen in their old haunts,
 White Sirius, glittering o'er the southern crags,
 Orion with his belt, and those fair Seven,
 Acquaintances of every little child,
 And Jupiter, my own beloved Star.
 Whatever shadings of mortality
 Had fallen upon these objects heretofore
 Were different in kind; not tender: strong,
 Deep, gloomy were they and severe; the scatterings
 Of Childhood: and, moreover, had given way,
 In later youth, to beauty, and to love
 Enthusiastic, to delight and joy.

As one who hangs, down-bending from the side
 Of a slow-moving Boat, upon the breast
 Of a still water, solacing himself
 With such discoveries as his eye can make,
 Beneath him, in the bottom of the deeps,
 Sees many beauteous sights, weeds, fishes, flowers,
 Grots, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more;
 Yet often is perplex'd, and cannot part
 The shadow from the substance (4: 231-55)

The way in which this new awareness “spread[s] far and wide” in a topographical and astronomical sense compares to the “cosmic sublimity” identified by James Averill in *The Poetry of Human Suffering*, in which the poet “feels himself drawn out of oppressive surroundings to participate in a universe of life” (92-93).²¹ Many of Wordsworth’s nineteenth-century readers found such a cosmic sensibility attractive. Yet even as the emotion “spreads,” the narrator resists the flow when he reaches “Jupiter, my own beloved Star” (4: 239). Up until this point the “new-born feeling” (233) is reflected in a diffusion of “brooks” and “craggs” and constellations (234; 236). With the turn to the poet’s nativity star,²² however, the feeling is new-born in another sense as the generous mood returns to “deep, gloomy” origins (243). The tone of the passage here is one which

fits with the poet's "eminently frugal mind" as Hutton called it. The poet sets his sights on the cosmos but then returns to his origins and broods, even as an excess of adjectives and punctuation gets in the way of the motion toward "delight and joy"(246).²³

Whereas the train of natural images leading up to this point emphasizes their interrelations, arriving at the poet's "beloved Star" (239) marks a move to discriminate between this moment and the primary experiences of childhood: "Whatever shadings of mortality / Had fallen upon these objects heretofore / Were different in kind" (240-242). We see the grandeur ebbs; even though the passage closes on the joyous present, that present is saturated with a sense of loss. The "severe" memories of childhood are inescapable amidst the beauty of the vision. As evidenced in his enlarged consciousness which widens to the landscape, here the poet's "human-heartedness" leads to his "love for objects" (4: 225) in a compelling twist on the "Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind" (Bk 8). The poet lands on "shadings of mortality" (240) only after striking the right cosmic tone, the "general language of humanity as connected with the subject of death" in Wordsworth's epitaphic theory (EE1 306-07). It is as if he must acknowledge the latent pain which makes the expansive spirit possible. That pain seems to anchor the retrospective "I" "who hangs, down-bending" from a boat, "solacing himself / With such discoveries as the eye can make" (247; 249-50). These "discoveries" sustain the ever-branching process of abstraction which lends itself to "enstranging" loss by adjusting the angles of perception: the poet sees his life again through "still water," "yet often is perplex'd, and cannot part / The shadow from the substance" (249; 254-55). Turning shadow into substance is ultimately the fraught task of generalizing sorrow: the epitaphic

cycle moves from the individual to the cosmic view of the human species, and back to the earthbound individual again.

As we have seen, words can both facilitate and impede the poetic function. Even though Wordsworth's general language assists in pulling the poet away from the particular so as to contemplate the human race, the inadequacy of language to communicate such primary emotions comes through in the use of clothing metaphors. The image of unveiling the soul when the poet is self-transmuted richly recalls the troubling relationship to words as represented by garments in Book 4 and *The Prelude* more generally.²⁴ Before the walking scene, the poet recalls how with "pride, / But with more shame, for my habiliments" (65-66) he greeted his schoolmates when he returned home from college, for example. "This vague heartless chace / Of trivial pleasures" (4: 304-05) which he temporarily trades for books and nature form the backdrop for his anxiety: the "very garments that I wore appear'd / To prey upon my strength, and stopp'd the course / And quiet stream of self-forgetfulness (4: 292-94). When we turn to the third "Essay upon Epitaphs," Wordsworth makes the connection between words and clothing more explicitly. There inadequate language for conveying the elemental emotions is specifically figured as "garb." He is concerned to represent "[e]nergy, stillness, grandeur, tenderness, those feelings which are the pure emanations of nature . . . those expressions which are not what the garb is to the body but what the body is to the soul, themselves a constituent part and power or function in the thought . . ." (EE3 161-65).

In a much-quoted passage on ill-fitting words, Wordsworth extends the clothes metaphor and implies how the “counter-spirit” of language can work to the reader’s benefit:

Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts. If words be not . . . an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift; such a one as those poisoned vestments, read of in the stories of superstitious times, which had power to consume and to alienate from his right mind the victim who put them on. Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve. (EE3 178-88)

Paul de Man’s well-known essay, “Autobiography as De-Facement,” reads the clothing metaphor as the language of *prosopopeia*: “[t]o the extent that language is figure (or metaphor, or *prosopopeia*) it is indeed not the thing itself but the representation, the picture of the thing and, as such, it is silent, mute as pictures are mute. Language, as trope, is always privative” (80). Frances Ferguson emphasizes that privative nature as language’s belatedness to communicate the passion it represents. Wordsworth’s epitaphic language “creates a kind of power vacuum within words themselves, so that they can only ‘speak of something that is gone’” (33). But as Ferguson points out, this makes epitaphs “essentially didactic, always leaving room in their generality for the traveller-reader to include himself, whether or not they issue a specific invitation—‘Pause, Traveller’—to him” (34). This ample opening for the reader’s interpretation is where the mute picture speaks.

Guided by Victorian critics, I emphasize the capacity of Wordsworth’s language differently from de Man and Ferguson. In an 1875 essay, Edward Dowden responded to the efficacy of words in the poet’s above assessment in a way that anticipates the insights

of deconstructive criticism: “Here the thought and feeling are not crystal-like with sharp, clear edges; rather they saturate the language which sustains them as a solvent, and which conveys them to us in such a way that they at once enter into the vital action of the mind” (“Prose Works” 152). For Dowden, vague language facilitates slippery, near-unconscious entry into thought. As his remarks suggest, the process works for good or ill for the reason it readily affects the “vital action of the mind.” The “counter-spirit,” the potential for language to harm and “derange,” is also the stuff of life in Wordsworth’s epitaphic aesthetic. In its flexibility, the “counter-spirit” is analogous to the “tender fiction” which protects the mourner until he can withstand the harsh light of truth. On this view, when the emotional core is too raw, it gets covered over on purpose, like Moses’s softening veil. The “counter-spirit,” considered as an indirect means of approaching sorrow, is also the means by which ghostly “shadow[s]” can become bearable “substance” (4: 255) or the “unsubstantial” can be made more real.

The “tender fiction” is the indirect means by which the poet struggles to make the “unsubstantial” “substantial” so as to lessen the burden for mourners in Wordsworth’s epitaphic theory. The distinctions Wordsworth makes in presenting the “tender fiction” are analogous to those he makes in the self-transmuting scene between the young poet and his God which likewise relieve his burden. In one mode of epitaph, the writer eases the grief of survivors through the “tender fiction” of the deceased speaking from his own gravestone. “Thus is death disarmed of its sting, and affliction unsubstantialised” (EE1 440; 439-40). In this manner, the mourner uses his imagination in order gradually to take in the painful truth. The poet then qualifies this observation by noting his preference for the mode in which the epitaph speaks in the voice of the mourners, rather than the

deceased, because the latter mode “exclud[es] the fiction which is the groundwork of the other” and thus “rests upon a more solid basis” (EE1 458-59). In the second “Essay upon Epitaphs,” however, Wordsworth’s use of the terms “substantial” and “unsubstantial” qualifies these conditions yet again. This second qualification colors my understanding of the “healing power” of Wordsworth’s epitaphic aesthetic on the poet and his Victorian readers.

In the second Essay, Wordsworth censures Alexander Pope’s epitaphic style for “faults” he might have avoided if “he had written in prose as a plain Man, and not as a metrical Wit” (EE2 495-96). In turning to the style of the Italian poet Chiabrera whose epitaphs ignited Wordsworth’s interest in the form, he underscores his governing thesis of the three Essays as it pertains to the disposition of the writer: in order for the epitaph to ring true for mourners standing at the grave today and a hundred years hence, the writer must make felt his sincere affection for the person behind the epitaph above his own clever style. This respectful posture toward the deceased demands “matter of fact intensity” which “forbids more authoritatively than any other species of composition all modes of fiction, except those which the very strength of passion has created; which have been acknowledged by the human heart, and have become so familiar that they are converted into substantial realities” (EE2 485-89).

Here fictions possess the potential for becoming “substantial realities” if first earned by the “intensity” of the affect before being “acknowledged by the human heart” as necessary fictions. This move recalls to mind another axiom from the first Essay: “The affections are their own justification” (EE1 292), which cuts to the chase of this relationship between “substantial” and “unsubstantial” realities. The familiarity of these

necessary fictions is what triggers the switch point between the two as one form of reality becomes “converted” or transmuted into the other. Just as he traces the place where “consciousness of animal delight” (4.397) gives way to divine impulses in the self-transmuting scene, Wordsworth’s epitaphic aesthetic pivots on demarcating the furthest knowable point at which “unsubstantial” shades into “substantial” reality. In the unknowable difference between the two, the verse cultivates gratitude for what the poet has and knows, as well as for what he can do: his duty to displace sorrow. As irresolvable as those differences may be, Wordsworth’s ritual of revision aims at making them relentlessly.

II. “Unceasing Ritual”

Like other Wordsworthians, Edward Dowden regarded the poet’s sensual engagement with nature as an endless ritual: “To Wordsworth the senses, themselves sacred, and hardly more to be named senses than soul, are ministers to what is highest in man . . . There was for him an unceasing ritual of sensible forms appealing to the heart, the imagination, and the moral will . . .” (“Transcendental” 69-70). To the degree that reading and revision in Wordsworth are complemented by the physical experience of natural sensations, the practice of returning to the text takes its turn with the natural world in the “unceasing ritual of sensible forms.” For the most part, though, the exact nature of Wordsworth’s ritual can be only a critical surmise based on analysis of his patterns of composition in conjunction with biographical data.²⁵ The poetry shrouds his particular conceptions of the deity in vague or indirect language, perhaps owing to his “diffidence in treating subjects of holy writ” as he reported in a letter written late in life to Henry Alford (*Letters Later Years Pt 4* 23). While this obscure language makes definitive

statements about Wordsworth's religious belief difficult, it is still possible to see this spiritual practice as the "Religion of gratitude" he claimed for himself to his close friend Sir George Beaumont, a faith measurable in revision and allegory (*Letters Later Years Pt 1* 351). The poet's "diffidence" worked to his advantage for Victorian readers who discerned no clear-cut religious creed, but who admired his reverence for nature and its lowliest inhabitants viewed from a serene remove.

When seen as a ritual, Wordsworth's constant returns to *The Prelude* serve as a reminder of the difference between the human realm and the places where it intersects with divine and natural worlds. Jonathan Z. Smith's theory of ritual ceremony as an "assertion of difference" (*To Take Place* 109) develops this concept by showing how boundary-marking brings desire and reality into better focus: "*Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things*" (author's emphasis, *Imagining* 63). Smith's understanding of ritual corresponds to Wordsworth's revision as a form of worship and mourning in which the difference between the ideal and the real can be imported into everyday situations as a control mechanism and generator of hope. The relatively contained environment of altering *The Prelude* or any poem can be seen as "performing" a "ritualized perfection" or at least exploring the imperfections— so that the poet can later summon up an order when he steps back into the mayhem of the "*ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things.*" As for attaining temporary perfection, William Knight, the scholar and editor who founded the Wordsworth Society in 1880, saw in Wordsworth's poetry the interpretive reach of an aesthetic that values the natural world in all its modes, both when it functions as the

“great tranquilizer and restorer of human faculties,” and when it finds the observer
 “crushed by the burden of finally insoluble problems”:

the relief which Nature gives, in such moods of mind and feeling, is not obtained by a clearing up of the mystery, *but by the removal of the things which make the mystery disturbing*, by resetting it in another form; presenting it again, in short, with a curious light at the heart of it,—a knowledge of the significance of things, illumining the darkness which remains. (“Nature” 422)

The work of “removal” does not seek to avoid pain, but to finesse it. Indeed, “resetting” the mystery “in another form” sounds very much like the work of revision which does not disown the world, or the work of art, by tossing out the good along with the imperfect pieces. Rather it is “eminently frugal,” and works with what it has, trying to see the parts in different combinations. This reworking of material may be one reason the revisions of *The Prelude* have been considered by some critics, including Geoffrey Hartman, as “corrupt[ion]s” of the earlier versions (Preface *WP* xvii). The revising poet or reader can put miles between himself and his pain if he works long enough with the text.

Like poetic revision, religious perspectives can effect such “resetting” from the particular everyday experience to a distant vantage point in order to differentiate between the “*way things ought to be*” and the “*way things are*,” as advanced in Smith’s theory of ritual. Clifford Geertz further assists in imagining how a religious outlook can put regular suffering through a wide angle lens: “The religious perspective differs from the commonsensical in that . . . it moves beyond the realities of everyday life to wider ones which correct and complete them. Its defining concern, moreover, is not action upon those wider realities but acceptance of them, faith in them” (668). Wordsworth’s revisions as self-correcting and the reader’s self-completion of the poem spring to mind here as kinds of aesthetic consummations which may yet result in action outside the text,

but which first seek to ponder interrelationships. Approaching ritual through cultural anthropology, Geertz throws new light as well on Pater's often-quoted reading of the "end-in-itself" in Wordsworth's poetry, an end embodied by all art in Pater's view: "the end of life is not action but contemplation—*being* as distinct from *doing*—a certain disposition of the mind . . ." ("Wordsworth" 62). The religious perspective implies a pause from "*doing*" so as to empower a process that promises to see further than either the poet or reader can see alone. The reader's willingness makes possible the aerial perspective on past emotion. Just as revision spins off its own intellectual vitality in the dance of meanings, the long view of life breeds faith in the individual's ability to remove himself temporarily from the "*ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things*" in Smith's phrase, in order to see from the eye of the emotional storm. Referring to "religious performances," Geertz notes that for outsiders, such ceremonies "can be only aesthetically appreciated or scientifically dissected. For participants, however, religious rituals are in addition, enactments, materializations, realization of the religious perspective—not only models *of* what they believe, but also models *for* the believing of it. In these plastic dramas men attain their faith as they portray it" (670). What at first appears to be the relinquishment of authority in ritual submission to a text, instead flows back to the reader or poet in unexpected ways. In revising Book 11 of *The Prelude*, for instance, the confidence instilled in the young poet lost on the "bare Common" who accepts humility as a condition of finding his way, redounds upon the adult poet, too, as a renewable form of faith: "So feeling comes in aid / Of feeling, and diversity of strength / Attends us, if but once we have been strong" (*Prel* 11: 303; 326-28).

For Wordsworth's spiritual or religious-minded readers, charting finite capabilities did not threaten the possibility of infinite knowledge existing beyond human awareness. Rather, for those readers, being brought up against mortal bounds appeared to make the infinite palpable to the degree the reader could become aware of the "*conscious tension*" (Smith 63) between the realms of perfection and real world inadequacy. In like fashion, the agnostic Leslie Stephen saw the potential of the outward movement from the detailed part in Wordsworth to reshape normal chaos: "The philosophic mind is that which habitually sees the general in the particular, and finds food for the deepest thought in the simplest objects. It requires, therefore, periods of repose, in which the fragmentary and complex atoms of distracted feeling which make up the incessant whirl of daily life may have time to crystallise round the central thoughts" ("Ethics" 219). Stephen found in reading Wordsworth that the act of solitary reflection presented a tool for coalescing far-flung thoughts and feelings for re-investment in the world of social engagement: the philosophic mind "must feed in order to assimilate" ("Ethics" 219). Depending on the reader, such pauses could be experienced as prayerful aids to sorrow.

III. Revising the Deity: Wordsworth and the "Spots of Time"

By analyzing the poet's revisions of the enigmatic "spots of time" in Book 11 of *The Prelude*, we can more clearly comprehend how the poetry's representation of distinct levels of awareness and fine lines of connection and separation between nature, man and the divine encourage individual action as an antidote to suffering. In tandem with cyclical movements joining the general and particular, ascertaining the "*way things ought to be*" from the "*way things are*" frees up the psyche and helps to keep sorrow at bay in moments of composition. We must keep in mind, however, that the poet protests too

much that the general and particular harmonize in the epitaph. We can conclude, instead, with critics such as Bennett (69), that the general and the particular elements of Wordsworth's epitaphic aesthetic resist easy resolution. Like the unwinnable battles between speech and writing and the spirit and counter-spirit of language, the general and the particular coexist in a complex tension in the epitaphic mode.

Likewise there exists a tension between revision as managing and revision as inflicting pain. Revision as a ritual form of self-correction continually brings the poet and narrator up against his human frailties, perhaps most painfully as a means of checking writerly pride against social obligations. Returning to reign in errant tendencies may speak to why the poet and his family reported his discomfort in writing and revising.²⁶ Yet the poet's consistent practice of "tinker[ing]" with his verse, as his wife Mary Wordsworth called it (*LMW* 250), suggests some deep vitality for his spiritual health and thus for his craft overall, if not for a revisionary net gain in *The Prelude*. Bennett, however, argues against "writing-as-therapy" (150) in which repressed emotions are given vent in the act of revision. In his account, inscription is traumatic for Wordsworth; "in writing *The Prelude*, Wordsworth composes himself as discomposed." (162). My reading acknowledges the pain and the unfinished nature of revision as a form of mourning. However, what proves saving is the marking off of boundaries which bear on the prophetic task. By demarcating his personal failures and losses from afar in the act of revision, the poet seems to be recalled not only to the source of his sorrow, but importantly, to the prayerful source of his resilience as evidenced in the "spots of time." The borders which afford relief and which spur him toward duty are the ones firmly established between Wordsworth and his God.

In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's pre-Freudian poetics of mourning as revision and return documents the gradual loosening of psychic bonds which precedes their reshaping within a view of the human as species and thus within nature's larger cycle of renovation and decay. In Book 4 we saw the poet implicitly mourning his youth as he prepared to accept a prophetic "bond unknown" (4: 342). His revisiting childhood habits of stargazing resembles the mourner's more explicit returns to the grave, exemplifying the levels of return as revision of affect in *The Prelude*. Such returns to the tomb loosen traumatic memories affixed to the deceased for re-attachment to new love objects. As Freud's theory accounts for it, the "work of mourning" necessarily proceeds incrementally: the painful process of freeing up psychic bonds to the lost loved one "cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 245). The lingering of the lost object in the mourner's affections becomes the "compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal" (245) in this psychic system. In Wordsworth's epitaphic aesthetic, however, healing may involve slowly detaching bonds, but the reality he depicts also involves a never-completed process of reattaching to the lost object by means of those objects which remain, particularly through the always decaying and renewing properties of language and the natural setting.

This process of reattachment is similar to the "power of unfinished, insufficient mourning-work" which founds Wordsworth's "social vision of transmortal community" (7) according to Kurt Fosso who conceives of these as small, alternative groups of mourners defined by their relationship to the dead. I emphasize a more sweeping version

of this community as it is abstracted to the human race and earthly cycles. But I agree with Fosso's view of Wordsworth's mourning process as one which does not move toward interiorizing the deceased in a Freudian model of healthy mourning. Rather this work leads "outward to memorializing tributes and to the bonds of mourning" (7). Leslie Stephen was aware of the importance of reforming severed bonds in this way. In an address to an ethical society late in life he reflected that "by slow degrees [grief] undergoes a transmutation into more steady and profound love of whatsoever may still be left. The broken and mangled fibres imperceptibly find new attachments . . ." ("Forgotten Benefactors" 256). Here transmutation involves reforming emotional "fibres" in a way which does not betray the beloved. Instead, for Stephen, making these new attachments is "but a carrying on of the old duties" which have become more "sacred and solemn by the old grief" (256).

Reconfiguring emotion is tricky work, though, given that the passions in Wordsworth's poetry tend to follow their own logic in practice, despite the poet's claims in theory. This is especially true because emotions adhere to places as much as they do to the people in the poems. Building on eighteenth-century mechanistic psychology, Adela Pinch's study of Wordsworth's affective style examines the questions that arise when feelings travel of their own accord in and across Romantic era texts and between persons. Wordsworth's poetry seems unable to pin down such "extravagant" emotions (Pinch 2) even though the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) argues that what separated his poetry from the verse in vogue at the time was "that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (*LB* 143-44).²⁷ The poet claims the intricate workings of the passions drive the subject of his

craft. However, figuring out which came first—the situation or the feeling—is like deciding how to prioritize speech over writing, or the general over the particular. The epitaphic aesthetic evidenced in *The Prelude* suggests that before the adult emotion even confers significance on poetic action, the larger natural scene has already acted upon the individual and “allied [itself] to the affections” (1: 641). Once the place has attached itself to the affections, and the affections have attached to the place, the original feeling which consecrates a place and keeps it alive in memory exists independently of that person, like the germ of a tale waiting to be quickened by the event and place. The narrator of “The Thorn” (1798) implies this is the case as it concerns Martha Ray’s secret sorrow, for instance: “Perhaps when you are at the place / You something of her tale may trace” (109-110).²⁸ For the visitor who looks hard enough, feeling has been inscribed in earth like Martha Ray’s woeful secret.

Insofar as the earth appears to be inscribed with emotions like the human body, Julia Kristeva’s theory of semiotic activity seems apt for comparing the ways in which passions appear to pour off into the setting. Kristeva holds that pre-oedipal drives inscribe the body and are thus inseparably bound up with both signifying and biology: “moods are *inscriptions*, energy disruptions, and not simply raw energies” (*Black Sun* 22). Literary language which is heterogeneous in Kristevan terms, composed of both “semiotic” and “symbolic” elements, “transposes affect into rhythm, signs, forms” (22).²⁹ That is, the drives which inscribe the body also inscribe themselves in language. In Wordsworth’s poetry there seems to be an odd connection between these drives in the body and in language and the scene of passion or trauma such that the emotional overflow appears to drain directly into the earth, even if that overflow is only contained

in memory. Kristeva gives us a way of imagining the passional runoff materially. It is as if this transfer of feeling occurred by proximity of bodily drives to earthly signs—rocks, plots of ground, lakes—which preserve traces of affects, just as written language preserves traces of these affects on the page.

Because of the way in which originary links are made between place, affect, and person, ties to the absent object may be loosened but not necessarily lessened by habitual returns to the significant scene or the grave. Rather ties seem to be remade in the grieving mind with the help of the germ of the tale at the scene. The adult poet writing *The Prelude* explains how the “vulgar joy” (1: 626) of youth may fade, but the accessible history of the emotion does not:

—And if the vulgar joy by its own weight
Wearied itself out of the memory
The scenes which were witness of that joy
Remained, in their substantial lineaments
Depicted on the brain, and to the eye
Were visible, a daily sight: and thus,
By the impressive discipline of fear,
By pleasure, and repeated happiness,
So frequently repeated, and by force
Of obscure feelings representative
Of joys that were forgotten, these same scenes,
So beauteous and majestic in themselves,
Though yet the day was distant, did at length
Become habitually dear; and all
Their hues and forms were by invisible links
Allied to the affections. (emphasis added, 1: 626-41)

When joyous feelings are no longer in the forefront of the memory, the scenes associated with that joy can still stimulate the joy inscribed in memory. Another way of saying this is to refer back to the “*active universe*” (*Prel* 2: 266) as formed of divine potential which can be shaped for good or ill. Wordsworth’s high argument famously calls for the interchange between the natural world and its inhabitants. *The Prelude* establishes that

interaction as first and foremost bodily. Impressions are initially made upon the poet when as a “Babe, by intercourse of touch, / [he] held mute dialogues with [his] Mother’s heart” (2: 282-83). That joyful infusion is one which moves from the maternal body by touch to the child within the natural setting. It is a familiar process which informs the entire discussion: the “obscure feelings” (635) which are rooted in “joys that were forgotten” (636) are “link[ed]” to the landscape in such a way that these forgotten joys are habitually activated by the same “scenes which were a witness of that joy” (628). I emphasize the scenes “which were a witness” as existing in the poet’s memory, but also seemingly independent of that memory, in the place itself which retains affective experiences as an emotional history or “soft records.” Places that bear witness, like acts of forgiveness, can be saving excesses in Wordsworth’s universe. The adult poet returns in memory and in place to the scenes which remain after the “characters” of nature have been “impress’d upon all forms”—on caves and trees as well as the young boy’s mind (1: 498). Such “characters” are not only those of joy, but characters “of danger or desire” (1: 499) which correlate to scenes of mourning and trauma. When the “invisible links” (1: 640) to the scene recall the deceased, they assist in forming the “bonds of mourning” in Fosso’s phrase.

Further, these ties to the deceased emphasize a call to duty enhanced by returns to the scene as memorial. Early on in the first “Essay upon Epitaphs” Wordsworth includes from Weever’s *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631) a brief history of epitaphs as derived from the ““presage or fore-feeling of immortality”” (EE1.20-21)³⁰ but does not include other parts of the same passage which he must have read and which seem relevant here. Attributing this wisdom on epitaphs to William Camden, Weever’s discourse reminds the

reader that one “motive” for thoughtful and frequent returns to epitaphs of honorable persons is to “bring us to repentance” (8). He explains the effect of viewing the expensively adorned sepulchres in ancient times, “by them we are put in mind, and warned to consider our fragile condition; for they are externall helps to excite, and stirre up our inward thoughts, *habere memoriam mortis semper prae oculis*: to have the remembrance of death ever before our eyes, and that our brethren defunct, may not be out of minde as out of sight” (9). In contrast to the aim stated in the “Essays upon Epitaphs” that the grave helps to bring about resignation (EE1 420-22), epitaphs which are “externall helps to excite, and stirre up our inward thoughts” in Weever’s discourse, produce a different undercurrent for Wordsworth’s theory which may be felt as the epitaph’s simultaneous call to duty.

While the significant natural scene impresses its forms, the actual epitaph at the gravesite impresses on the reader’s mind at once the “character” of the deceased and the mourner’s obligation to the living. Wordsworth referred explicitly to such ties in a letter to his close friend Sir George Beaumont, written just days after the death of the poet’s brother. Here he describes the loss of John Wordsworth, who perished in the wreck of the *Earl of Abergavenny* off the coast of Weymouth on 5 February 1805, a loss from which the poet never fully recovered: “I shall never forget him, never lose sight of him, there is a bond between us yet, the same as if he were living, nay far more sacred, calling upon me to do my utmost, as he to the last did his utmost to live in honour and worthiness” (*Letters Early Years Pt 1* 547).³¹ Wordsworth’s felt duty to his dead brother may have been reinforced by places connected with his brother’s affections, and the influence may have moved in the other direction as well.³² The heightened sense of

connection to his brother through death is one which called him to action, though, just as Stephen described the process of reattachment and making sacred “old grief” through the new ties. In like fashion, Wordsworth’s poetry called many of his Victorian readers to duty through his depiction of an animated natural world.

For the poet of *The Prelude*, as for the writer of epitaphs and the mourner in the “Essays upon Epitaphs,” a literally grounded sense of identity emerges in the ritual of return. The poet’s identity takes form by revising “*the way things ought to be in conscious tension with the way things are*” (Smith, *Imagining* 63). In William H. Galperin’s notion of the “internalized allegory” (166), the man writing *The Prelude* assumes the godlike role of prophet at the same time as he models himself on the idealized figure. Consequently, the deity he worships grows far too close for comfort. In the rhythm of the “internalized allegory,” the man writing imitates the godlike character of the prophet, shuttling back and forth between the two roles. The survivor at the gravesite, in a different way defines himself “ultimately by what [he] is not” (Galperin 91)—one who has departed the known material world. The mourner’s identity is changed less by a “mode of displacement” (91) than by simply standing at the edge of death with his own life in sharp relief. Yet both procedures lead to forms of transmutation: just as the mourner slowly revises his grief by continual returns to the lost object in memory, Wordsworth’s over-identification with the deity necessarily becomes subject to revision as well. Over the course of the poet’s lifetime the returns to the “spots of time” in *The Prelude* expose a different poetic identity which need not bear the burden of a “sublime self” (157). We see in the maturing poet of *The River Duddon* sonnets (1820) in Chapter 3 and in the poet of *The Fourteen-Book Prelude* the shedding of this “sublime self” for a

relation to a deity separate from the poet but connected through the “prime and vital principle” (*Prel* 13: 194). As I conceive of it, the “internalized allegory,” like the survivor’s returns to the grave, takes the shape of mourning which is gradually externalized in a process of transmuting the self.

The irresolvable tension of this allegory, which is the source of much of the poet’s sorrow, grows out of a desire to impress his own image on nature and his fears of usurping God’s role in the process. Not only does Wordsworth’s negotiation of this impasse fuel the continual revisions of the poem, his presentation of this struggle as a gift to Coleridge is what justifies “talk[ing] so much about himself.” Over a period of several evenings ending in January 1807, Wordsworth read his autobiographical poem aloud to Coleridge and members of his family.³³ The final lines of Coleridge’s poetic reply intimate the force of hearing the words from the poet’s mouth: “I sate, my being blended in one thought / (Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?) / Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound— / And when I rose, I found myself in prayer” (109-112).³⁴ It is ultimately as a prelude to prophetic duty that Wordsworth need reflect so intently, and upon his death in 1850, so publicly, on his own mind. The value of this self-searching for Coleridge and for Wordsworth’s nineteenth-century reading public lay not so much in the poet’s unique findings as its intricate documentation attested to the importance of their doing likewise.

No other can divide with thee this work,
 No secondary hand can intervene
 To fashion this ability; ’tis thine,
 The prime and vital principle is thine,
 In the recesses of thy nature, far
 From any reach of outward fellowship,
 Else ’tis not thine at all. (13: 191-197)

Abrams (120) and other critics hear an emphasis on the mind's autonomy in these lines from Book 13 which form the epigraph to this chapter. It is also possible, however, to hear Wordsworth's recognition of the confines of his own prophetic voice against his desire to "reach" and to heal his ailing friend Coleridge. "No secondary hand can intervene / To fashion this ability"; Wordsworth can take his reader only so far. The lines imply that the writing hand—in this case Coleridge's—connects the recesses of the soul to that "vital principle" which is the inner potential for the divine and which by definition lies beyond the power of any other human to bestow ("far / From any reach of outward fellowship"). While the entire poem can be considered as a gesture of "outward fellowship" to Coleridge, Wordsworth suggests that this gift comes with no batteries or assembly instructions: only Coleridge's hand can direct the "vital principle" by initiating the hard work of elevating his own soul.

In a psychoanalytic meditation on the way self-love is bound up in the goodness of the whole for Aquinas, Kristeva opens an avenue to this "vital principle" in Wordsworth's universe. The potential for good and the individual's participation in that good as presented in Wordsworth's natural world coincide with Thomistic philosophy. For St. Thomas, the love of self precedes any other kind of love because this love is defined by God's goodness from the beginning, as Kristeva points out: "the greatest good is God, but the first access to him comes from our immediate relation to ourselves; moreover, the similarity between others and ourselves permits us to have access to them" (*Tales* 172). This fits in with a central Thomistic tenet which underlies Wordsworth's poetry, subjected though it is to great scrutiny: that all parts of the world have meaning simply because they exist. Aquinas advances "an idea of being . . . not just as an

arbitrary thereness of things for sense-experience, but as a logical and significant thereness in a community of the universe revealed to man by knowledge and love”

(McDermott xxiii). In Kristeva’s analysis of Thomistic thought, both knowledge and love stem from a form of self-love which is defined in terms of the divine whole:

It is thus love of one’s own self as one’s own good that determines and directs other consecutive loves. This love of ‘one’s own self,’ however, should be conceived only as participation in *ontological good*, which obviously refers to God but is also to be interpreted as preservation of the species. The created being loves, as it partakes of the species: it is *preserved* through love, and because it is ‘of God.’” (*Tales* 174)³⁵

In Kristeva’s comments, we detect some of the sensibility of the third “Essay upon Epitaphs” which raises the “peculiar” qualities of the individual to the ideal light of the qualities he had in common with the species (EE3 335-36), a cycle which for the young poet, starts and ends with the individual’s naked soul before his God. Kristeva’s reading of Thomas asserts that loving oneself is “partak[ing] of the species” as well as “*preserv[ing]*” the species. This relation of the individual to the kind suggests how self-love as a divine good relates to the “prime and vital principle” to which the poet of *The Prelude* and his friend Coleridge have equal access. The only step remaining is “meditated action”—upon contemplation, an action which constitutes the “food of hope” in the words of the Wanderer in Book 9 of *The Excursion* (21; 20). It is the necessary “*doing*” which follows upon the poet’s “*being*” to rework Pater’s phrase.

As we saw in Book 4 of *The Prelude*, the patient cultivation of Wordsworth’s proud and terrifying gift is not only what promises the interchange with society and nature for which he longs, he seems to have little choice in the matter but to fulfill a higher duty in this way (“bond unknown to me / Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly, / A dedicated Spirit” 4: 342-44). The “bond unknown” bestowed on Wordsworth

in the consecration scene may be “unknown” insofar as it is unknowable; but in the act of checking his imaginative powers, the poet nevertheless indicates he can feel its presence when he brushes up against it. The possibility of violating the proper bounds of poetic flight haunts *The Prelude*, as exemplified by the crisis of Imagination at Simplon Pass in Book 6. One of the results of this “internalized allegory” is to put the poet at a remove at such moments of composition that he can barely recognize his own hand as the poet’s hand writing. Similar fears could explain the “hand unseen” which “impels” (90-91) Anna Letitia Barbauld, writing in the eighteenth century. In “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” (1773), a poem which inspired Wordsworth’s fragment, “A Night-Piece” (1798), the poem’s speaker “launch[es] into the trackless deeps of space” (82):³⁶

Here must I stop,
Or is there aught beyond? What hand unseen
Impels me onward thro’ the glowing orbs
Of habitable nature; far remote,
To the dread confines of eternal night
.....
But oh thou mighty mind! Whose powerful word
Said, thus let all things be, and thus they were,
Where shall I seek thy presence? How unblam’d
Invoke thy dread perfection? (89-93; 99-102)

When the act of writing leads both poets to ask “is there aught beyond?” there is a corresponding need to acknowledge the deity, as if to assuage the guilt of having come far enough afield to ask the question. Both poets follow in the Miltonic tradition of testing the limits of divine poetic inspiration. For Barbauld and Wordsworth, the practical benefit of this atonement may be extra flying time, as both poets seek to navigate earthly obligations and those imaginative gifts which press the limits of that world. Or, perhaps the tension is reduced if the writer positions him or herself to write first for God in order

to “build up” the human soul and the poetic imagination in one fell swoop. In any case, Wordsworth’s returning to the “spots of time” makes sense as a way of returning to ponder the deity by feeling his early loss, even if the spirit lives in the “recesses” of his nature (13: 195), and has through deliberately vague language, gone underground in the text. As reflected in textual revisions, the poet’s relationship to his deity is one he revises over time.

It is only fitting that the “spots of time” which form the core of the 1799 version of *The Prelude* and which are described as being “scatter’d every where, taking their date / From our first childhood” (11: 275-6), should be scattered finally throughout the evolving poem itself. The last three “spots” which were written after Christmas 1798 in Goslar Germany—the scenes of the drowned man, the gibbet crime and Waiting for the Horses—represent a move from the young poet’s participation in the stealing of a boat, or another hunter’s trappings or hanging dangerously from a ledge as he plunders a bird’s nest; to his implication in more grisly scenes, in which a murderer is the one hanging in punishment.³⁷ In these last three “spots,” death is later made palpable for the poet and the reader by emblems of the dead which are depicted in each scene: the unclaimed “heap of garments” (5: 461) which belong to the drowned man, the “Gibbet mast [which is] moulder’d down” (11: 291) and the inscribed name of the murderer; and the hawthorn bush and single sheep which mark the vantage point of the schoolboy who eagerly awaits the horses to carry him home for Christmas and, most unexpectedly, to his father’s death soon after. The last three “spots” surely carry over from the first set of “spots” the guilt of having taken untoward liberties. But there seems to be more at stake for the poet in the latter group of three “spots”; whatever crimes lurk there, the emphasis on the boy being

alone, lost, and anxiously waiting for guidance surely reflects on his later status as an orphan. This orphaned state correlates to the violation by a poet whose imagination roams too freely and flies too high. The boy who loses his earthly father may feel implicated in the same way as the adult poet who loses his standing with God the father for giving the Imagination free reign.

In the gibbet scene, the poet's revisions suggest that these stolen liberties do correspond to his role as prophetic poet. Leading up to this scene, the poet makes a notable addition to the 1805 version of the poem which elaborates on the "renovating Virtue" of these childhood memories:

A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced
That penetrates, enables us to mount
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will. (11: 266-273)

While these lines may suggest that somehow the "spots of time" can restore the imagination and enhance pleasure to the point that "the mind / Is lord and master," the entire phrase also reminds of a possible uncertainty—a "*deepest feeling* that the mind / Is lord and master" (emphasis added). If "passages of life" (271) also refers to writing or reading passages of verse, then remembering and revising the "spots of time" would minister in moments of despair, but also in those soaring moments of composition, when the poet "feels" as if his mind is "lord and master." One way the "spots" could work to restore boundaries then is either to feed or to tone down the poet's ambitions, as appropriate to carrying out his prophetic role. This tempering process is in keeping with the *Fourteen-Book Prelude* in which the poet makes explicit the way the "spots" work to

clarify the limits of the mind's sovereignty. Given the poet's conservative trend in later life, the new qualifying phrase in which "passages of life" instead "give / Profoundest knowledge how and to what point / the mind is lord and master"(12: 220-222) is hardly breaking news. But after reading the later revisions, returning to these lines in the 1805 poem has the effect of destabilizing the feeling first registered there. The loss of John Wordsworth in February 1805 may or may not be relevant to these particular lines; various drafts of Book 11 were reworked in 1805.³⁸ But the need to hold onto the "deepest feeling that the mind / Is lord and master" comes through clearly enough—even if that feeling is false.

Further changes in the gibbet scene underscore the poet's concern with the risks of prophetic writing which is figured here as "monumental writing." The "urchin . . . who scarce / Could hold a bridle" (299-300) is depicted in the 1799 poem as mounting his horse "with ambitious hopes" (300). In 1805, Wordsworth narrates virtually the same scene, but his word choice points to his poetic anxieties: "At a time / When scarcely (I was then not six years old) / My hand could hold a bridle, with proud hopes / I mounted" (279-282). While the change to the word "hand" alone may seem insignificant, in light of further 1805 additions that entail descriptions of writing, the reader is invited to imagine the hand of the boy taking the bridle as the writing hand of the adult poet. No sooner does the boy guide his own horse than he loses sight of his own guide. Frightened, the boy dismounts and finds himself at the scene

where in former times
A Murderer had been hung in iron chains.
The Gibbet mast was moulder'd down, the bones
And iron case were gone; but on the turf
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought
Some unknown hand had carved the Murderer's name.

The monumental writing was engraven
 In times long past, and still, from year to year,
 By superstition of the neighbourhood
 The grass is clear'd away; and to this hour
 The letters are all fresh and visible. (11: 289-299)

Taken together with the new “monumental writing,” the added detail that the boy’s “hand” holds the bridle as he “mount[s]” with “proud hopes” suggests an allegory for the adult poet’s first efforts at taking the reins of his own imagination, perhaps without divine guidance. In this context, the boy’s “proud hopes” recall to the reader’s mind the poet’s oft-expressed desire to wield in language a force equivalent to the natural forces which have shaped his own gifts. That desire marks the discrepancy between the mind’s power to create and the “element” with which it does so—the words on the page. Even more specifically, the dreamlike sequence of images in the gibbet scene literally play out the poet’s desire to “stamp” the mind’s image in nature, in this case, in letters on the turf.

The reader can then follow out the poet’s “proud hopes” to their nightmarish extremes. If, in writing a poem on his own mind, the poet inscribes his own name in verse to the exclusion of God’s name, then he, too, becomes a murderer, and his own epitaph marks the crime.³⁹ The poetic act of inscribing his own epitaph in this way conflicts with his duty to his God and is perhaps one reason the poet is so intrigued with finding a theory of epitaphs so as to safely inscribe his name in verse. Thus it is no wonder that the hand remains “unknown” to the boy and unnamed by the poet. Like the “unseen hand” in Barbauld’s meditation, this writing hand has entered unknown territory and necessarily remains as remote from the poet’s direct knowledge as the “unknown bond” which ties him to holy service. But in a telling line in the 1805 poem, a shift from “was engraven” to the present tense narrative works to clear away the memory of the frightened boy and

allows the adult poet to recall those letters in the present. Or, if the tense change cuts to the poet writing in the present, the poet may be unconsciously implicating himself as the “unknown hand” as he glances down at the revision underway: “and to this hour / The letters are all fresh and visible.” By the time he writes the *Fourteen-Book Prelude* however, the imagined trespass has been safely put away: the boy’s hand is now seen as the “inexperienced hand” (226) by the wiser poet in retrospect. And though the superstitious custom of clearing the grass remains, the moment which intrudes in the 1805 text is contained by the later revisions. The later text shifts to the past tense and from the immediate “this hour” to the more distant “that hour,” effectively separating the poet from his earlier poetic crime. The revisions reveal a corresponding sense of urgency to leave the scene of the inscribed letters and to climb back up on the common to gain another view of the place where he is lost. Whereas the earlier versions indicate he simply “left the spot” (1: 313, 1799; 11: 302, 1805), in the *Fourteen-Book Prelude*, the boy wastes no time lingering over the letters: “a casual glance had shewn them, and I fled” (12: 246).

In the 1805 and later revisions of *The Prelude*, the poet narrates a return to the spot of the gibbet mast, an abrupt addition that marks the significance of the memory as well as an awareness of place which retains much of the “spirit of the place.” Whereas the self-transmuting scene in Book 4 shows the process of humanizing sorrow with a turn to the “cosmic sublim[e]” in Averill’s terms, here, the sublime moment is only implied. Theresa M. Kelley’s study of Wordsworth’s revisions reads this return to the gibbet scene “in the company of women who brought domestic happiness”—the poet’s sister Dorothy Wordsworth and his future wife Mary Hutchinson—as a “domesticated sublime” (123).

In revisions from 1832-50, Kelley explains, the female “presence domesticates the scene and the boy who saw it” (123), although mysteriously Dorothy Wordsworth has been revised out of the picture (123). The “two dear Ones” in 1805 are revised instead to “the loved One” in the Fourteen-book text (12: 262). By 1832 Dorothy Wordsworth was seriously ill and one can only speculate as to what it meant that the poet could no longer include her in the “blessed season” of this scene.⁴⁰

The return to a domesticated scene exemplifies Kelley’s theory of the poet’s “twofold aesthetics” (2), which alternates between sublime and beautiful figures. Her theory of a poetic “contest” in which the sublime is “harnessed” by the beautiful might also be understood as a manifestation of Wordsworth’s anxieties as a poet-prophet. Given that the reader is unprepared for the sudden shift from “strong wind” to “When in a blessed season” in the revision, the insertion of a subsequent return to the spot goes a long way toward explaining the tempering effect of this “spot of time” by pointing to what takes place off the page.

but I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I look’d all round for my lost Guide,
Did at that time invest the naked Pool,
The Beacon on the lonely Eminence,
The Woman, and her garments vex’d and toss’d
By the strong wind. When in a blessed season
With those two dear Ones, to my heart so dear,
When in the blessed time of early love,
Long afterwards, I roam’d about
In daily presence of this very scene
.....
And think ye not with radiance more divine
From these remembrances, and from the power
They left behind? So feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends us, if but once we have been strong. (11: 309-320; 324-328)

The reader is not told how the poet's mind can move from the "visionary dreariness" to the "blessed season" without so much as a pause. But in eliding the critical restorative moment—the reason the poet returns to the "spots of time" in the first place—he strongly suggests what he cannot narrate.

In the Waiting for the Horses scene which follows, the poet describes another moment of abjection when, after his father's death, he recalls watching "in such anxiety of hope, / With trite reflections of morality, / Yet in the deepest passion, I bow'd low / To God, who thus corrected my desires" (11: 372-75). In the gap between the poet's recollection of the lost boy on the common and the remembered return with his "two dear Ones," may lie another moment of correction or transmutation in which the poet offers up the writing self in submission to his God. For all the mysteriousness of these two official "spots of time," what comes through unmistakably in the coda to the gibbet scene is the necessity of giving first in order to receive aid: "but this I feel, / That from thyself it is that thou must give, / Else never canst receive" (11: 332-34). And although it is not clear what kind of "prophet" Wordsworth aims to be here—a prophet of nature or God or the poetic word—it is possible to hear in these lines a revision of the Christian doctrine: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospels, the same shall save it" (Mark 8: 35). In psychoanalytic terms, we might consider Wordsworth's poetic gift to Coleridge as the poem's most sublime aspect of sociality by returning to Kristeva on natural love in Aquinas: "the Thomistic logic of love amounts to positing that because there is Unity and love for that Unity (of Self), there is also Union of the two (the loved one being identified with oneself)" (*Tales* 181).

Or, in other words, “the dynamics of Thomistic thought completes the *sublimation* of narcissism within an ontology of the *good*” (181).

Like the actual epitaph whose materiality seems so central to Wordsworth, the “spots of time” represent both a feeling and a physical place joined in memory to which mind and body can return and be “nourish’d, and invisibly repair’d” (11: 265) in meditation or prayer. Stopford Brooke, a liberal theologian and poet who parted ways with the Church of England in 1880, perceived well this process of return as did other Victorian critics who read differently from the way we do now. He understood how in humbling himself before his God, the poet at once delineates human limitations and basks in the soul’s majesty. The “spots of time” for Brooke retain that intimation of immortality in which “the spirit [is] mourning in itself for that imperial Palace whence it came . . .” (*Theology* 246). In such moments, we feel “the greatness of the soul. To these hours we look back, and there is in them, all sorrowful and vague as they are, virtue to recall us—when they are refashioned by association and added to by experience—to higher thoughts, to nourish and repair imagination when it has been dulled by the wear and stress of life . . .” (246). Brooke conceived of these “spots of time” as “regenerating memories” (247) to which the reader and poet could both return.

For Wordsworth, the “spot” which is the text of *The Prelude* serves as a private memorial where his revisions return him to the deity in ways only Wordsworth can know. But insofar as the inscrutable “spots of time” insist on the reader’s reflection and return, the “extended epitaph” of *The Prelude* also serves as a public memorial visited by a long line of critics. Wordsworth hints at the possibility of the epitaph as a communing spot for readers across the years in the third of the “Essays upon Epitaphs.” In it he describes the

simplest of memorials inscribed with only the name of the deceased and the dates of birth and death: “even a Tomb like this is a shrine to which the fancies of a scattered family may repair in pilgrimage; the thoughts of the individuals, without any communication with each other, must oftentimes meet here”(EE3 491-94). As a bare monument to which twenty-first century readers may “repair” like the Victorians and inscribe their meanings in a history of such returns, *The Prelude* resembles such a shrine, a place where “without any communication with each other,” the minds of his readers must “oftentimes meet.”

Notes

¹ All references to *The Prelude* are to the 1805 A-B Stage Reading Text unless noted otherwise. *The Thirteen-Book Prelude* by William Wordsworth, ed. Mark L. Reed. Ms. A and MS B were prepared in late 1805-early 1806. MS C shows revisions from 1818-1820 (Preface, ix-xiii).

² *Was It For This*, the first draft of *the Prelude*, was a complete poem of only 150 lines written in Germany in October 1798. See Introduction *Four Texts*, xxv-xlvi, 541-2n.

³ Hartman refers to the “completed sketch” of the Boy of Winander in Book 5 of *The Prelude*: “by converting a figurative death into an actual,” the poet’s depiction “yields to the prevalent taste and becomes a beautifully extended epitaph (There was a Boy, and—he died)” (20), *Wordsworth’s Poetry: 1787-1814*. In *Romantic Victorians*, Richard Cronin also uses the term “extended epitaphs” to describe biographies: “written memorials, extended epitaphs that fix in print all that happened in between the two simple dates that are inscribed on the tombstone” (25).

⁴ In his comprehensive study, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, Stephen Gill makes a similar point about Wordsworth’s poetry more generally, rather than about the ritual of return in particular as I do here (40). It will be obvious that the present study owes a great deal to Gill’s scholarship.

⁵ “Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont,” P2V, 266-268.

⁶ Coleridge’s poem, “To William Wordsworth” was the first major response to *The Prelude* after hearing it read aloud to him by Wordsworth in 1807. *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poetical Works*, Vol 16.1 pt 2, 815-19.

⁷ A few fragments of *The Prelude* appeared in Wordsworth’s published works during his lifetime. The Winander Boy passage from Book 5 of *The Prelude* appeared as “There was a boy” in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800); a passage from Book 1 (429-490) appeared as “Influence of Natural Objects” in Coleridge’s short-lived periodical *The Friend* for 28 Dec. 1809, and then in Wordsworth’s *Poems* (1815) under the classification of “Poems Referring to the Period of Childhood.” With respect to De Quincey’s early access to the *Prelude*, John E. Jordan comments: “it was probably no small part of the poet’s grievance that De Quincey printed passages from memory” (349), ed. *De Quincey to Wordsworth: A Biography of a Relationship*.

⁸ My position also departs from Abrams, Hartman, and Bloom in the reading of Wordsworthian nature. All three critics use Wordsworth’s own categories of experience to read the poet’s imagination in varying degrees of antagonism to nature. Hartman argues for the most adversarial bond on one end of the spectrum, with Bloom about midway, and Abrams falling at the other end in a gentler reconciliation of man and nature. By contrast, I read Wordsworth’s imagination as antagonistic to itself, fate, and his conception of God.

⁹ Stephen Gill’s chapter on “England’s Samuel: Wordsworth as Spiritual Power” covers this phenomenon from a number of different angles. See *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, 40-80.

¹⁰ Mark L. Reed notes that MSS. M, A, and B show the word “weakness” where “weariness” has been bracketed in l.148 of the 1805 text. For a variety of reasons, including the recent use of “weakness” in the same passage, the editor goes with the word “weariness” as the intended word based on the C-stage revision of MS B.

¹¹ Citations for *The Convention of Cintra* refer to line numbers in the *Prose Works*, ed. Owen and Smyser.

¹² See Chapters 5-7 on *The Prelude* in particular. *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry*, 131-85.

¹³ This is the large arc of memory constructed by the writer of autobiography in the act of retrospection. The “I-now,” or the writing subject, returns to various points along the life-arc which correspond to former selves at particular moments in history, or the “I-then” (14). See Carolyn Williams’s “Teaching Autobiography” in *Teaching Literature: A Companion*.

¹⁴ Line 54 of “Resolution and Independence” was added to the poem for the 1820 edition.

¹⁵ P2V, 150-151.

¹⁶ The reading text for the *Fourteen-Book Prelude* is based mainly on MS D, which last saw revisions around 1838-1839. W. J. B. Owen’s reading text is an “eclectic” text, drawing on MS D first, then MS E and then the 1850 edition of the poem where necessary. Owen’s rationale for relying on MS D makes sense

from the standpoint of the poet's intentions: it is "the latest manuscript to which the poet is known to have given prolonged and close attention" (11).

¹⁷ All Biblical references are to the King James Version of the Bible.

¹⁸ *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth.

¹⁹ "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," *LB*, 116-120.

²⁰ McLane quotes *The Enquirer. Reflections on Education, Manners and Literature in a series of essays*, 1st ed. London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1797, 31. P. 25 in my edition.

²¹ In Averill's example of "cosmic sublimity," he refers to Wordsworth's poem "A Night-Piece" in particular (91-96).

²² Mark L. Reed, ed. of the *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, annotates the line as follows: "Jupiter, astrologically within its own sign (Sagittarius) in the first house, arguably dominated Wordsworth's birth (10:00 P.M., April 7, 1770). The poet and his sister admired the planet in the evening sky during the first days of their residence in Grasmere, late in 1799" (156n).

²³ I owe these insights to Colin Jager.

²⁴ In Book 5 there is of course the eerie pile of garments found by the boy in the Drowned Man episode (467). And in Book 11, the garments of the woman bearing the pitcher on her head are "vex'd and toss'd / By the strong wind" (316).

²⁵ Lori Branch identifies "rituals of spontaneity" in Wordsworth's early and late poetry. Such rituals displaced and augmented traditional religious liturgy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in an uneven "secularization of goodness" (4). These new varieties of secular and religious ritual were less visibly communal and ritualistic, and more individually "spontaneous," including free prayer and modes of sensibility such as poetic effusion, all of which were interwoven commercially in the culture. See *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth*, 175-209.

²⁶ One often-cited example indicative of Wordsworth's pain while writing occurs in a letter to Coleridge, written by William and Dorothy Wordsworth from Goslar, Germany in December 1798: "I should have written five times as much as I have done but that I am prevented by an uneasiness at my stomach and side, with a dull pain about my heart. I have used the word pain, but uneasiness and heat are words which more accurately express my feeling. At all events it renders writing unpleasant" (*Letters Early Years Pt 1* 236; 235-36).

²⁷ *LB*, Appendix 3, 746. Line numbers are in parentheses.

²⁸ *LB*, 77-85.

²⁹ For Kristeva, the "semiotic" is bound up in the relation of the infant's body to the maternal body, where drives anticipate signification which commences with language and subjectivity. The Symbolic is the overarching category of signification, or the social order, which contains elements of both "semiotic" or maternal influence, in tension with the "symbolic" element "which is the element of signification that structures the possibility of taking a position or making a judgment. It is the element of stasis within the Symbolic, whereas the semiotic is the element of rejection. Both of these elements are crucial to signification" (Oliver 10). For a lucid explanation of Kristeva's use of these terms, see Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind*, 1-47.

³⁰ This is Camden's *Remaines* being quoted by Weever "without acknowledgement" in his 1631 text, according to Owen and Smyser (101), *Prose Works*, Vol. 2. William Camden, *Remaines Concerning Britain*, 6th ed. London, 1657, p. 356. Weever's text does not indicate he is quoting Camden directly, but it does acknowledge the idea is Camden's.

³¹ Wordsworth's letter of 11 February 1805 responds to his surviving brother Richard Wordsworth's letter, which arrives with news of their brother John's death (*Letters Early Years Pt 1* 539-40).

³² The place where William and Dorothy Wordsworth last saw their brother John departing near Grisedale Tarn so affected the poet, writes Stephen Gill, that "[a]t age 73 Wordsworth could still pin-point the place to within two or three yards" (*A Life* 243). See Dorothy Wordsworth to Lady Beaumont 11 June 1805 (*Letters EY Pt 1* 598).

³³ Wordsworth read *The Prelude* aloud "on a series of evenings concluding 7 Jan" in the presence of Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary Wordsworth, Sara Hutchinson and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Reed 345). *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years, 1800-1815*.

³⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "To William Wordsworth: Composed on the Night after his Recitation of a Poem on the Growth of an Individual Mind," *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poetical Works*, Vol 16.1 pt 2, 815-19.

³⁵ This section develops from Kristeva's analysis of *Summa Theologiae*, Ia. 60 article 3.2 on angelic love (399n): I cite from *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 9, ed. and transl. Kenelm Foster, O.P. Blackfriars, Cambridge, a different text from the one Leon S. Roudiez uses in Kristeva's text: "As being simply one implies more unity than being in union with another, so a subject's self-love is more of a unity than his union, through love, with another. And Dionysius spoke of love as uniting and holding together precisely in order to show that love of the not-self derives from love of the self—as the term 'uniting' derives from 'one.' Future references will be noted by "ST."

³⁶ Editors William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft note that in two poems written in 1798 Wordsworth responded to the phrase "A tongue in every star" which appears in line 48 of "A Summer Evening's Meditation." In addition to "A Night-Piece," the editors note the second poem responding to this phrase was "an untitled poem not published until 1992" (100n).

³⁷ For a composition history of the "spots of time," see Stephen Parrish's "Introduction: The Growth of the Two-Part *Prelude*," (3-36), *The Prelude, 1798-1799 by William Wordsworth*.

³⁸ Mark L. Reed's Introduction to the *Thirteen-Book Prelude* indicates that "further important revision probably occurred about April-May" 1805 on Book 11 (57).

³⁹ J. Douglas Kneale's interpretation of Wordsworth reading the murderer's name has some similarities to my own: "Whether the 'unknown hand' is the murderer's or another's, or whether 'that fell deed' is the gibbeting or the murder, the possibility of a self-reflexive reading remains with this bare inscription" (144). Kneale goes on to consider the idea of the written work in Foucauldian terms, as "licensed to kill" its author (144). In a rich argument, Kneale also considers the possibility that the "unknown hand" suggests an intertext with the Biblical book of Daniel in which an unknown hand leaves a warning from God which Daniel interprets. See his Chapter 5 in *Monumental Writing*, 129-147.

⁴⁰ In *William Wordsworth: A Life*, Stephen Gill notes that during the winter of 1831-2, Wordsworth and his wife Mary worked long hours on transcribing and revising manuscripts as the poet realized he was preparing his fair copies for posterity in the event of his illness. "He turned . . . inevitably, to *The Prelude*, the poem that had always been intended for publication after *The Recluse*, and with unremitting labour prepared a fresh copy Acutely worried by Dorothy's illness, depressed by the progress of the Reform Bill, Wordsworth none the less continued to work and in June 1832 he published a further, four-volume, *Collected Works*." It is believed that Dorothy suffered from a form of dementia similar to Alzheimer's disease (372; 375).

Happy is He who lives to understand!
 Not human Nature only, but explores
 All Natures,—to the end that he may find
 The law that governs each; and where begins
 The union, the partition where, that makes
 Kind and degree, among all visible Beings;
 The constitutions, powers, and faculties,
 Which they inherit,—cannot step beyond,—
 And cannot fall beneath . . .

(*Exc 4: 335-43*)

Chapter Two

Wordsworth's "Active Principle" and the Echoing Parts of a World

To appreciate the Victorian response to Wordsworth's animated nature requires a sense of the respite it offered a modern era "pregnant with change" as John Stuart Mill put it in "The Spirit of the Age" (*CW 22: 228*). As railroads crossed the landscape and cities drew workers from rural areas, the Wordsworthian pastoral took on greater significance. Walter E. Houghton explains in his classic work, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*: "the romantic love of nature passed into a new phase. It became the nostalgia for a lost world of peace and companionship, of healthy bodies and quiet minds" (79). The "active principle" (*Exc 9: 3*) of Wordsworth's natural world fueled spiritual encounters with a body of poetry consistently touted by critics as a bastion of health against the ills of a modern age. An intense interaction between the poet's depiction of that world and his Victorian readers was possible because as Leslie Stephen reminded those readers, in Wordsworth's universe "[i]t is not so much the love of nature pure and simple, as of nature seen through the deepest human feelings" ("Ethics" 218). Further, the Wordsworthian persona which linked the reader's feelings to a natural world distinct from human nature affirmed that the "active universe" (*Prel 2: 266*) was an ordered one.

The human feelings represented in Wordsworth's "*active universe*" were never as simple as critics such as Arnold maintained. A healthy dose of Wordsworth's verse depended on the complex task of self-transmutation, which involves the painful separating out of human, divine and natural domains. Some nineteenth-century readers appeared to be savvy to the way in which the poetry's dissolving and corrupting features were part and parcel of its transforming qualities. In an essay written on Wordsworth in the late 1860s, J.C. Shairp, who became Chair of Poetry at Oxford in 1877, described the limits of the "inspired thinker" or poet: "He can touch others who are lower sunk than himself, by a kind of spiritual contagion. But even he cannot reach to the bottom, and minister healing to the mind diseased" (31). For Shairp, such healing could only come from a place beyond consciousness. In terms resembling Shairp's, the American scholar Henry N. Hudson later characterized Wordsworth's spirituality as a "blessed contagion" which could "quietly but inevitably" reach readers who were not necessarily believers (69). Similarly, Aubrey de Vere, the poet who knew Wordsworth in the older poet's last years of life and who pilgrimaged each year to visit Wordsworth's grave after his death,¹ also understood how this spiritual passion carried with it more than pleasure: it "comes forward as a minister of virtue, and does not shrink from pain" ("Genius and Passion" 121). De Vere made his point using one of Wordsworth's later compositions, "Lines Suggested by a Portrait from the Pencil of F. Stone" (c.1834) which reflects on how the spirit of words can "soothe, more than they agitate" (124),² as does the angel who "troubled" the healing waters of Bethesda's pool in the Gospel story (John 5: 1-15). In Wordsworth's allusion, the angel "with healing virtue / Informs the fountain in the human

breast / That by the visitation was disturbed” (126-28). The poetry must hurt in order to “inform” with its “healing virtue.”

The deconstructive quality of language which these Victorian readers seemed to intuit constitutes one of the human limitations the poet continually faced in revision. Such limitations are allegorized by a natural world which is by turns personal and impersonal, complicating its famed interchange with humans. Patiently acknowledging these boundaries, however, frees up the poet in the work of transmutation in which each encounter provides “life and food / For future years” (“Tintern Abbey” 65-66). Shairp remarked that for Wordsworth “imagination was a treasure-house whence he drew forth things new and old, the old as fresh as if new” (65). Broadly speaking, this economical strategy of drawing forth the new and old is the means by which the persona’s passion is made tranquil so as to brace for the uncertainties of fate. Rather than directly challenging the forces of the natural world, the poetry suggests the individual can consult his own “treasure-house” of memory as the first step toward effecting change externally. In order for the “treasure-house” to provide a stay against the unpredictable forces of nature and language, however, the persona must first succumb to nature.

Through a removed narrator, the poetry modeled an act of identification with nature which the nineteenth-century reader could then imitate in relation to the speaker. The persona may have been severe, but it possessed the willing attitude of one who seeks knowledge from nature. W. J. Dawson linked Wordsworth’s uniqueness to this kinship with nature in *The Makers of Modern English: A Popular Handbook to the Greater Poets of the Century* (1891): “he never thinks of Nature in any other way than as a Mighty Presence, before whom he stands silent, like a faithful high-priest, who waits in solemn

expectation for the whisper of enlightenment and wisdom” (120). De Vere also cast the poet’s relationship to nature in the posture of one listening and learning: “[Wordsworth] must come to [nature] as to a prophetess, that he may incline his ear to her monitions, not as to an artist that he may admire and extol her skill” (“Genius and Passion” 106). This desired disposition complements the well-known approach recommended by Wordsworth’s narrator in “Expostulation and Reply: ““Nor less I deem that there are powers, / Which of themselves our minds impress, / That we can feed this mind of ours, / In a wise passiveness”” (21-24).³ In keeping with such an attitude of patient expectation, the process of transmutation is essentially conservative. Hutton got at this combination of vigilance and desire when he pegged Wordsworth’s imagination as one which “watched hungrily and received gratefully” (“Mr. Morley” 133). The respectful epitaphic mode is met with a natural world which may be beautiful but is inclined to force the narrator back on his own resources. The mind conducive to transmutation therefore must be adept at attaining a “wise passiveness,” but it must also have the fortitude to struggle with sorrow by turning it outward in the form of duty.

Wordsworth courted his readers with this animated universe as seen through a distant persona which was distinguished by its serenity. This serenity was not always perceived by his readers as hard-won, however. Dawson, for example, described Wordsworth as the one to whom readers go “when our hearts are grieved and our nerves worn down by the ceaseless harass of life amid a crowd” (*Quest and Vision* 67). But “when our hearts are broken,” he wrote, the reader wants a “teacher who has himself passed into the sanctuary of sorrow, and trodden the wine-press alone, and Wordsworth cannot claim to have done that” (67). Nevertheless, Wordsworth offered a “nobler sort of

sympathy—calm, godlike, healing” (67). Dawson, like other readers in the period, apparently needed to believe that Wordsworth had not experienced the kinds of suffering which he represented in the poetry. In his valuable guide to Wordsworth’s nineteenth-century British criticism, N. S. Bauer notes the irony of such readers.⁴ One would expect Victorians who sought solace to favor a poet who had himself undergone suffering, yet “most preferred to see him as a man who had not known it” (viii). I maintain that Victorian readers’ mistaken impression of Wordsworth’s own suffering fed into the ideal persona he aimed to effect. In an 1842 review of Wordsworth’s volume, *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning made comments in tune with Dawson’s. Comparing Wordsworth to Byron, she concluded the latter “was a poet through pain” whereas Wordsworth (who was very much alive at the time) “is a feeling man, because he is a thoughtful man; he knows grief itself by a reflex emotion; by sympathy, rather than by suffering” (757). Barrett Browning’s distinction importantly bears on the role of thought in transmuting emotion. The “reflex emotion” also suggests the gap between man and poet built into the persona so as to cultivate the fiction that Wordsworth, like the Wanderer in *The Excursion*, could “afford to suffer” (1: 399).

The Wanderer’s pantheistic conception of the “active principle” functions separately from this sympathetic and removed persona, yet both are subject to the deconstructive nature of transmutation. Corresponding to this principle is the divine potential cultivated in Wordsworth’s ritual of revision in *The Prelude*—the “vital principle.” With his autobiographical poem Wordsworth extended this “vital principle” to Coleridge and initiated an echoing from reader to reader in the “epitaphic mode” (Ferguson 155). Frances Ferguson has observed that *The Prelude* “virtually constitutes a

series of epitaphs spoken upon former selves . . . And Wordsworth's revisions substantiate this link between autobiography and epitaph which implies that the themes of growth and immortality never stand far from the theme of death . . ." (155). Yet as a gift to Coleridge, the poet pushes this "theme of death" back again towards life: "The prime and vital principle is thine, / In the recesses of thy nature, far / From any reach of outward fellowship" (13: 194-96). As the Wanderer in *The Excursion* would have it, the "vital principle" must be continually pushed toward life, and further, is not exclusive to Wordsworth or Coleridge. Rather when we align the "vital principle" in *The Prelude* with *The Excursion*, we find that 'To every Form of Being is assigned' (9: 1)

An *active* principle:—howe'er removed
 From sense and observation, it subsists
 In all things, in all natures, in the stars
 Of azure heaven, the unenduring clouds,
 In flower and tree

 Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
 Beyond itself, communicating good,
 A simple blessing, or with evil mixed;
 Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
 No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
 It circulates, the Soul of all the Worlds.
 This is the freedom of the Universe;
 Unfolded still the more, more visible,
 The more we know; and yet is revered least,
 And least respected, in the human Mind,
 Its most apparent home.
 (9: 3-7; 10-20)

"[A]ssigned" to "whate'er exists," including "the invisible air" (9: 1; 10: 9), there is nowhere to hide from this principle. Although the "*active* principle" represents well-traveled territory in Wordsworth criticism,⁵ I devote the chapter to this omnipresent aspect of the poetry in relation to spiritual reading because it touched a nerve in Victorian critics. The idea was powerful not only because it characterized an ordered world, but

also because of its double-edged epitaphic nature manifest in the spirit and “counter-spirit” of language (EE3 186). This double nature of language is analogous to the implied agency of those ubiquitous “properties” (9: 10)—“a simple blessing, or with evil mixed—attractive to Victorians even if that “freedom of the Universe” (9: 16) was laced with perils. The “*active principle*” operates independently of the persona and the inhabitants of the Wordsworthian landscape, yet the Wanderer suggests that the attentive mind can detect and presumably direct it, or at least “know” it in some form: “Unfolded still the more, more visible, / The more we know” (17). From “more, more” and “more” to “yet is revered least / And least respected, in the human Mind” (18-19), we feel the forces being coaxed by the Wanderer in the direction of hope against the threat of spiritual death.

The natural intelligence of Wordsworth’s animated universe, which seems simultaneously fostering and unmindful of its human inmates, evidently factored into the consolation experienced by Victorian writers on the poet. Separate from humans and yet vibrating with meaning, this natural world appeared to meet the longing in readers for such an order. Ideas about evolution were in the air as early as Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoonomia* (1794-98), with texts such as Lamarck’s *Philosophie zoologique* (1809), Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* (1831-1833), and Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) raising doubts about the divine origins of the cosmos, even as some scientists and theologians found ways of reconciling these multiplying fields of knowledge. In Wordsworth’s verse, the hard-to-pin-down religious quality made easier the reconciliation of empiricist and transcendentalist ways of thinking. Shairp, a Presbyterian, remarked on the poet’s way of seeing anew the common earth: “Whereas to

most men the material world is a heavy, gross, dead mass, earth a ball of black mud, painted here and there with some colour, Wordsworth felt it to be a living, breathing power, not dead, but full of strange life; his eye almost saw into it, as if it were transparent” (64). From the same moods which “unsubstantialized” (64) the earth, came some of Wordsworth’s “most ideal lights” (64) as expressed in the poetry for Shairp.

Some critics, such as the liberal theologian and poet Stopford Brooke, made a point of interpreting the pantheistic element of Wordsworth’s natural world in Christian terms. Brooke found implicit in Wordsworth’s poetry a “double view of God” which affirmed the poet’s pantheism was not a “pure pantheism,” but was a form of pantheism qualified by “dematerializing the universe in thought” (*Development of Theology* 33; 31). Like many commentators on Wordsworth’s depiction of nature, he saw the poetry as bringing the spiritual to the material world. As Brooke interpreted it, while the poet was in nature, he conceived of God as an impersonal entity; while in society, the poet viewed God as personal. In the “union of these two conceptions of Him we shall find our highest thought of Him who is our Father and yet the incessant Energy of the infinite universe” (33). Brooke thus tried to justify the “*active* universe” within the Christian tradition by reading the implied deity at the levels of human personality and abstract “Energy.” Elsewhere Brooke suggested part of the attraction of the “*active* principle” as he imagined it from the poet’s perspective: “Is it only the matter of the universe, which by itself is dead? No, [Wordsworth] answered. Matter is animated by a soul, and it is this soul which thrills to meet me” (*Theology* 95). Such a depiction of nature appealed for its welcoming “soul” which turned earthly matter into a vital home for poet and reader. Thus while Victorians interpreted Wordsworth’s “*active* universe” (*Prel* 2: 265) variously,

what impressed many readers was the felt significance of all components relative to each other, for the very reason they had form and matter. In this regard, Wordsworth's "*active principle*" exhibits a Thomistic flavor of the divine origin of a world in which God exists in everything "since nothing can exist except he cause it to do so."⁶

Part of the power of Wordsworth's animated universe resides in the way its material otherness intensifies the reader's self-awareness—what Onno Oerlemans has called an "openness to the material" (20). This way of seeing "produces an awareness of one's difference from the world, and one's isolation within it. It emphasizes the otherness of the physical as a first step in acknowledging where and how we exist" (20). As I am applying this notion to transmuting sorrow, this strangeness of the natural world serves as a prelude to recognizing self-limitations in order finally to grieve one's loss. At the same time the distinction is made between self and physical nature, there is felt a corresponding deep connection. Walter Pater, along with A.C. Bradley, noticed something of this strangeness of the natural world as the poet portrayed it, a trend in Wordsworth criticism which was later developed in distinct ways by David Ferry and Geoffrey Hartman,⁷ as against the idealist strand of criticism which runs from Matthew Arnold to M.H. Abrams.

Writing on Wordsworth, Pater eloquently explained the physicality of an epitaphic aesthetic that applies to human intellect and rocks alike: this living universe "came of an exceptional susceptibility to the impressions of eye and ear, and was, in its essence, a kind of sensuousness" ("Wordsworth" 48). Pater was sensitive to the materiality of the poet's returns to specific places insofar as the return to a spot was conducive to metonymic exchanges with that spot. The Leechgatherer in "Resolution and

Independence” (1807) exemplifies this process of linking earth to body and body to earth again and thereby lessening the reader’s experience of the differences between the two.

The poem images the old man first as a stone, then as a “sea-beast crawl’d forth” (69), and finally as the old man who stands as “Motionless as a Cloud” (81) beside the pond where he passively labors as does the poet who waits for the right words to adhere.⁸

While the old man’s speech and his “bent double” appearance “all troubled” (135) the poet-narrator, not unlike the “troubled” waters of Bethesda, the most moving image he takes away from this unexpected messenger is his dignified manner despite poverty and physical decay: “I could have laugh’d myself to scorn, to find / In that decrepit Man so firm a mind” (144-45).⁹ That attitude is of course the patient and trusting one to which the narrator aspires. It is the “firm” epitaphic spirit of the Leechgatherer which finally marks the difference between man and earth.

Despite the strength of that spirit, however, human and natural objects which comprise the language of the landscape are signs bound to coincide with the substance which is the “mother of all things and their grave” as Pater calls the “old dream of the *anima mundi*” in the same essay (“Wordsworth” 57).

The close connexion of man with natural objects, the habitual association of [Wordsworth’s] thoughts and feelings with a particular spot of earth, has sometimes seemed to degrade those who are subject to its influence, as if it did but reinforce that physical connexion of our nature with the actual lime and clay of the soil, which is always drawing us nearer to our end. But for Wordsworth, these influences tended to the dignity of human nature, because they tended to tranquillise it. By raising nature to the level of human thought he gives it power and expression: he subdues man to the level of nature, and gives him thereby a certain breadth and coolness and solemnity. (49)

Pater suggests how Wordsworth’s representation of humans who are continually exposed to the influence of objects in the natural setting stretches the reader’s conception of

human and object. The poet first “enstranges” these objects insofar as one object implicates the other in the terminus they share. For this reason I consider the earth the “authentically temporal destiny” of the figures in the poetry (“Rhetoric” 206), modifying Paul de Man’s phrase, and differing from his interpretation of Romantic poetry insofar as I correlate both time and space with Wordsworth’s poetic figures over de Man’s preference for time (as allegory) and irony. An emphasis on time and place makes sense given that Victorian readers pilgrimaged to the geographical places in the poems and to the poet’s grave as part of their individual rituals associated with reading the poet.¹⁰

Pater’s precise wording acknowledges that Wordsworth’s poems repeatedly link humans and soil “but” the poet’s continual association with a certain spot of earth does more than “reinforce” our eventual decay, as is the case with the “decrepit” (145) Leechgatherer. The habitual linkage of place with idea or feeling draws out qualities in the surroundings which alert the poet and reader to powers being exerted outside of the human body. Such are the “tranquillis[ing]” influences which seem beyond the control of the narrator who records them but which give humans “a certain breadth and coolness and solemnity.” The incessant influence of the natural setting reminds the poet-narrator of his physicality in myriad ways, initiating a gradual readjustment of his own place within a larger perceived order. The poet sees “men and women as *parts of nature*, passionate, excited, in strange grouping and connexion with the grandeur and beauty of the natural world,” concluded Pater, “images, in [Wordsworth’s] own words, ‘of man suffering, amid awful forms and powers’” (emphasis added, “Wordsworth” 63).¹¹ In this way, the poetry “enstranges” the human being within the living forms of rocks and trees by shifting the usual conceptual framework.¹² As Shklovsky asserts, “enstrangement can

be found almost anywhere (i.e. wherever there is an image) The purpose of the image is not to draw our understanding closer to that which this image stands for, but rather to allow us to perceive the object in a special way, in short to lead us to a ‘vision’ of this object rather than mere ‘recognition’” (9-10). It is this strange and satisfying “vision” of the human within his setting that Wordsworth presented to the Victorian reader.¹³

I. The Boy of Winander: “that uncertain Heaven”

Whereas Wordsworth criticism led by Hartman has tended to view the poet’s imagination and nature as adversaries, I wish to step back from nature to survey what is even more pressing to my interpretation, the tension between all the parts. This tension points up a divine order which the poet connects to putting emotions in order as well. As highlighted in the chapter’s epigraph, the poetry searches to “find / the law that governs each [nature]; and where begins / The union, the partition where, that makes / Kind and degree” (*Exc 4: 337-40*).¹⁴ Wordsworth’s syntax struggles to define this point of connection and disconnection, the borderline like the comma between “where” and “that makes.” Finding the fine line between parts both seems to affirm the poet’s distinction from his God, lightening the burden of prophetic responsibility, and to lead him gently to the other side of mourning thanks to a stern disposition. In Book 3 of the Prelude, “Residence at Cambridge,” the young poet describes a similar seeking for distinctions in nature: “I had an eye / Which in my strongest workings, evermore / Was looking for the shades of difference / As they lie hid in all exterior forms . . .” (156-59). Through this manner of looking at the world, nature “spake perpetual logic to my soul, / And by an unrelenting agency / Did bind my feelings, even as in a chain” (3: 165-67). Here

detecting the differences between parts of nature provides the young poet with the “perpetual logic” which orders his feelings by binding them.

Wordsworth’s poetry emphatically seeks out the meaningful earthbound part even if it also soothes with a transcendent whole in poems like “Tintern Abbey.” The complexity of this interaction is brought home by the different levels of cognition and depths of experience staggered across *The Prelude* alone. In the “world of the text,” in the words of Paul Ricoeur (*Figuring* 43), much happens unaware, unseen, and unheard, but not always unaccounted for by the interpreter of the “*active universe*.” Multiple levels of awareness work with and against the poet’s deployment of revision to emphasize the different parts of a world. By the way the poet positions narrators and characters relative to internal and external influences, these various levels of awareness impress themselves on the reader. One such keenly-felt moment occurs when the Boy of Winander listens for the owls and the “voice / of mountain torrents, or the visible scene . . . enter[s] unawares” into his imagination (*Prel* 5: 408-410). The Priest’s ignorance of Leonard’s identity in “The Brothers” provides another instance. Likewise, an awareness of his limited awareness informs the reflections of the poet-narrator who stands by the mouth of the River Duddon and “feel[s] that “we are greater than we know” (14).¹⁵

In Wordsworth’s energized universe, the tendency to stress “the union, the partition” (*Exc* 4: 338) between people and things in the landscape is increasingly evident across the many *Preludes*. This trend crystallizes in the later sonnets whose rigid form sustains the boundaries between poet, nature, and divine. In *The Prelude*, these differences include the attention that individual objects like people and buildings pay to

each while other aspects of the setting appear oblivious to the same people and buildings (a discrepancy which will make more sense below). Distinct levels of awareness represent distinct but interrelated parts of a natural world. The “*active principle*” exists throughout these parts in many incarnations: in the pantheistic (or panentheistic) element in the “wild green landscape” of “Tintern Abbey” (15),¹⁶ but also in the “*active*” properties of the “mute dialogues” between the mother and “Bless’d” babe in Book 2 of *The Prelude* (266; 283; 237). Wordsworth’s universe runs on personas who continually bestow blessings on places and other characters like the speaker who blesses the Old Cumberland Beggar in the lyrical ballad: “Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!” (155; 164)¹⁷

That the various parts may not be comprehended in full, either by the observer or amongst the parts themselves, only appears to be conflictive in Wordsworth’s aesthetic; rather the poetry implies that the connection between the parts still can be felt by the willing and attentive character or reader. In theory in this frame of mind, whether the reader is by the graveside, holding a pen, or out of doors, he can sense a pervasive order with potential for good amidst tragedy and incoherence. The poet in *The Prelude*, like the wandering pedlar of *The Excursion*, knows indirectly by emotion what he cannot explain in words: “in the mountains did he feel his faith” (*Exc* 1: 247). The narrator’s assurance depends on recognizing his human confines, a corrective process which endows the individual with the means for re-conceiving his role within the collective. The narrator’s or reader’s task may never be completed in this aesthetic, but the potential for his meaningful placement within the web of things proved attractive for Victorian readers.

Even though scenes of blessing and other forms of the “*active principle*” posit principles of a natural unity, the poetry insists on the difference between this collective and man’s place within it. As William Knight observed, Wordsworth’s poetry unfolds an “impersonal Order as well as a personal power” which quickly cuts through self-pity and any fictions about nature devised on man’s behalf: “Our introspectiveness and self-consciousness are rebuked by Nature, whenever we are alone with her, and open to her influences; and it is as necessary that these should be taken out of us, as the conceit that we have fathomed her ways and processes of work” (“Lecture May 1878” 312-13). Here “self-consciousness” seems to be an all-knowing kind. Failure to recognize the difference between nature’s unknowable forces and human capacity earns a reprimand. A critic writing for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1889 made remarks similar to Knight’s while disputing that Wordsworth’s poetry committed the “pathetic fallacy” as Ruskin perceived it. The poet “uses the same terms to express the similarity of human and natural life. Language admits of no other. But Nature remains outside himself, preserving her own independent will, passions, and emotions, refusing to allow man to impose himself upon her” ([Prothero] 443). In this view of Wordsworthian nature, man’s likeness to nature is clear, but his difference from nature is also of supreme importance; the poet must keep his respectful distance. Readers like Knight took reassurance in the depiction of a natural world which was careful to preserve some “unlikeness” between man and nature: “it is easy to carry this notion of kindredness [with nature] *too far*, and thus to degrade it altogether. If we do not recognise the transcendant [sic] unlikeness of nature to man along with the likeness which exists, the latter idea is more than vulgarised. It becomes distorted and untrue” (“Lecture May 1878” 311). Just as the poetry’s healing action

works by a “spiritual contagion” (Shairp 31), it is through this “unlikeness” that the bond between man and nature “gain[s] in reality and grandeur” (Knight 311).

Relying on Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory, we can conceive of the import of these moods of Wordsworth’s strict but loving Nature, and begin to account for the echoing parts of a world. Specifically, the interactive natural setting can be read allegorically as the infant moving into language and the adult moving into the therapeutic space for transference in the psychoanalytic model. Following Freud, Kristeva interprets the “father of individual prehistory” as a loving parent with whom the child identifies in a primary, “objectless identification,” a “father” who is a parent with sexual traits of both parents and whose love is necessary to enable the child to identify in the process of learning to symbolize (*Tales* 26). The pre-objectal child needs to see the mother desiring someone else and being desired by someone else as a sign she is worthy of the child’s love, a variation on the Wordsworthian notion set forth in “A Poet’s Epitaph”: “And you must love him, ere to you / He will seem worthy of your love” (43-44).¹⁸ According to Kristeva: “it is in the eyes of a Third Party that the baby the mother speaks to becomes a *he*, it is with respect to others that ‘I am proud of you,’ and so forth . . . without the maternal ‘diversion’ toward a Third Party, the bodily exchange is abjection or devouring . . .” (*Tales* 34).¹⁹ In this sense, someone else must love the mother before the mother seems worthy of the child’s love and identification can then progress through “incorporat[ing] the speech of the other” (26). In his method of depicting different levels of awareness between its distinct parts, I argue that Wordsworth’s living world enacts the relationship between the mother and the “father in individual prehistory” which signals to the pre-objectal child it is loved and therefore can identify and begin the process of

signification. Wordsworth's "*active* universe" constitutes one big model for moving into language by means of identification: the separate parts of the universe are like parents whose offspring within that universe can symbolize because the different parts attend to each other lovingly.

Hudson noticed the ways in which the sensate and insensate elements of the natural world reciprocate in loving relationships, distinct from the persona or characters in the poem: "this great law of mutuality [does not] prevail only between man and the inferior creatures: on the contrary, these inferior creatures themselves, both animate and inanimate, have social links and ties among themselves; virtues, like rays of light, running from each to all and from all to each . . ." (163). Hudson proceeded to list a series of examples in support of his claim, including an excerpt from "To M.H." (1800), from "Poems on the Naming of Places" in the *Lyrical Ballads*, in which Nature makes a spot all her own: "The travelers know it not, and 'twill remain / Unknown to them" (16-17).²⁰ If a man should build a home nearby, "He would so love [the spot] that in his death-hour / Its image would survive among his thoughts" (21-22). An independent Nature who creates her own aesthetic hideaway provides an example of the natural world first loving a spot that a human would also love if he only knew it existed. This odd relationship adds another level of intelligence for the reader to filter: humans and the natural world exist in a poetic environment in which meanings swirl from all directions, whether or not characters choose to attend to these signs, or know enough even to acknowledge them.

Importantly, there is a way in which the relationships between parts are analogous to those between the poet and reader. Wordsworth's idea that the reader must love the

poet before he will seem worthy of that love requires the reader's loving predisposition which corresponds to the child who is similarly inclined by virtue of the mother's loving attachments. Edward Caird, a Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, commented on the reader's willing attitude: "[Wordsworth's poetry] requires us, in a sense, to become as little children, to divest ourselves of all artificial associations and secondary interests . . ." (147). As Kristeva explains it, the child accepts language to become a signifying being: "When the object that I incorporate is the speech of the other—precisely a nonobject, a pattern, a model—I bind myself to him in a primary fusion, communion, unification. An identification" (*Tales* 26). Here we can recall the young poet in *The Prelude* who sought "shades of difference" (3: 158) hidden in exterior forms. For him the earth's power spoke a "logic" and "by an unrelenting agency / Did bind [his] feelings, even as in a chain" (3: 165-67). In this light, binding emotion has value not only as a way of managing passion or storing it up in the "treasure-house" of memory, but of investing that passion in a "primary fusion" with an "other" such as nature. In Kristevan terms, the infant separates from his parents even as he incorporates their language in a "primary fusion." The reader who identifies with the Wordsworthian persona is similarly fused. If he is inclined to learn from the persona the language of listening, of "wise passivity," the reader is positioned to enter "the world of the text" where rocks and humans are revered because they exist. The depiction of these differing levels of cognition, of parts which attend or do not attend to each other, in this way allegorizes the freedom of this universe and the imaginative space opened up for the revising poet and the receptive reader.

For the narrator and readers like Knight, the juxtaposition of aware and unaware aspects of self and nature in the poetry seemed analogous to contrasting levels of perception in the reader. Knight implied that these foregrounded shades of knowledge refer the reader to a feeling of faith which grasps relations otherwise too refined for detection by the human intellect: “The link connecting part with part may be too subtle for us to trace, but it exists, and is felt to exist, at the very moment when our perception of difference in the parts is keenest” (“Lecture May 1878” 307-308). In Book 5 of *The Prelude*, the natural influences acting unbeknownst to the boy who is fluent in the language of owls, or to the young poet wandering freely by the lakes, remind the reader of the broader influences of natural or manmade objects which act and react upon each other in the poems. As Wordsworth pictures it, the “*active principle*” supports his universe like the “building [which] stood as if sustained / By its own spirit!” when his mother’s early death “remov’d” the “props of [his] affections” (*Prel* 2: 295; 294). The Boy of Winander passage in Book 5 shows up the continuity of the animated setting which persists amidst discontinuity, suggesting the coexistence of multiple levels of knowing between external and internal objects of the imagination, and a world concerned with making contact between those objects.

There was a Boy, ye knew him well, ye Cliffs
 And Islands of Winander! many a time
 At evening, when the stars had just begun
 To move along the edges of the hills,
 Rising or setting, would he stand alone,
 Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering Lake,
 And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
 Press’d closely, palm to palm, and to his mouth
 Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
 Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls
 That they might answer him.—And they would shout
 Across the watry Vale, and shout again,

Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,
 And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
 Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
 Of mirth and jocund din! And when it chanced
 That pauses of deep silence mock'd his skill,
 Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
Has carried far into his heart the voice
 Of mountain torrents, or the visible scene
 Would enter unawares into his mind
 With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
 Its woods, and that uncertain Heaven, receiv'd
 Into the bosom of the steady Lake. (emphasis added, 5: 389-413)

At first glance, the well-known scene conveys nature's personality more than its impersonality. Yet humans in this scene and the lines following it enact a variation on nature's impersonality as do manmade things, when they fail to take notice of the natural objects impinging upon them. By contrast, the reader takes in the levels of knowing and not-knowing in the poem and locates where the divine and natural and human worlds intersect. The Boy of Winander, for instance, receives the lake and reflected sky and hills "unawares" (*Prel* 5: 410); his not-knowing mirrors a natural world that at times appears not to know or care. R. H. Hutton noticed how Wordsworth's poetry generally zeroes in on the lack of awareness in nature or characters for a reason: "It is not true that Wordsworth's genius lay mainly in the region of *mere* nature;—rather say it lay in detecting nature's influences just at the point where they were stealing unobserved into the very essence of the human soul. Nor is this all. His characteristic power lay no less in discovering divine influences, as they fall like dew upon the spirit" (Rev. of *William Wordsworth* 25). Hutton detects what a number of Victorian critics did in Wordsworth's poetry—the distinction between worlds and the intimations between them. He also takes

further Knight's idea that the subtle ties between man and nature are felt most "when our perception of difference in the parts is keenest."

Hutton's analysis of the Winander scene in particular directs the reader to the "exactness as well as a fullness of meaning" in the 'gentle shock of mild surprise [which] / Has carried far into his heart the voice / Of mountain torrents.' The poet's "exactness" lies in the levels he depicts within his own knowledge: "for there is an infinite variety in the depth of his poetic imaginations; some lie near the surface; others lie deeper, but still within the sphere of less meditative minds; others spring from a depth far beyond the reach of any human soundings" (Rev. of *William Wordsworth* 13). For the Boy of Winander, "that uncertain Heaven" (5: 412) reflected in the lake, represents the precarious interrelationship of boy and nature whose knowledge springs from the depths beyond human reach. Insofar as the boy "dies at a crossroads in human life" before he suffers the pain of self-division, his death "appears merciful" in Hartman's estimation (WP 21; 22). But the poet's self-critique is less forgiving; it employs the "exactness" of representation from a different angle.

In particular, the significance of "that uncertain Heaven" for the poet writing comes through in the exchange with the owls as anxiety about poetic competence. The knowledge that arrives "sometimes" while the boy "hung / Listening," does so only after hearing the "deep silence [which] mock'd his skill" and the sound of his own limitations (5: 406-7; 405). In the *Fourteen-Book* version of *The Prelude*, those limitations receive a different accent. The revision reads "and when a lengthened pause / Of silence came, and baffled his best skill . . ." (5: 381-82), recalling the Old Cumberland Beggar who is "baffled" at another of life's "crossroads." As he eats alone, his food falls "from his

palsied hand, / That still attempting to prevent the waste, / Was baffled still . . .” (16-18). The reader may be tempted to hear across the oeuvre the rhyming sounds of “baffled . . . skill” and “baffled still,” or the “palsied hand” that cannot “prevent the waste” as forms of poetic death as much as bodily decay. A less contrived reading of the “deep silence” of the 1805 text and its later revision to the “lengthened pause / Of silence” (381-82), however, might simply hear “that uncertain Heaven” as fear for a time when the gift of verse no longer flows.

In an example of the poetry’s “enstranging” techniques, the poet brings the reader to what appears to be the limits of both the boy’s world and the natural world, and yet makes the reader do a double-take when those limits almost disappear. In the line following the “mock[ing]” (405) silence in the 1805 text, an odd grammatical construction carries the reader from the past tense of “hung / Listening” to the present perfect tense of “Has carried,” creating a jarring effect when a completed action sounds as if it might still be continuing in the narrator’s present. When the speaker resumes the present perfect tense to describe walking past or standing at the boy’s grave (“when I have pass’d / At evening . . . / . . . I have stood / Mute” 5: 419-21), he invites the reader to associate the verb “has carried” with “have pass’d” and “have stood,” so that the narrator’s actions and the voice carried into the boy’s heart become blended in the reader’s ear as the lines progress. The poet employs the present perfect tense similarly in both the Thirteen and Fourteen-book texts. Just as the boy’s call matches his voice to the hooting owls, the narrator seems to call to the boy with his matching verb tenses. John Alexander Alford observes “Because the present perfect in Wordsworth’s poetry is so richly suggestive of temporal distance, that is, of a continuous expanse from past to

present . . . we should expect to find the construction most often at the heart of contexts suggestive of other kinds of distance as well” (125). Here there is both a distance of time and the “other kin[d] of distance” of death. Caird stressed the way the poet bridges this distance between human and natural worlds in such passages: “The poet, with trembling and watchful sensibility, seems to stand between the worlds, and catches the faintest sounds of recognition that are carried from one to the other” (179). In sharing the present perfect tense of “has carried” which refers to the voice entering the boy’s heart, with the narrator’s own movements by the boy’s grave (“have passed” and “have stood”), the “faintest sounds of recognition” are carried from one verb tense to the other, briefly uniting the selves of the writing poet and both the boy’s moment of recognition and his lack of recognition.

Beyond the divisions between human and natural worlds is the divine influence which exists everywhere as potential in Wordsworth’s poetic realm. The poet’s skill in “discovering divine influences, as they fall like dew upon the spirit,” in Hutton’s phrase, might be seen here in the boy’s hands before they cease to serve his purpose: with “both hands / Press’d closely, palm to palm” (5: 396), the boy echoes the owls as surely as he echoes the position of one praying. To consider the owl hootings as voices “of God” is not too far removed from the way the cuckoo’s echoing voice reminds the speaker of internal voices which are “ours though sent from far” (21) in another poem, “Yes! full surely ‘twas the Echo” (1807), which Caird linked to the mutual recognition in the Winander scene (“Listen, ponder, hold them dear; / For of God, of God they are!” 23-24)²¹ We are reminded of the strained language of “The union, the partition where, that

makes / Kind and degree” (*Exc.* 4:339-40), where humans and things are both separated and joined in a form of “species poetry” (McLane 29).

For all the moments of communion Wordsworth depicts in the Winander scene, he also includes baffling moments of discontinuity. What does it mean when voices cease to respond or when personified natural objects appear to be unaware of their range of influence? In Wordsworth’s “*active universe*” some objects remember and other objects forget those who are in their purview. The “sweet Valley” (452) to whom the young poet has been “entrusted” (451) in the Drowned Man episode which follows in Book 5, for example, apparently forgets her charge, or looks the other way, as the child encounters the garments which portend something terribly wrong on his travels. As if to compensate for her negligence, nature offers up a “beauteous scene” for the backdrop of horror, no less so than the previous scene of the Boy of Winander’s “gentle shock of mild surprize” and subsequent death (*Prel* 5: 470; 407). In the poet’s retrospection on the Boy of Winander’s grave, he imagines the personified village church, the “throned Lady,” as also careless of the dead who sleep below her lookout point:

I see her sit,
(The throned Lady spoken of erewhile)
On her green hill; forgetful of this Boy
Who slumbers at her feet, forgetful too,
Of all her silent neighbourhood of graves,
And listening only to the gladsome sounds,
That, from the rural School ascending, play
Beneath her, and about her. (424-31)

The “throned Lady[’s]” selective attention, “listening only to the gladsome sounds” of schoolchildren recalls Knight’s idea in Chapter 1 that the “relief” offered by Wordsworthian nature is attained not by “clearing up of the mystery,” but “*by the removal of the things which make the mystery disturbing*” so as to enable its reevaluation.

The church singles out the sounds of children to the exclusion of her “silent neighbourhood of graves” in this scene, just as the epitaph writer highlights certain details of a life to the exclusion of others in order to do honor to the memory and assist in alleviating the pain of that loss. In hearing only the “gladsome sounds,” the “throned Lady” does not hear the silent dead, as the epitaph writer must. But the “throned lady” and the epitaph writer use similar exclusionary techniques. The “Essays” encourage the writer to see the deceased “as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualises and beautifies it; that takes away, indeed, but only to the end that the parts which are not abstracted may appear more dignified and lovely; may impress and affect the more” (EE1 336-38). The poet insists that this manner of seeing is a “faithful image”: “It *is* truth, and of the highest order” (EE1 341-3). The epitaph writer’s act of representation enhances the dignity of the deceased by forgiving his faults; his work represents “truth hallowed by love” (EE1 346). The danger remains, however, that in the process of “hallow[ing],” as in the “*removal of the things which make the mystery disturbing,*” a certain violence may be done upon the truth.

II. Revolutionary Echoes

Book 10 of *The Prelude* presents a different kind of violence. There the poet could be said to transfer the “tumult” (10: 398) of the Winander scene to an explicitly political stage as experienced by the young adult poet. In the spring of 1804 Wordsworth probably composed “some form” of the first section of Book 10, a book which meditates on events which occurred during his residence in France in the early 1790s (Reed 40).²² The confusing chronology enacts the chaos he records. Feeling betrayed by the French Revolution and alienated from his own country, Book 10 describes a defining crisis in

which Wordsworth “lost / All feeling of conviction, and in fine / Sick, wearied out with contrarieties, / Yielded up moral questions in despair” (10: 897-900). A less often quoted part of Book 10, excerpted below, presents a stoical attitude toward suffering of the kind that Victorians found attractive. In it we can hear the minor key being sounded for the active “properties that spread” beyond all things in the world of The Wanderer, “communicating good, / A simple blessing, or with evil mixed” (*Exc* 9: 10-12). The poet-prophet confronts the darkest hours of human nature in a complex reaction to the revolutionary violence in which he turns to the Biblical prophets to find “something to glory in as just and fit” (10: 412):

amid the awe
 Of unintelligible chastisement,
 I felt a kind of sympathy with power,
 Motions rais'd up within me, nevertheless,
 Which had relationship to highest things.
 Wild blasts of music thus did find their way
 Into the midst of terrible events,
 So that worst tempests might be listen'd to:
 Then was the truth received into my heart,
 That under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,
 Griefs bitterest of ourselves or of our Kind,
 If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
Honour which could not else have been, a faith,
 An elevation, and a sanctity,
If new strength be not given, or old restored,
The blame is ours not Nature's. (emphasis added, 414-29)²³

The weight of the passage contrasts with the earlier “concourse wild” when the prophetic owls prefigure the boy’s death with their silence and another source of natural music fills it in: the “voice / Of mountain torrents” which were “carried far into his heart” (5: 408-09). Whereas the owls’ “long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud / [which] redoubled and redoubled” (5: 402-403) convey joy even as they presage death, the poet’s turn to the “enflamed” prophets who witnessed the “consummation of the wrath of

Heaven” (10: 401; 408) in Book 10 foretells darker strains. “Wild blasts of music” are required for the young man to face political upheaval and his own guilty hopes for change, presumably mediated by his own verses, harsher music to match the evil he seeks to comprehend: “Then was the truth received into my heart” (10: 419; 422). The musical tempest which comes from his pen so that “worst tempests might be listen’d to” (421) suggests how fury as a component of trauma can be cultivated by composition at a more fevered pitch. The parts here are additive. Rather than removing the source of disturbance as nature does in Knight’s assessment, the writing builds up the intensity as if to approximate the degree of atrocity so that “terrible events” might be grasped literally through the pen.

The “truth received into [his] heart” further tells the reader how the poet’s idealized recurrence to the human race keeps duty front and center as he balances personal guilt and sorrow against the same sorrow conceived as a human predicament—“Griefs bitterest of ourselves or of our Kind” (10: 424). The truth as he hears it in the collective trauma of the French Revolution, places responsibility squarely on individual shoulders, though, for making the “heaviest sorrow earth can bring” yield up its unique “Honour” which is also “a faith, / An elevation, and a sanctity” by way of compensation (10.423; 426-7). By including political bloodshed with the “heaviest sorrow” that “earth” bestows on humankind, “earth” encompasses both nature and human nature. The responsibility for the evil of war must be borne by persons viewed within their “Kind” (10: 424), a species on earth, but one which is rendered distinctly from the rest of the natural world (“The blame is ours not Nature’s”).

This scene recalls Wordsworth's idea of generalizing sorrow by abstracting to the species in "Essays Upon Epitaphs." To achieve a "perfect Epitaph," the writer must stress the social contribution of the deceased on behalf of both the dead and the living so that "what was peculiar to the individual shall still be subordinate to a sense of what he had in common with the species" (EE3 337; 335-36). In the passage in Book 10, grief is generalized to the "Kind" as a way of "enstranging" that sorrow before he can face it with the help of his sister Dorothy and "Nature's self" (10: 921). Underlying the poet's grief is clearly the loss of his revolutionary ideals. But Wordsworth also has on his mind his own significance. Earlier in Book 10, he figured himself "An insignificant Stranger" (10: 130) while in France and subsequently mused on "How much the destiny of man had still / Hung upon single persons" (10:137-38). That concern makes the prophets attractive; he desires to shape his own destiny as a poet-prophet if nothing else. His disenchantment is thus at once political and deeply personal. To perceive that his crisis is in part vocational we have only to work backward from the professed cure effected by his sister Dorothy, who "in the midst of all preserv'd me still / A Poet, made me seek beneath that name / My office upon earth, and nowhere else" (10: 918-920). In this sense, the poet's identification with the prophets would also factor into the cure as one ideal replaces another. Further, Wordsworth's "primary fusion" (Kristeva, *Tales* 26) with the ancient prophets becomes the reader's ideal in the form of a principle of transmuting sorrow: "If from the affliction somewhere do not grow / Honour which could not else have been, a faith, / An elevation, and a sanctity" Before he receives Dorothy's aid, the narrator takes the first steps of mourning the trauma of the French Revolution and of recovering

his sense of poetic worth. He does so by binding his sorrows and fears to a prophetic ideal.

In contrast to the scene in Book 10 where sorrow is plainly the poet's, loss in the Winander scene is represented indirectly in the narrator's retrospect on the death of an innocent boy and on his own human limitations as a poet. The narrator's sorrow is aestheticized in the scene in which we watch the boy's desire for one thing—his trusting calls to the owls—result in his receipt of something profoundly greater, an ideal communion with the natural world, even if it escapes his full recognition. The poet binds himself to this ideal in effect by writing the boy's epitaph, which serves as an allegory for his own poetic death. But there is another important binding of affection in Book 10 and another death in the poet's development. Approximately 100 lines after he turns to the ancient prophets he turns to the tomb of "An honor'd Teacher" (492), William Taylor. The narrator's identification first with the prophets, then with his beloved teacher regenerates his sense of poetic calling as he stands before his teacher's grave. Taylor's "plain Stone, inscribed / With name, date, office, pointed out the spot, / To which a slip of verses was subjoin'd, / (By his desire, as afterwards I learn'd) (495-498). Those verses were a variant on the last four lines of Gray's "Elegy Written in an Country Churchyard" which address the stranger to leave alone both his "merits" and his "frailties" where they "alike, in trembling Hope, repose" in God's bosom.²⁴ It is an epitaph which asks the stranger not to criticize or praise, but to let the deceased rest in his faith.

The poet reads in his teacher's epitaph a "special kind of history" which Alan Liu calls "self-epitaphic" history (381).²⁵ The lines are a "self-epitaph" insofar as Taylor selected the verses, but also because he told the poet shortly before his death, "My head

will soon lie low” (501). As a result of reading his teacher’s “self-epitaph,” the poet is himself thrown into “self-epitaphic consciousness” (381) in which he writes his own epitaph so that in Liu’s assessment, “even the present becomes *as if* past” (382):

I thought with pleasure of the Verses, graven
Upon his Tomb-stone, saying to myself
He lov’d the Poets, and if now alive
Would have lov’d me, as one not destitute
Of promise, nor belying the kind hope
Which he had form’d, when I, at his command,
Began to spin, at first, my toilsome Song. (10: 508-514)

For Liu, the poet’s self-epitaph “contains in seed” his “characteristic lyricism,” the movement from “pastoral elegy to prophetic hymn” (382). Thus Wordsworth’s “Hymn of triumph” (10: 543) released upon hearing of Robespierre’s death at Leven Sands “may fulfill the spirit” (382) of the ancient prophets as Liu points out, but I stress this hymn is only possible because the narrator has reinforced his ties to the “Poets” at his teacher’s graveside. He has re-found the “kind hope” which his teacher had “form’d” through his instruction.

What makes these scenes most epitaphic is the narrator’s generalization of sorrow to the human race, and then his binding of that sorrow first to the prophets, and then to the poetic ideal “form’d” by Taylor’s attentions. Wordsworth’s identification with the “enflamed prophets” is brought down to earth in a “primary fusion” with the memory of a single human who shaped his destiny and for whom the despairing poet can still “spin” his “toilsome Song.”

Taylor’s epitaph contrasts with “Lines written on a Tablet in a School.” In the lyrical ballad, the narrator requests that his verses on Mathew be read as a supplement to the “two words of glittering gold” (31) engraved on the tablet: It is “a request I make /

Which for himself he had not made” (15-16).²⁶ The difference between the two epitaphs—Mathew’s inscribed name and Taylor’s self-epitaphic verses from Gray’s “Elegy”—lies not only in Taylor’s desire to have Gray’s “Elegy” serve as his epitaph, a request he makes for himself, but also in Taylor’s explicit identification with the “Poets” through whom he is still bound to his pupil. Taylor continues to form his pupil as his desire to communicate to his mourner is registered forcefully. The “*active principle*” which has been pushed toward violence in the Revolution, causing “Griefs bitterest of ourselves or of our Kind” (10: 424), is in some profound way pushed toward life again at the level of the individual’s restorative memory at he stands before Taylor’s epitaph. The narrator looks both inward and outward for the sources of strength necessary to live out the dictum that from suffering, “If new strength be not given, or old restored / The blame is ours not Nature’s” (10: 428-29). He begins to restore that old strength before his teacher’s grave.

The Victorian novelist and literary historian Margaret Oliphant drew attention to the phrase “Honour which could not else have been”²⁷ to comment on the poet’s “constant endeavour to prove . . . the reasonableness of sorrow in the theory of human existence—the necessity for it, and the grandeur of its use, which justified its employment” (306).²⁸ Oliphant compared this theme with the “sickening suggestion that ‘everything is for the best,’ with which the commonplace comforters of this world do their little possible to aggravate grief” (306). But how did Wordsworth’s approach to suffering avoid that “sickening” sort of consolation for readers like Oliphant? Her article emphasizes how insistently the poet held to this principle: “He will allow no grief to be dwelt upon for itself—no pang to be suffered without some compensation” (306).

Oliphant then refers to the Wanderer in the first book of *The Excursion* as the model for Wordsworth's approach to suffering, recounting in particular the pedlar's serenity as he left the ruined cottage which was all that remained of Margaret and her family: "I walked along my road in happiness" (*Exc.* 1: 984). Oliphant reflects: "This is the imperative doctrine which [Wordsworth] preaches, perhaps all the more earnestly because it is difficult for the mind to hold by it through all the miseries of the world. It was the doctrine with which, in the face of the gigantic calamities of France, he had endeavoured to comfort his own sore and bitterly disappointed heart" (306). Oliphant implies that the poet's insistence on this theme gives away more than he intends, an observation which may bring us closer to why Victorians could find comfort in Wordsworth's poetry whereas twenty-first century minds might resist it. If readers like Barrett Browning perceived the poet experienced grief by a "reflex emotion," others like Oliphant may not have been so sure. Such readers may have felt the questioning and fear behind the brave face; the poet's recurrence to the theme of turning sorrow to use may have been seen as an ideal for which he, too, was still striving.

Notes

¹ Noted in Katherine Mary Peek's *Wordsworth in England*, 121.

² *Last Poems, 1821-1850* by William Wordsworth, ed. Jared Curtis, 270-274.

³ *LB*, 107-08.

⁴ I am indebted to Bauer's scholarship. See *William Wordsworth: A Reference Guide to British Criticism, 1793-1899* for a vital resource on nineteenth-century readers of Wordsworth.

⁵ For example, H.W. Piper's *The Active Universe: Pantheism and the Concept of Imagination in the English Romantic Poets*.

⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, Vol 2, *Existence and Nature of God*. Ia. Question 8, Article 4, p.123. I am grateful to Colin Jager for suggesting the relevance of Thomism for my project.

⁷ In A.C. Bradley's essay "Wordsworth," based on Oxford lectures given in 1903, he suggested "the road into Wordsworth's mind must be through his strangeness and his paradoxes, and not round them" (101). David Ferry describes Wordsworth's poems as "lovingly hostile to the humane world" (4). He approaches these poems with respect to the "limits of mortality that define man as what he is, individual, idiosyncratic, circumscribed; and it is against the mortal limitations of man that Wordsworth, in my view of him, conceived such a hatred" (4), *The Limits of Mortality*.

⁸ *P2V*, 123-29.

⁹ Pater cites the Leechgatherer, without the details, in his discussion.

¹⁰ Stephen Gill describes such pilgrimages while the poet was alive in *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, 10-14. Samantha Matthews discusses Wordsworth's grave as a site of pilgrimage in *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century*, 154-188.

¹¹ The line cited by Pater appears in both the *Fourteen-Book Prelude* edited by Cornell, and the 1850 edition edited by de Selincourt, with slightly different wording: "Man suffering among awful Powers and Forms" (*Prel* 8: 165), suggesting Pater quotes from memory.

¹² Writing in 1851, D. M. Moir noted the poet's playing with the reader's vantage point as well when he claimed that Wordsworth's poetic landscapes "have a Chinese character about them—the remote and the near being equally brought forward, in defiance of perspective—as to the man lying horizontally on the grass each blade seems a spear, and the circling wild-bee is confounded with the swallow in the remoter sky" (72-73).

¹³ Shairp captured this "vision" of the human as it emerges from depictions of characters like the Cumberland Beggar who are closer to earth than the poet or reader: "He has revealed, in the homeliest aspects of humble life, a beauty and worth not recognised before, or long forgotten. He has opened for men new sources of interest in their kind, not only in shepherds and peasants, but in tattered beggars, and gipsies, and wayworn tramps" (71).

¹⁴ Paul Fry describes the epitaph in terms of such a "partition": "The Wordsworthian epitaph is a narrowing, a metonymic crossing of the bar: but the bar is not suppressed; rather it is emphasized" (166). After 1810 (the period in which Wordsworth wrote the "Essays upon Epitaphs") remarks Fry, "to have faith is to believe that while the angels may see all things and conditions as one, the human mind, with its 'excursive power' (4.1263), at best may catch reflections of that vision in seeing all things as leaning on one another in a vast associative figure, a syntax linked one step at a time through a gradation or sloping countryside of differences" (167).

¹⁵ Sonnet 33 "Conclusion," *The River Duddon. A Series of Sonnets*, SS, 75.

¹⁶ *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* uses the movement rolling through all things in "Tintern Abbey" as an example of "panentheism," Vol. 9, Garvie, 612. I owe this reference to A. D. Martin, who describes the difference between "pantheism" and "panentheism" as follows: "Pantheism is the assertion of the identity of God and the Universe; in Euclidean language, His coincidence with the Universe. A competent theologian [Garvie] refers to the tendency which runs through Wordsworth's poetry as *panentheist* rather than *pantheist*, the view that all things are in God, a belief which involves the transcendence of God as well as His immanence. Wordsworth saw Nature and Man as, so to speak, immersed in God, partaking of His nature, but not as necessarily conforming perfectly to His will. He had a sure conception of God as beyond all things and overruling all things" (14), *The Religion of Wordsworth*.

¹⁷ *LB*, 228-34.

¹⁸ *LB*, 235-37.

¹⁹ Kelly Oliver's chapter "The Imaginary Father" provides a clear discussion of Kristeva's complex argument. See 69-90.

²⁰ *LB*, 250-51.

²¹ *P2V*, 255-56.

²² In the spring of 1804, Wordsworth probably composed the first section of Book 10 through the scene in which he learns of Robespierre's death, which ends around line 566 (40). Introduction, *The Thirteen Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed.

²³ In de Selincourt's 1850 version, the passage is more questioning although the crucial lines I have italicized in the 1805 version remain virtually the same. The "motions" which were "rais'd up within" (417) the poet in the 1805 version become in the 1850 version: "Motions not treacherous or profane, else why / Within the folds of no ungentle breast / Their dread vibration to this hour prolonged?" (458-460)

²⁴ Taylor's epitaph is quoted in Liu, 381.

²⁵ Liu's notion of history in Wordsworth is bound up with nature as a middle term between history and the self, a mirror which "hide[s] history in order, finally, to reflect the self" (19).

²⁶ *LB*, 211-12.

²⁷ Leslie Stephen also pointed out this passage in a footnote to his essay, "Wordsworth's Ethics," 222n.

²⁸ The passage from Book 10 that Oliphant quotes in her article does not match the 1850 de Selincourt and Darbishire edition exactly: "Honour which could not else have been; a faith / For Christians, and a sanctity."

Whence that low voice?—A whisper from the heart,
 That told of days long past when here I roved
 With friends and kindred tenderly beloved;
 Some who had early mandates to depart,
 Yet are allowed to steal my path athwart
 By Duddon's side; once more do we unite,
 Once more beneath the kind Earth's tranquil light;
 And smother'd joys into new being start.

—W. Wordsworth, Sonnet 21, *River Duddon* ¹

Chapter Three

Reluctant Return: Earth and Epitaph in Wordsworth's *River Duddon* Sonnets

“Was it for this / That one, the fairest of all Rivers . . . // sent a voice / That flow'd along my dreams?” (1: 272-73; 276-77) Wordsworth posed the question in *The Prelude* and generated an epic poem in the process. In the *River Duddon* sonnets (1820), he continues the “interrogative mode” (Wolfson, *Questioning* 17) of Romanticism in a new key and with a new river as he seeks to capture the river's voice and to define his own. We have already seen that *The Prelude*'s revisions reflect the poet's changing relationship to the deity across a lifetime. Wordsworth's use of self-correcting revisions and formal experimentation to mark off his mortal place, defined as part of, and yet distinct from, the world of nature, affirms a growing sense of submission to his God with the *River Duddon* volume. In particular, Wordsworth explores the tension between the elegy and epitaph within the borders of the sonnet, the “scanty plot of ground”² which attaches him to earth. In the poems from at least the *River Duddon* sonnets on, the absence of boundary figures like the Leechgatherer signals a change in the aesthetic; the poet begins to inhabit the border regions himself and seems intent on maintaining borders he can devise formally in the poetry. Through marking these sonnet-styled plots of

human time, the poet participates in an outwardly directed act of devotion. In the sonnet form Wordsworth finally achieves a form of worship which is not self-worship.

Against the long thread of revisions which make up the many *Preludes*, the scope of this chapter is more sonnet-like. It outlines a smaller territory of space and time in the poet's career. Just as the sonnet breaks down experience into manageable portions, this portion of the poet's life isolates for analysis the interplay between poetic form and unintentional biography by way of indirect mourning. This segment of a life covers literally the Lake District, and a period of time which begins roughly around 1809 during the writing of "Essays Upon Epitaphs"³ through December 1818 when Mary Wordsworth relayed to Sara Hutchinson: "W. is at this moment sitting, as he has been all the morning . . . with his feet on the Fender, and his verses in his hand—nay now they have dropped upon his knee and he is asleep from sheer exhaustion—he has worked so long. He has written 21 Sonnets (including []*ld ones) on the river Duddon—they all[to]*gether comprise one Poem"(41).⁴

The sonnets on the River Duddon that "comprise one Poem" constitute public and private meditations which are pivotal in the life and in the career. Scholars have known that the *River Duddon* volume matters for the way it marks the slow turning of the critical tide in Wordsworth's favor; from the 1820s onward, the poet's reputation gradually took its place in the esteem of an English and American reading public.⁵ But as Stephen Gill and others have argued, the River Duddon also represents a crucial moment in "the creation of his poetic identity" as a national poet with a Lake District "brand name" (Wordsworth and *RD* 22; 38).⁶ In this chapter I examine this poetic transition in the context of Wordsworth's increasing use of the sonnet in mid-life, a change that leads to

the late-career memorial series in which sonnets and rivers figure prominently. The turn to the sonnet form, solidified with the *River Duddon* volume, realizes the aesthetic born of the “Essays Upon Epitaphs,” albeit imperfectly. Further, the poet may have indirectly transmuted his own sorrows by using the return to the River Duddon via the sonnet series to mourn the deaths of his two children which occurred years earlier. Even as the poet obliquely mourns these losses, though, the question driving the *River Duddon* sonnets more overtly concerns ambition and the “Unfruitful solitudes” (*RD* 5: 4) of the poet’s proud remove from society. From a position of self-exile in the savage River Duddon environs, Wordsworth appears to rethink his responsibility as a poet-prophet on one level, and on another, to gain the right distance from and thus proximity to the deaths of his children in order to grieve them. He leaves the reader to detect the intimate losses linked to the Duddon’s banks in between the sonnets’ carefully-measured lines.

Even as Wordsworth less obviously addresses his private suffering in The *River Duddon* sonnets, we can detect a move to a more public persona in a sequence that Jonathan Bate has called “the public counterpart to the private fluvial movement of *The Prelude*” (221). As the poet journeys over the course of a day along the river, from its obscure mountain “birth-place” (1: 9) to the Irish Sea, Wordsworth lets the river’s path guide the narrator’s reflections. The sonnets thus progress with the stream topographically, moving from chasm to chasm, swinging across thousands of years of geologic history in the white spaces in between. The series in this way sets off the poet’s meditations on mortality and his own career against the enduring presence of landscape, a setting which implies a natural progress and depth of time, at once uniquely his and that of humanity. Wordsworth specifically uses the river metaphor to refer to the progress of

the human race in his *Reply to 'Mathetes'* published in Coleridge's periodical, *The Friend*, for 14 December 1809: "The progress of the Species neither is nor can be like that of a Roman road in a right line. It may be more justly compared to that of a River, which both in its smaller reaches and larger turnings, is frequently forced back towards its fountains, by objects which cannot otherwise be eluded or overcome . . ." (*Prose Works* 2: 149-153).⁷ At the same time the river parallels the species, it follows the individual's philosophical progress as well. In his response to the young man "Mathetes," who seeks the moral guidance of a "living Teacher,"⁸ Wordsworth urges him toward "steady dependence upon voluntary and self-originating effort, and upon the practice of self-examination sincerely aimed at and rigourously enforced" (211-213). Such a stern self-searching attitude which extends outward to the larger community characterizes the poetic persona of the *River Duddon* sonnets.

The river advances sonnet by sonnet, but the sequence simultaneously protests its natural progress, like the stream "forced back towards its fountains." The poem hesitates by digressing to tell of traditions like the "Love-Lorn Maid" and the hidden pool in Sonnet 22, or the ritual of "Sheep-Washing" in Sonnet 23. The Postscript and the lengthy appendix—totaling 30 pages in the original edition—accentuate the poem's constructedness and suggest by their bulk alone Wordsworth's reluctance for the series to end. A substantial portion of the poet's notes consist of a memoir of the Reverend Robert Walker, the long-serving curate of Seathwaite Chapel to whom the poet alludes in the 18th sonnet of that name. He is the same Priest named "the Wonderful" by his parishioners, whose good works provide a brief exemplary tale in *The Excursion*.⁹ In the *River Duddon's* appendix, Walker merits a substantial life history precisely for the way

he could have stepped outside of history: “Robert Walker was not a man of times and circumstances; had he lived at a later period, the principle of duty would have produced an application as unremitting; the same energy of character would have been displayed, though in many instances with widely-different effects” (SS 96). Duty is a chief concern of these sonnets. Wordsworth’s own “principle of duty” to leave a work that endures comes through clearly when the sequence halts impressively before the 33rd and final sonnet to insist on looking back in order to look ahead: “For, *backward*, Duddon! as I cast my eyes, / I see what was, and is, and will abide” (33: 3-4). While the poet appears anxious for his work to “abide” like the river, insofar as his use of the sonnet form announces its artfulness and thus sets it against nature, he also resists the notion that the function of his poetry and the river can ever be the same. The series knows instead that the earth “will abide” and that the ultimate return to earth will be the body’s. The *River Duddon* sonnets which are so fascinated with a return to a beloved stream, and with resisting the flow, are just as fascinated with the point of no return, most closely associated with the place where the river spreads to the sea in the concluding sonnets.

The relationship between the earth and the human body, living and dead, shapes Wordsworth’s notion of the sonnet as an earthbound part of the whole. The poet hints at the overall relationship of the living body to his work when he characterizes the kinship between metrical composition and prose as bodily in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: “Poetry sheds no tears ‘such as Angels weep,’ but natural and human tears,” he writes; “she can boast of no celestial Ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both” (257-60).¹⁰ In the most concrete sense of this formulation, genre would seem to cohere in the person writing. Yet

if one abstracts from the poetry and prose while retaining a sense of the material, the image of a shared generic body contains much more than the hand and heart of the poet. The body also belongs to earth in *The River Duddon, A Series of Sonnets: Vaudracour and Julia: and Other Poems. To which is annexed A Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes in the North of England*. The extended name itself highlights the volume as an interdependent series of poetry and prose that does not want to end. The movement between the two forms resembles the tension between elegy and epitaph which the poet negotiates in the sonnet.

The “vital” fluids circulating in this literary landscape include both historically-specific places and self-critical allegories of poetic and human progress which are viewed from a safe emotional distance. It is as if in later years Wordsworth could stand upon his “Age, / As of a final EMINENCE” (9: 52-3) and “hear the mighty stream of tendency,” (9: 88) like the “venerable Sage”(9: 2) in *The Excursion*. At the same time as this volume commemorates Wordsworth's private sorrows and poetic ambition, however, it challenges the imperial impulse of a poet whose only god is himself, and of an industrializing nation for whom acts of “getting and spending” threaten the beauty of his native hills.¹¹ The *River Duddon* sonnets ironically help to carry out this critique, as Wordsworth's epitaphic ideal is wont to do, in a manner that makes room for the celestial and for processing grief by remaining afar from the “natural and human tears” he privileges in 1800.

By opening the volume with the *River Duddon* sonnet series and ending it with his guide to the Lake District, Wordsworth not only makes plain the blood-relationship between poetry and prose, but he also stresses the materiality and controlled affect as key

components of his epitaphic aesthetic. Like the epitaph proper, the material form of the sonnet cannot be separated from its function for Wordsworth. In these sonnets, personal, societal, geological, and generic histories converge as the backdrop for a series of meditations on what remains behind when humans pass away: the forms of river and rock, civilizations and their ruins, and a body of literature that lives. Against this setting and the “Essays Upon Epitaphs,” the *River Duddon* sonnets disclose a palimpsest of human sorrows, layered like earth, and importantly, surveyed from a height. A

Topographical Description is itself an accretion of sorts, as explained in an italicized note which faces the closing text: “[*This Essay*] is now, with emendations and additions, attached to these volumes; from a consciousness of its having been written in the same spirit which dictated several of the poems, and from a belief that it will tend materially to illustrate them” (*Prose Works* 2: p.169n). The poet's reflections on the landscape pour forth from the “same spirit” as several of the poems, detailing their settings and evincing the volume's larger obsession with attachments and supplementary notes which prolong the process of ending.

The prose descriptions of earth which are “annexed” to the volume are essential for gaining the right perspective on the poems. The prose guide not only describes in detail the Lake District's mountains, lakes, streams, vales, and tarns as they have been shaped by nature and man, it suggests the best angle of approach and in many cases, the best time of day and year, for each view. Like the sonnets which are both public and private in scope, such views depend on one's vantage point. Significantly, the poet first presents the lay of the land from a godlike perch, asking the reader “to place himself with me, in imagination, upon some given point; let it be the top of either of the mountains,

Great Gavel, or Scawfell; or, rather, let us suppose our station to be a cloud hanging midway between these two mountains . . .” (*Prose Works* 2: 534-37). With the prose and sonnets book-ending the volume in this way, and with poet and reader held aloft for a panoramic view, it soon becomes clear that the poet finds in formations of earth allegorical models for his poetry to endure as things.

I. “How shall I paint thee?”

“Not,” the first word of the first sonnet in this series, emphasizes the resistance that distinguishes the *River Duddon* sonnets in general until the series succumbs to ending in the sea.¹² In the opening sonnet, the narrator defends his choice of a stream: “Not envying shades which haply yet may throw / A grateful coolness round that rocky spring, / Bandusia” (1: 1-3). The poet refuses to covet the celebrated fountains of other poets like Horace’s spring Bandusia. He picks instead a “native Stream” (1: 9) of humble origins as a means of asking how he can remain true to his poetic gift and divine task, his dilemma in the third sonnet.

How shall I paint thee?—Be this naked stone
My seat while I give way to such intent;
Pleased could my verse, a speaking monument,
Make to the eyes of men thy features known.
But as of all those tripping lambs not one
Outruns his fellows, so hath nature lent
To thy beginning nought that doth present
Peculiar grounds for hope to build upon.
To dignify the spot that gives thee birth,
No sign of hoar Antiquity’s esteem
Appears, and none of modern Fortune’s care;
Yet thou thyself hast round thee shed a gleam
Of brilliant moss, instinct with freshness rare;
Prompt offering to thy Foster-mother, Earth!

As we saw in *The Prelude*, the poet must unveil himself in order to clarify his ambitious hopes. The “naked stone” reminds the reader of the vulnerability of the “self-

transmuting” scene and the blankness of the “bare common” in the “spots of time” in Book 11 as well as the poet’s inability to paint what he saw there: “I should need / Colours and words that are unknown to man / To paint the visionary dreariness / Which, while I look’d all round for my lost Guide, / Did at that time invest the naked Pool . . .” (309-13). The adult poet contemplating the River Duddon imagines himself as if he is the first man to do so with his blank slate: “How shall I paint thee?” becomes the quest for the right artistic disposition for his craft at large, not simply for this river in this moment. Appropriately enough, just as “each most obvious and particular thought . . . // Hath no beginning” in *The Prelude* (2: 234; 237), the source of this stream is only subtly pronounced by its own ornamentation. The poet still suggests what he cannot paint; the difference between the “sonnet” and the “stone” on which he sits is so many letters. The banks of the Duddon become identified with the sonnet as the rocky vessel for the poet’s stream of thought on a dear subject: “Pure flow the verse, pure, vigorous, free, and bright, / For Duddon, long-lov’d Duddon, is my theme!” (1: 13-14)

Despite their resistance to ending, *The River Duddon* sonnets depict the longing for reciprocity with a natural and a pure order, and the sonnet form offers the medium for achieving it. As John Wyatt observes with an eye to the geological theories at work in the series, “[t]he sonnets present a Divine contract with humanity, a reconciliation between human tradition and a law-governed physical world” (135). This is one way of reading the humanized river’s simultaneous self-consecration and offering to “Foster-mother, Earth!” (3: 14) in the third sonnet: “Yet thou thyself hast round thee shed a gleam / Of brilliant moss, instinct with freshness rare” (12-13). One is also reminded of the poet’s appeal to Coleridge in *The Prelude* to seize his own “prime and vital principle” (13: 194),

an appeal Wordsworth may make to himself in this instance. The river's self-honoring gesture is a "Prompt offering" to earth which does not wait on critical approval or rely on extraordinary beginnings. The deep connection between self-love and providing a gift of "brilliant moss" is one the river understands by "instinct," unlike the poet who walks the fine line between arrogance and realizing his gifts in *The Prelude*.

The precarious intersection of self-love and the deity turns on the right relationship to pride as the sonnets allegorize it. This self-love, like the river's faith in self, is in keeping with the Thomistic principles discussed in Chapter 1: "without access to *one's own good* there can be no access to God. Without self-love, no love for God can be perceived or thought, and consequently no gift of love to others" (Kristeva, *Tales* 176). We can hear the lines from "Resolution and Independence" reverberating as well: "By our own spirits are we deified" (47).¹³ Balancing love of self and the respect of others for one's gifts is also represented as tricky at best. While poetic prowess may come with vain tendencies, it comes with suffering when talent goes unappreciated. How the poet creates his "speaking monument" depends on his attitude toward that talent, to his God, and to his future readers, especially given that his verse prior to publication of the River Duddon, did not "speak" to his contemporaries.¹⁴

This tricky balance is more evident in the poet's construction of the fifth sonnet. Here, he invites the reader to weigh the question of "how" to paint the river in terms of the prideful solitary whose worth went unrecognized in "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree" in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). In the third sonnet, the "naked stone" serves as the poet's seat as he seeks to make a "speaking monument." With the solitary's death in

“Lines,” he leaves the “seat” as “his only monument” (43).¹⁵ The narrator in the fifth sonnet continues to worry about his audience:

Sole listener, Duddon! to the breeze that play'd
 With thy clear voice, I caught the fitful sound
 Wafted o'er sullen moss and craggy mound,
 Unfruitful solitudes, that seem'd to upbraid
 The sun in heaven!—but now, to form a shade
 For Thee, green alders have together wound
 Their foliage; ashes flung their arms around;
 And birch-trees risen in silver colonnade.
 And thou hast also tempted here to rise,
 'Mid sheltering pines, this Cottage rude and grey;
 Whose ruddy children, by the mother's eyes
 Carelessly watch'd, sport through the summer day,
 Thy pleas'd associates:—light as endless May
 On infant bosoms lonely Nature lies.

At first it is hard to know from the ambiguous syntax who is the “Sole listener”—the speaker or the stream. In line two we perceive that the poet is the listener who catches the “fitful sound” of the stream, but anxiety lingers throughout the series that the Duddon may be the speaker's only listener. Less in doubt is the extremity of the setting, the “Unfruitful solitudes, that seem'd to upbraid / The sun in heaven!” (4-5) The stream and poet range through a no man's land where the moss is “sullen,” not “brilliant” as before when lovingly offered to “Foster-mother Earth.” The “lofty waste” (2: 3) only lends to the severe mood and defiance of the elements, the otherness of nature. George McLean Harper, an early twentieth century biographer of the poet, rendered the relation of sonnet to scene: “Somewhat bare and austere these sonnets are, like the bleak hills and stony valleys they celebrate. They keep faith with their subjects, a self-sacrificing loyalty that scorns the specious gains of flattery” (311). The desolation which “seem'd to upbraid / The sun” may be essential to formation of the poetical character. The fundamental question for the poet: if election means separating himself from his community, to what

degree of self-sacrifice? Like the “lonely yew-tree [which] stands / Far from all human dwelling” (1-2) in “Lines,” or more dramatically, the “Blasted” poet in Percy Shelley’s *Alastor* (73),¹⁶ the wisdom of the poet’s remove from society is at stake.

The tenor of the fifth sonnet changes noticeably, however, once the trees make shade for the river, and the river draws the cottagers to its shores. In “Lines,” the solitary is the one who “taught this aged tree / Now wild, to bend its arms in circling shade” (10-11).¹⁷ Yet the company of the natural setting did not fulfill the solitary as it does the narrator of the sonnet; the solitary needed another audience; “pure in his heart, against the taint / Of dissolute tongues, ’gainst jealousy, and hate, / And scorn, against all enemies prepared, / All but neglect” (15-18). Unacknowledged by his fellows, “the food of pride sustained his soul / In solitude” (20-21). The narrator zooms in on a different kind of waste in this scene as he describes the solitary spending hours in the yew-tree seat “tracing here / An emblem of his own unfruitful life” (28-29). Whereas the “sheltering pines” and cottager and playing children displace the “Unfruitful solitudes” of the River Duddon from the narrator’s watchful remove, the yew-tree seat preserves the “unfruitful life” of the solitary “here” for speaker and reader to ponder up close. Yet even the “unfruitful” existence bore its pleasures; as the solitary gazed from his yew-tree seat, his lovely prospect “became / Far lovelier, and his heart could not sustain / The beauty still more beauteous” (32-34)—a scene presumably still available to the passerby in the fiction of the poem (“—Nay, Traveller! rest”). The solitary’s offense hits close to home as one might argue that the epitaphic aesthetic promotes a prospect which is exclusive by design insofar as it requires a studious investment of its reader. Both “Lines” and the fifth

sonnet interrogate the relation of social responsibility to the precarious cultivation of genius, as well as the role of audience in that endeavor.

Perhaps the narrator's warning to the "Stranger" who is invited to rest by the yew-tree bears on the *River Duddon* sonnets as well: "that pride, / Howe'er disguised in its own majesty, / Is littleness" (46-47). "Lines" condemns the solitary's scornful attitude while making palpable his yearning for contact of a certain kind. The deliberate syntax of the final lines enacts the preferred approach to self-examination which keeps pure the "holy forms / Of young imagination" (44-45). "True dignity" (57) is his who "Can still suspect, and still revere himself / In lowliness of heart" (59-60). Complicating matters, we can clearly hear the loneliness of that dignity in "lowliness," along with its loveliness. It is the ratio of suspicion to reverence that determines whether in looking on himself, the "Traveller," like the solitary, looks on the "least of nature's works" (53). The caesura in the penultimate line suggests that self-inspection requires equal parts self-criticism and self-love, both of which require self-possession ("Can still suspect, and still revere himself"). In a journal entry on 4 June 1842, one of the poet's acquaintances in old age, Caroline Fox, recorded Wordsworth's conversation on the subject of pride and "divine permission of evil," relevant to the narrator's tempering of self-esteem in "Lines" and in the sonnet at hand. Fox quotes the poet: "Nothing but faith can keep you quiet and at peace with such awful problems pressing on you, —faith that what you know not now you will know in God's good time . . . faith is the highest individual experience, because it conquers the pride of the understanding,—man's greatest foe" (175). Approaching the fifth sonnet with "Lines" in mind, the reader can imagine the "pride of the understanding" as the locus for calibrating faith.

The fifth sonnet also richly suggests the respectful boundaries which must be observed between man and nature, as evidenced by the tender tone which emerges after the pause in line 5 “—but now, to form a shade / For Thee, green alders have together wound / Their foliage . . .” (5-7). The transition of mood is complete once the river’s “pleas’d associates” come into view—the “Cottage rude and grey” and its “ruddy children.” As the Fenwick Notes to the series imply, these banks are sacred for the poet because of their association with his two children, Catharine, and Thomas, who died in 1812 at the ages of three and six. Wordsworth writes: “I have many affecting remembrances connected with this stream. These I forbear to mention, especially things that occurred on its banks during the later part of that visit to the seaside of which the former part is detailed in my epistle to Sir George Beaumont” (32). In his circuitous way, he guides the reader to the lines of the “Epistle to Sir George Howland Beaumont, Bart.” (1811), where one can better appreciate the “feelings of personal delicacy”¹⁸ which led him to withhold the poem from publication until 1842. There he expresses both parents’ hopes that sea baths for the children “Would their lost strength restore and freshen the pale cheek” (117).¹⁹ Although not one of his smoother compositions, the “Epistle” sheds light on the elegiac tone of the *River Duddon* sonnets; the trip made with the children along the Duddon Banks in August 1811 evidently impressed him profoundly. The Irish poet Aubrey de Vere gives an account of a conversation with the elderly poet about the loss of his children long after the fact: “he described minute details of their illnesses with an exactness and an impetuosity of troubled excitement such as might have been expected if the bereavement had taken place but a few weeks before. The lapse of time

appeared to have left the sorrow submerged indeed, but still in all its first freshness” (“Recollections of Wordsworth” 280).

Writing anonymously in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1889 on “The Duddon Vale as It is and is to Be,” Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley defended the Duddon Valley against proposed manufacturing facilities that would “drink the Duddon dry” (151). He recalled why the river was special to the poet who commemorated it: “Wordsworth must have remembered, amongst other things, how those beloved children, so soon to be removed—they died in the following year—played on Duddon banks, and have linked indissolubly with that Duddon stream the vision of that

Being, breathing thoughtful breath,
That traveller between life and death,

with whom he shared the Duddon journey”(153).²⁰ A reminder of that “traveller” intrudes in the 21st sonnet, whose octave provides the epigraph to this chapter: “Whence that low voice?—a whisper from the heart” (1). With the “voice” from the past that tells of loved ones— “Some who had early mandates to depart” (4)—the word “voice” acquires a different valence; this is not only a poetic voice to be cultivated, but also a voice that can only be rejoined “by Duddon’s side” (21: 6). The biographical context may help to explain the mysterious closing line of the fifth sonnet in which the child is parent to the stream—“On infant bosoms lonely Nature lies”—and to suggest why the “ruddy children” would so comfort a lonely river or poet.

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant -
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight

The Truth's superb surprise
 As Lightning to the Children eased
 With explanation kind
 The truth must dazzle gradually
 Or every man be blind -
 —Emily Dickinson (c.1872)²¹

II. Earth and Epitaph

In these first sonnets, prophetic ambition and memories which make the river banks sacred trouble the wandering poet. By soothing both concerns at once, the sonnet becomes Wordsworth's ideal poetic form as realized in this series. I suggest that a similar pattern of tamed ambition and consecration of place extends to the late memorial tours. Within the confines of the sonnet, the poet can create without usurping God's role. And through the sonnet's close connection to earth, he can honor locales as a means of naming his loss.

As much as the sonnet solves for Wordsworth, the question of poetic influence still haunts his turn to the sonnet form. The poet famously traced this turn to the moment he “took fire” in 1802 after his sister Dorothy Wordsworth read to him Milton's sonnets, with which he was long-familiar (*Fenwick Notes* 19). Daniel Robinson has charted the influence of a more recent sonnet tradition—the English river sonnets of Charlotte Smith and William Lisle Bowles—finding that with the *River Duddon* volume, Wordsworth “appear[s] to be balancing his debts” both to Milton and to the sonnet of Sensibility (449). By inserting himself in a lasting line of sonneteers, Wordsworth is “attempting to preserve his reputation for the future by reinvigorating a mode of sonnet that had gone out in the 1790s” (450). As Robinson observes, the volume initiated a reassessment of the poetry in reviews in *Blackwood's* and the *British Critic*, for example, spurring a welcome

rebound after the “critical nadir” (451) which accompanied the publication of *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner* in 1819. In short, Robinson credits the critical revaluations brought on by the *River Duddon* volume with nothing less than “sav[ing] Wordsworth’s career” (451). In following out an often overlooked link from Wordsworth to the sentimental sonnets that were all the rage in the late eighteenth century, Robinson points up an aspect of Wordsworth’s quest for fame and ongoing dance with mortality that interests me most: the necessity of indirection to his uncertain task. The *River Duddon* sonnets “suggest that Wordsworth, having gained some distance from Smith and Bowles, wanted to preserve some record of their influence,” writes Robinson, “even as he clearly also wanted to disassociate himself from the sonnet of Sensibility, which had a stronger influence upon him than he would later admit” (453). The poet clearly responds to the sonnet of Sensibility and to those of his strong precursor Milton in my view. For this ambitious poet, the “anxiety of influence” (Bloom 6) is not restricted to trespassing on divine turf.

Complicating matters, Robinson notes the tendency away from the personal in the *River Duddon* sonnets by comparison to the earlier river sonnets: “The Duddon is more anonymous and more generalized than Smith’s [River] Arun or Bowles’ [River] Itchin, and the poet, too, loses somewhat his identity . . .” (456). But the import of the *River Duddon* sonnets for Wordsworth lies in both their public and their personal power. Wordsworth’s epitaphic aesthetic resides not only in the sonnets’ generality and thus in their indirection to the work of mourning, but also in the way their frugality or restraint allows him to worship his God.

The way in which the sonnet is both conducive to mourning and devotion meets up in the form’s materiality for Wordsworth. Despite his concern with making and

keeping a name as a poet in this sonnet series, there is a larger issue at stake which the poet's fame exemplifies and which the sonnet as a material form facilitates: the human desire to attach to earthly things. The awareness of his earthbound nature and the simultaneous knowledge that he is distinct from God appear to embolden the poet to keep producing in later years. The sonnet fits a new frame of mind. To be sure, critics have commented on the way the confines of the sonnet make possible a kind of freedom for Wordsworth, for example. Jennifer Ann Wagner stresses the visionary capacity of Wordsworth's sonnets over their restraint. She argues that with the sonnet series, like the individual sonnets themselves, Wordsworth "attempts to shift the function of the sonnet from the merely consolatory or compensatory to the revelatory" (60). In my reading, however, the restraint and visionary qualities are a package deal; it is because of the one that the other is possible. Like the "spots of time," the poet's humility before his God—evidenced in part by the frugal form—makes possible his visionary power, monitored though it may be within the sonnet's lines.

The sonnet's finite physicality seems part of this power. J. Hillis Miller observes a similar opening-out quality in the sonnet owing to its brevity: "Wordsworth saw the small size and rigid laws of the sonnet as paradoxically allowing for one kind of largeness or another" (63). Looking to metaphors of small spaces like the hermit's room and the student's "citadel" in "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room," Miller concludes "[a]ll these are enclosures making possible an expansiveness of meditation or speculation, a concern with first and last things" (64). Such meditations on first and last things make sense in a sonnet sequence which is of at least two minds about ending. For Miller, Wordsworth's shift to the sonnet form must be situated alongside the unfinished

masterwork, *The Recluse*, which brings up the “theme of poetic impotence, an impotence born of the poet’s largeness of ambition and self-imposed inclusiveness of scope” (65). If, as Miller suggests, Wordsworth embraces the sonnet so as to master in small what he cannot master in epic form, his prolific generation of sonnets may parallel the ways in which *The Prelude*’s revisions are generated by an “illusion of mastery” as Susan J. Wolfson has argued (*Formal Charges* 101). As the poet ages, the finished form of the sonnet might also soften fears of death in the same way that the flurry of revisions allows the poet to revise a past he cannot change. Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s study *Poetic Closure* explains how endings can be constructed to satisfy: “Haunted, perhaps, by the specter of that ultimate arbitrary conclusion, we take particular delight, not in all endings, but in those that are designed. Our most gratifying experiences tend to be not the interminable ones but rather those that conclude” (1). For Wordsworth, a series of designed endings keep him close to the earth as he carefully advances to the River Duddon’s end.

For the poet writing *The Prelude* and the *River Duddon* sonnets, it is hard to overestimate the significance of the place as both physical and metaphysical. Wordsworth returned to the Duddon throughout his life, calling it his “favourite River” at one point in 1821 (*Letters Later Years Pt I* 4).²² Wordsworth’s friend Lady Richardson recorded in her “Reminiscences of Wordsworth” an 1844 trip with the poet to the Duddon which brought up memories for him.²³ The poet’s returns to the river, like his returns to the gibbet scene in *The Prelude* must have activated the passions associated with the place in a process of mourning. Thomas De Quincey implied that the poet preferred a graduated emotional process by the way he depicts the passions indirectly:

“whosoever looks searchingly into the characteristic genius of Wordsworth will see that he does not willingly deal with a passion in its direct aspect, or presenting an unmodified contour, but in forms more complex and oblique, and when passing under the shadow of some secondary passion” (*Collected Writings* 11:301). The same indirection is true of the allegories of mourning evidenced in *The Prelude* and the *River Duddon* sonnets. To understand the way this mourning works, one must follow the way words participate as “things” in this “complex and oblique” treatment of emotion.

Wordsworth refers to words as “things” in his often-cited note to “The Thorn” in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). There he is not only at pains to distinguish himself from the ballad’s repetitious narrator, but also to explain how repetition bespeaks frustration when words fail to convey the passions fully. Thus the narrator “will cling to the same words” (45)²⁴ in a stubborn effort to get across those feelings to an audience. Further, such “repetition and apparent tautology are frequently beauties of the highest kind. Among the chief of these reasons is the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are themselves a part of the passion” (*LB* 46-50). If one extends the materiality of words to the signs of the landscape as texts, one can grasp the properties that words as “things” share with physical objects in the landscape to which the passions also become attached in memory.

Leslie Stephen explained how human actions and their settings forge feelings in Wordsworth’s verse in an important essay which sparked a response by Matthew Arnold in his 1879 selection of Wordsworth’s poems. This is the same essay in which Stephen credited the poet with “transmuting sorrow” by turning it to dutiful ends. Pairing Benjamin Disraeli’s “prescription” of “ma[king] love in a palace” with Wordsworth’s

choice of setting for the same, Stephen outlined the features of this phenomenon of memory: in one case, the sight of the palace “will recall the splendour of the object’s dress or jewellery; if, as Wordsworth would prefer, with a background of mountains, it will appear in later days as if they had absorbed, and were always ready again to radiate forth, the tender and hallowing influences which then for the first time entered your life” (“Ethics” 217-18). Stephen directs us to the way the setting seems to “absor[b]” the lover’s joy and simultaneously lend something of its grandeur to that joy for future access. This associative action applies to the way objects similarly soak up painful affects. The potential for a range of emotions to be recalled through the material object explains how the poet can coax a sorrowful feeling toward the residue of a more joyful one with which it is already preserved in the scene. Yet even as the object common to both emotions promises replacement of one feeling with another, the triggering mechanism remains uncertain.

The only certainty is the indirection of the process. An object retains memories after abstract thoughts become blended with its physical details indirectly, as explained by De Quincey’s notion of the “involute.” Recurrent contact with that object then pulls up the previously impressed thoughts. De Quincey reached this insight by recalling the indelible link of his older sister’s death at eight years of age with the bright sunlight that filled the room where her body lay: “far more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of *concrete* objects, pass to us as *involute*s (if I may coin that word) in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled, than ever reach us *directly* and in their own abstract shapes” (*Collected Writings* 1:39). These

“perplexed combinations” imply the confusing ties between grief and scene which occasion them.

When significant settings hold the painful excess of grief linked to memory, the mourner, like the revising poet, can return to consult the amount of sorrow he can withstand. Unlike the completed mourning Freud’s theory describes, this model of mourning remains unfinished. In comparing mourning to features of melancholia, Freud observes that “time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and . . . when this work has been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 252). However, with the help of places which retain the passional overflow of the memory of the lost loved one, ties to the lost object can stay alive in a continual form of mourning.²⁵

Wordsworth himself experienced this tie to Grasmere, the place where his two children were buried in 1812. On 8 January 1813, the poet wrote to Lord Lonsdale about the need to leave the parsonage at Grasmere where memories were so sharp: “[The house] stands close by the Churchyard; and I have found it absolutely necessary that we should quit a Place, which, by recalling to our minds at every moment the losses we have sustained in the course of the last year, would grievously retard our progress towards that tranquillity of mind which it is our duty to aim at” (*Letters Middle Years Pt 2* 66). This dutiful need to leave the physical scene tells of the power of affections held in the landscape, but it also reveals the stress points of the poet’s own theory of mourning outlined in the “Essays Upon Epitaphs” in which the “grave is a transquillising object: resignation in course of time springs up from it as naturally as the wild flowers” (EE1 420-21). The

poet could not allow the memories preserved in the homestead to speak in due course. Instead, he left the painful scene out of “duty.”

In the *River Duddon*, the poet maps this mourning onto the landscape in sonnet-sized doses, participating in a long tradition of pastoral elegy. Within the sonnet’s rock-like compactness, Wordsworth still has space to name his God and nature, however, in an act of separating himself from both as he contemplates death. Ellen Zeztel Lambert traces this perspective of death back to the first *Idyll* of Theocritus. By portraying the death of Daphnis as a separation from, rather than a seamless part of nature, Theocritus rewrites the context within which nature relieves man’s suffering and initiates the genre of pastoral elegy: “Without the sympathy between man and nature, the pastoral elegist could not *place* his sorrow. But without the distinction between the two realms, the very source of his sorrow would be obscured” (xxix). As the green alders and the ashes form a shade for the river, and the cottagers comfort the lonely river in the fifth sonnet, nature’s sympathy gives Wordsworth a place for his sorrow in a private twist on the conventions of pastoral elegy. We presume Wordsworth “placed” his sorrow off the page as well. In the *River Duddon* sequence, the elegiac tone which attaches itself to words and to the places they describe, seems to find a satisfying container in sonnets which help to hold the loss and which are, like his days, bound each to each. And yet like the pastoral elegy which acknowledges man’s separation from nature and thereby registers his sorrow, the sonnet series makes clear that the poet will not “abide” in the same way as the river will “abide.”

In Wordsworth’s theory of epitaphs, “placing sorrow” in the landscape parallels the epitaph writer’s healing technique of moving the mourner’s mind from particular pain

to pain in the aggregate, while capturing a “faithful image” of the deceased (EE1 341). This ability wraps within a “general sympathy” (EE1 325) what was unique to the subject so that the memorial recognizes the deceased both “as a human being” and as an individual “for a satisfaction to the sorrowing hearts of the survivors, and for the common benefit of the living . . .” (EE1 154; 157-59). In joining the “individual worth” (EE1 157) of the deceased to his worth as a human being, the epitaph writer symbolically spreads the mourner’s present pain across human time. Moreover, for the mourner who perceives how the generations of earth are allied with man in easing sorrow, the spreading goes one step further to transform human pain to the pain of earth: “[W]hen death is in our thoughts,” writes Wordsworth, “nothing can make amends for the want of the soothing influences of nature, and for the absence of those types of renovation and decay, which the fields and woods offer to the notice of the serious and contemplative mind” (EE1 198-202). The “types” of renovation and decay may not rise to the power of the “Characters of the great Apocalyps, / the types and symbols of Eternity” envisioned by the poet in the Simplon Pass crossing in Book 6 of the *Prelude* (570-71). But the poet considers these earthly cycles as “types” which can pull the “serious” thinker outside of human time, if temporarily, and into a geological register. This long-range way of seeing is evidenced across the *River Duddon* volume with poems like “Ode. The Pass of Kirkstone,” for example, not to mention the sonnets and the prose piece *A Topographical Description*.²⁶ The language of renovation and decay was frequently found in books on geology such as James Hutton’s *Theory of the Earth*, theories Wordsworth would have known from *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* according to Wyatt.²⁷ Imagining the

deceased in the context of natural cycles automatically imposes a cosmic template, lending grandeur to the life of the departed and to the process of grieving.

The materiality of words, and by extension, the poems in which they are arranged, undergirds a deep connection between the earth and the sonnet form. “Things” include words, or natural objects, or spots of earth, or Lucy in her grave—objects and places that become fixed in emotionally-charged memories which the poet seeks to revisit and revise. The way the mind “attaches to words” just as it attaches to “things” which are a “part of the passion” suggests that Wordsworth’s mid-to-late career attraction to series of sonnets fulfills a desire to remain attached to earthly things by means of utilizing the “scanty plot” of the sonnet. Following Wordsworth’s metaphorical logic, a sequence of these “plots” or gravelike “narrow rooms” has much in common with the “authentic” (5: 653) or oral epitaphs in *The Excursion*: there is a way in which both sonnet sequence and churchyard series form overdetermined epitaphs. Further, when viewed with a geological consciousness, the “spot of time” and the epitaph proper start to resemble each other; the individual human life itself appears a “spot of time” across the years. Such a cosmic consciousness informs the epitaph and enables the poet to face his mortality with exquisite indirection and regulated affect, aided by the controlled form of the sonnet as a variation on the epitaph. Wordsworth wants to leave his mark on earth; the sequence of shaped plots (lyric and narrative) appears to be his best insurance policy.

Wordsworth provides another window on the importance of materiality for the epitaph proper insofar as it captures the felt permanence of the mountains in small. He does so in an analogy used to open the 1810 version of “Essays upon Epitaphs” in a paragraph that does not appear in future reprintings of the *Essays* until the twentieth

century.²⁸ According to more than one editor, the paragraph is “probably” written by Coleridge,²⁹ and although it does not appear again when the Essay is appended to *The Excursion*, it sheds light on the poetics of epitaphs whether the voice is Coleridge’s or Wordsworth’s. In the introductory paragraph, the writer declares that his purpose is to reflect on epitaphs for “the more practised Reader,” but also, he explains

to those Persons who are unfamiliar with such speculations, my labour, in the present Essay, may be likened to that of a Teacher of Geology, who to awaken the curiosity of his Pupils, and to induce them to prepare for the study of the inner constitution of the Planet, lectures with a few specimens of fossils and minerals in his hand, arranged in their several classes, and the beauty of which he points out to their attention. (EE1 p.49n)

Here composition becomes the teacher’s province in more than one sense. The poet’s “specimens,” the varieties of epitaph, are things composed of inorganic matter. What is more, the aesthetic composition of the samples on display has its own function: to entice students to further study of the internal principles by which such specimens—geological and poetical—are formed. The analogy between rock and fossil formations and kinds of epitaph is indeed instructive for Wordsworth’s reader-pupil. The epitaph is always bound to the earth insofar as the inscription on stone marks the place where human dust returns to dust. Given the sheer number of rocks that make up the landscape of Wordsworth’s oeuvre, the idea of the poet as a teacher of geology seems oddly fitting. “Rocks and stones and trees” are not only as ubiquitous as the “spots of time” and space in the poetry and prose, they are the forms of nature in which these “spots” most literally converge. The geological samples of the planet’s “inner constitution” are records of its long history, spots of earth and deep time which also constitute the cherished terrain of the poet’s own loves and losses. In the *River Duddon* sequence, this man-made variation on the earth’s geological record takes the form of the sonnet for Wordsworth.

Like the sonnets themselves, the signs of nature seem to take on the status of a “purer element” or an ideal by means of which the poet can approach painful emotions. Wordsworth intimates the way in which natural beauty tempers such feelings in one of the poet’s additions to *A Topographical Description* when it was revised for publication in 1823.³⁰ In the presence of a lake in autumn’s “season of stillness,” a resident of this region

must have experienced, while looking on the unruffled waters, that the imagination, by their aid, is carried into recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable. The reason of this is, that the heavens are not only brought down into the bosom of the earth, but that the earth is mainly looked at, and thought of, through the medium of a purer element. (*Prose Works* 2: 1193-98)

We are familiar with these reflective images from the body of Wordsworth’s poetry—perhaps most notably the Boy of Winander scene in which “that uncertain Heaven” appears reflected in the still waters of the lake and is then received into the young boy’s heart. In the case of the River Duddon, the narrator often associates the river with purity: the stream is “remote from every taint / of sordid industry” (1-2), for instance, in the second sonnet (and similarly, 12: 6; 18: 7; 19: 4; 23: 9; 14: 26; 6: 27; 13:). There is a precedent for imagining the river as a “purer element” in one of the earlier *Miscellaneous Sonnets* from the *Poems* (1815) as well. In “Brook, that hast been my solace days and weeks,” the poet concludes that “the Eternal Soul is clothed in thee / With purer robes than those of flesh and blood” (11-12; *P2V* 533-34).³¹ We see then a way in which the lake and river, and by extension, the words of the sonnet, become the “medium of a purer element” through which the imagination can meet more than halfway those feelings which are “otherwise impenetrable.”

Kristeva explains from the position of the depressive how beauty as an ideal object can pull the mourner out of himself and his suffering: “In the place of death and so as not to die of the other’s death, I bring forth—or at least I rate highly—an artifice, an ideal, a ‘beyond’ that my psyche produces in order to take up a position outside itself—*ek-stasis*” (*Black Sun* 99). In the case of the river, or any other ideal of natural beauty, the setting enables the mourner to move outside himself in more than one way: at the level of the beautiful object and at the level of the generations of earth within which humans and the woods are continually cycling (“The immeasurable height / Of woods decaying, never to be decay’d” *Prel* 6: 556-57).

In the absence of an internalized deity, perhaps the “purer element” of the stream provides a poetic way of touching a godlike ideal. The sonnet series finds in the apparent permanence of nature a divine symbol, and yet with the counter-movement of the five sonnets beginning with “Not” or “No,” the sequence records its dis-ease with this arrangement. One motive for this opposition is suggested by Wordsworth’s awareness of the “images of decay” in his guide to the Lake District. In an unfinished prose work named *An Unpublished Tour*, written around 1811-1812 in a style similar to *A Topographical Description*, Wordsworth goes so far as to say of the mountains that “the clearness of the atmosphere permits every wrinkle in the rugged surface of those huge masses to be traced, so that, lasting as they assert themselves to be, it is written upon their foreheads: we are perishable” (582-585).³² In his self-conscious use of the sonnet sequence to parallel a river’s topography, the poet shows that to identify his career with the river’s path is to desire the permanence of natural forms while acknowledging elsewhere that even the mountains are dying in a long process of restoration and decay.

To produce sonnets with a geological awareness therefore amounts to an assertion of faith in an act of inscribing that operates foremost on the “soft records” of the human mind.

As noted in Chapter 1, I take the term “soft records” from the eighth of the *River Duddon* sonnets in which the poet-speaker ruminates on the hopes of early humans who traversed the same region. He raises a series of questions which hang in the air answered only by the “soft record” of the river rolling by. I liken these soft sounds to the “blank earth” of unmarked graves, the unwritten records of the dead which exist as memories impressed as overtones or echoes of actions rather than as words written in stone.

What aspect bore the Man who roved or fled,
 First of his tribe, to this dark dell—who first
 In this pellucid Current slaked his thirst?
 What hopes came with him? what designs were spread
 Along his path? His unprotected bed
 What dreams encompass’d? Was the Intruder nurs’d
 In hideous usages, and rites accurs’d,
 That thinned the living and disturbed the dead?
 No voice replies;—the earth, the air is mute;
 And Thou, blue Streamlet, murmuring yield’st no more
 Than a soft record that whatever fruit
 Of ignorance thou might’st witness heretofore,
 Thy function was to heal and to restore,
 To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute!

Once again the speaker’s vulnerability is marked by his imaginings of primitive man in “unprotected” circumstances. The questioning and emphasis on the “first of his tribe,” and the “first” who “slaked his thirst” suggests a kind of primal ambition. One is tempted to substitute for the “Intruder” the original poet who might be “nursed / In hideous usages” (7) in the press. Like the elementary passions depicted, the rhythms of the sonnet are jagged until the feeling of calm which overtakes the poem at the volta as the speaker stops his inquiry long enough to hear that “No voice replies;—the earth, the air is mute”

(9). With the medial caesura, the reader also absorbs the change in tempo and tone of the “mute” air. Here, as in the “Unfruitful solitudes” of the fifth sonnet, no human voice is heard, and yet the “blue Streamlet” murmurs in the background, reminding the speaker not of “hideous usages” but of the river’s purifying properties. The scene’s potential for healing paradoxically recalls Wordsworth’s notion of language as a “counter-spirit” described in the third of the “Essays upon Epitaphs” in which language “[is] unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve” (EE3 186-88). In this sonnet, however, we start with the “counter-spirit,” the “hideous usages” to which intruders, like language, can be put. The sonnet thus pushes against the “counter-spirit,” back to the river’s first “function” to “heal and to restore.” It was a function in the poetry Victorians found appealing.

III. “Approaching Abjection” through the Sonnet Form

Considered abstractly as a disposition and concretely as engraved words, the epitaphic aesthetic increasingly corresponds to abjection as theorized by Kristeva. This ambiguous psychoanalytic space helps to explain how Wordsworth clings to earth through the process of revision and why the sonnet form gives him the needed boundaries for braving this territory. It is finally within the borders of the sonnet that Wordsworth feels most at home aesthetically as a prophetic poet. While this study does not include the *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822) (later named the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*), we must see the *River Duddon* sonnets as a gateway not only to the memorial tours, but to a form of writing which aligned him closely with church institutions, attracting Tractarians like John Keble and John Henry Newman when the Oxford Movement commenced in the 1830s. To trace the evolution of this aesthetic through the poet’s experimentation with

form, it is necessary to see the firm lines of the sonnet as emerging from abjection, but also from his affinity for the inscription, elegy and epitaph proper.

Despite his great interest in the epitaph, Wordsworth rarely masters his ideal in pure form. Perhaps his hardest-won epitaph is inscribed on the gravestone of his son Thomas Wordsworth, who was buried at Grasmere Churchyard. A decade after her young son's death, Mary Wordsworth described her husband's difficult task of composition in a letter to Edward Quillinan, as he waited for the poet to pen an epitaph on his deceased wife, Jemima: "it took him years to produce those 6 simple lines," Mary Wordsworth wrote, referring to her son's epitaph. "Yet he could not give it up" (*LMW* 88).³³ Just as revealing, Wordsworth held his son's epitaph from print until the *Poetical Works* of 1836-1837:

Six months to six years added, He remain'd
Upon this sinful earth, by sin unstain'd.
O blessed Lord, whose mercy then remov'd
A Child whom every eye that look'd on lov'd,
Support us, teach us calmly to resign
What we possess'd and now is wholly thine.³⁴

These lines are especially relevant for the way they enact the ambivalence which haunts the *River Duddon* sonnets at their most intimate: when and how to attach and let go of earthly things, and how to re-attach in new ways that are mindful of divine grace.

Christopher Ricks's elegant sense of the "non-temporal pause" (90) created by Wordsworth's use of white space helps to convey the ambivalence inherent in this epitaph proper: "Unless the rhythm or the sense of the formal punctuation insists upon it, the line-ending (which cannot help conveying some sense of an ending) may not be exactly an ending. The white space may constitute an invisible boundary; an absence or a space which yet has significance; what in another context might be called a pregnant

silence” (90). In the suspension created at the end of the third line of this epitaph, for example, the reader can imagine what the poet undoubtedly felt upon his son’s death: that God’s “mercy” was “then remov’d.” The next line completes the thought, making the child, not God’s mercy, the clear referent of “remov’d.” With the closing words “wholly thine,” the homonym reminds us not of God’s holiness, but that the last word of the poem is God’s, as is the child who has been “wholly” removed from this life. Nor does the final sentiment erase the anguished path of reaching it; the poet’s feelings of betrayal remain mixed with the tone of resignation in the pregnant white spaces of the poem.

In adhering to an epitaphic ideal, the inscription on his son is exceptional in a poetic practice in which generic impurity seems bound up in the very conception of memorial writing. Wordsworth’s mixed and fixed epitaphic form enables the poet to explore thematically the blending of seemingly opposite tendencies, such as the need for earthly fame and the belief in an immortal soul, by means of framing and containing them in poetic language. The formal tension which results from bringing together elegy and epitaph in the sonnet form approximates a similar anxiety in the poet: a growing desire to keep firm the boundaries of human and divine against his lifelong attraction to the places where they merge. The emotional safety net Wordsworth extends in the form of the *River Duddon* sonnets thus affords a sense of mastering a long history of conflicting desires toward his God and his own mortality.

The sense of “indomitableness” to which he felt prone from an early age and his need to tame this tendency are described in the poet’s frequently-quoted comments on the “Immortality Ode,” dictated late in life to Isabella Fenwick: “I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence & I communed with all that I saw as

something not apart from but inherent in my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality” (*Fenwick Notes* 61). While the Fenwick Notes no doubt carefully position his career for posterity, the continual pull of an “abyss of idealism” lends credence to the idea of an “internalized allegory” (Galperin 166) in which the young poet responds to this heady idealism by drawing inward the godlike presence he feels in nature. In such a scenario, the roles of divine prophet and all-too-human poet were destined to clash. And they did; with the crisis of John Wordsworth’s death, the sense of a godlike self no longer sufficed. The tragedy brought home the harsh realization that the poet’s life had all along been “Hous’d in a dream, at a distance from the Kind!” (“Elegiac Stanzas” 54) We can hear the desire to avoid the same trap in the first sonnet of the *River Duddon* series, “Better to breathe upon this aëry height / Than pass in needless sleep from dream to dream” (1: 11-12).

And yet, the later poetry reveals a continued struggle with the necessity of myth for holding onto hope. The discrepancy is not that myth is necessary; it is the nature and degree of that necessity which the later poetry questions. The “internalized allegory” of the poet-prophet must give way to a revised poetic mission which still relies on myth to some degree but which is neither fully internalized nor externalized, as both extremes give rise in different ways to Wordsworth’s “egotistical sublime.”³⁵ The new enabling myth is at pains to observe the clear point at which mortal pride must cede to divine powers.³⁶ The poet must find the right tone for honoring his own gifts without falling prey to envy and ambition. This is not to say that for Wordsworth, finally, the divine is not brought down to earth in real ways as he finds sufficient evidence of the divine in

nature. Rather, the hypersensitive poet must guard against an all-powerful feeling of oneness with nature and the divine in which the individual man is not only continuous with the universe, he *is* the universe. As Wordsworth strives for the economy of an epitaphic ideal in later years, the sonnet form in particular becomes fertile ground for working through the related aims but separate means of elegy and epitaph while keeping the “egotistical sublime” in check.

If one steps back from the poet’s laws for monumental engravings in his “Essays Upon Epitaphs” to view the larger body of poetry, one can discern that the poetic epitaph proper makes up a small portion of Wordsworth’s oeuvre as compared to the prominently-featured sonnet—more than 535 of the latter, depending on how the sonnets are counted, and by whom.³⁷ Joshua Scodel observes not only how “few actual poetic epitaphs” (384) comprise the oeuvre, but also how the existing epitaphs cannot be counted among his major poems. Scodel provides an in-depth history of the appropriation of the English poetic epitaph by poets from Ben Jonson and John Donne, to Alexander Pope and Wordsworth, for political, social, aesthetic, and religious commentary during the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. According to Scodel, the epitaph’s use declined when poets lost interest in the rigid formulas and the reader’s response to the poem as paramount (404). He aligns the “end of the epitaphic tradition” (384) with the ascendance of both the “personal elegy” for mourning the dead and the obituary as the “major para-literary expression of the dead’s public significance” (404). Scodel explains how Wordsworth, “[m]ore self-consciously than any of his epitaphic predecessors” (385), probed the cultural implications of public attitudes toward the dead. While Scodel does not consider the sonnet as a manifestation of Wordsworth’s epitaphic

theory, I take the sonnet as a variation on the epitaph with more room for emotion. The sonnet provides an ideal format for experimenting with a range of poetic voices, including the elegiac, in varying degrees of intimacy, anchoring the mature poet in the process of marking earth as that which lies beyond earth looms closer.

Wordsworth is careful in the “Essays Upon Epitaphs” to find the appropriate voice for the epitaph without erring on the side of elegy. The right tone derives from both the material of the monument and the labor of carving the letters which “might seem to reproach the author who had given way upon this occasion to transports of mind, or to quick turns of conflicting passion; though the same might constitute the life and beauty of a funeral oration or elegiac poem” (EE1 423-29). In the sonnet, Wordsworth appears to add more of the “life and beauty” of elegy prohibited in the epitaph proper and to retain the material connection to the setting of the engraving as does the inscription.

As Wordsworth employs it, the sonnet’s connection to earth closely compares to that of the inscription. Geoffrey Hartman has traced the poet’s treatment of place to this form which proliferated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and to its generic descendant, the votive or commemorative epigram, a “sister-tradition” to the epitaph in which the voice of the genius loci warns the passing stranger he is on hallowed ground (“Inscriptions” 211). This latter notion shares much in common with the “speaking monument” the poet yearns to create in the third of the *River Duddon* sonnets. In Wordsworth’s hands, the nature inscription “is never landscape alone”; rather, it is landscape in the process of being personally marked: “[t]he setting is understood to contain the writer in the act of writing: the poet in the grip of what he feels and sees, primitively inspired to carve it in the living rock” (“Inscriptions” 222). In the *River*

Duddon sonnets, the river as analogy for the species extends this “personal marking” to envelop the sorrows of the human race.

Wordsworth thus holds in tension public and private forms of marking at the same time he seeks to temper the stronger emotional pitch of the elegy with the earnestness of the epitaphic sentiment. Coleridge’s remarks on the sonnet suggest how the roundness of the form may assist Wordsworth in maintaining this complex balance in the sonnet series.

In his Introduction to the second edition of *Poems* (1797), Coleridge writes:³⁸

The Sonnet then is a small poem, in which some lonely feeling is developed. It is limited to a *particular* number of lines, in order that the reader’s mind having expected the close at the place in which he finds it, may rest satisfied; and that so the poem may acquire, as it were, a *Totality*,—in plainer phrase, may become a *Whole* . . . Perhaps, if the Sonnet were comprized in less than fourteen lines, it would become a serious Epigram; if it extended to more, it would encroach on the province of the Elegy. (*Collected Works* 16:1 pt 2 1235)

Wordsworth echoes Coleridge’s comments on the “*Totality*” of the sonnet in a letter to Alexander Dyce of 22 April 1833, referring to the “pervading sense of intense Unity” he found pleasing in Milton’s sonnets in which the syntax “overflows” from the octave into the sestet: “Instead of looking at this composition as a piece of architecture, making a whole out of three parts, I have been much in the habit of preferring the image of an orbicular body,—a sphere—or a dew-drop” (*Letters Later Years Pt 2* 605). The admired shape of the sonnet created by the poet’s use of enjambment may factor into the poet’s efforts to pursue this “*Totality*” in the sonnet form. Together with Coleridge’s idea of the melancholy cast of the sonnet, one can imagine how the sonnet fulfills a need midway between epitaph and elegy. Further, it is possible that the very sequencing of the sonnets enhances this controlled but vital feeling by pacing them on the page.

Cultivating the speaker's proper distance from the subject of the sonnet is another way in which Wordsworth achieves the restraint he so values in the epitaph. Such a distant perspective distinguishes the speaker of the sonnet sequence as it re-emerged in the late eighteenth century, according to Michael R.G. Spiller. The "passionate spectator" describes a lyric voice derived from Elizabethan practitioners of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence such as Shakespeare and Spenser. Removed from the subject of contemplation, the "passionate spectator" in cases of lost love, for example, might be considered an "outcast" (28). The questioning speaker of the *River Duddon* sonnets may fall into the category of "outcast" or, at least, that of an observer who exists both inside and outside the scene under discussion. Together with the speaker as "spectator," the concision of the sonnet form helps to gain the desired distance on the emotional content such that each "orbicular body" offers the reserve of an unshed tear instead of a gush of emotion.

The sonnet's controlled passion characterizes the solemn aesthetic which unfolded as the poet redefined his idea of the human after he lost his brother John Wordsworth in a shipwreck in 1805. Although Wordsworth carefully imaged his corpus as human in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, his brother's death forever qualified what he meant by that term, as critics have often noted.³⁹ When Wordsworth responded to the loss by writing in "Elegiac Stanzas," "a deep distress hath humaniz'd my Soul" (36),⁴⁰ he inaugurated an aesthetic which evolved in afteryears and which he theorized in "Essays Upon Epitaphs." There resulted a "new idiom," in the words of Kenneth R. Johnston, who contrasts the "spots of time" which spread their influence over a single life in *The Prelude*, with the oral epitaphs which condense whole lives of a rural parish in a series of short graveyard tales in *The Excursion* (297). I appreciate the newness of this later idiom

against the suspended visionary moments that shape the poet's life through revision in *The Prelude*. In my interpretation, however, both the condensed oral form of the "new idiom" and the "spots of time" cultivate a measure of gratitude which I associate closely with the developing epitaphic aesthetic and the means by which the poet transmutes or hopes to transform grief into duty—a disposition he encourages in his reader as well. In later years, this acceptance of limitations and the need to find contentment with what the poet already has seems to find its complement in the compactness of the sonnet as a form of epitaph which is not without its visionary moments.

Importantly, boundaries assist in finding this contentment. When considered as a metaphorical crossing point of human and divine, the sonnet form as exemplary of Wordsworth's epitaphic aesthetic gives new meaning to the "omphalos" or "boundary image, the symbol of a border between natural and supernatural" according to Hartman (*WP* 198).⁴¹ His sense of the boundary image is one in which "Wordsworth preserves the self from all (including mythic) encroachments because the self is not this or that but *between*" (198). That is, "with rare exceptions" the poetry "stops short of the supernatural and draws its energy from boundary images" (198). I agree that the poetry is fascinated with marking the space between human and divine, but Wordsworth's poetry also consistently illustrates evidence of divine power throughout. His aesthetic is built around determining the right relationship to this power. Hartman finds that the English romantic poets treat the human and non-human "middle ground" (200) of the ancient gods differently: For Blake, the boundary image serves as resting place, for Shelley and Keats, it is a "mythopoeic mixing or weaving of natures, but their minds never enter this act totally enough to be deceived" (200). It is "Wordsworth alone [who]

refuses to create imaginary beings of a mixed nature, yet it is he who comes closest” to depicting the “blended or boundary image” (200), exemplified for Hartman by the man-and-mountain figure of Virgil’s Atlas and realized in Wordsworth’s Leechgatherer.

My conception of boundaries in Wordsworth owes a great deal to Hartman’s interpretations of Wordsworth’s figures like the Leechgatherer, the Discharged Soldier, and the Old Cumberland Beggar who appear to hover between this world and the next and who embody the interconnectedness of all matter. In the later poetry at least, Wordsworth assiduously avoids poetry which resides “between” worlds, though, by choosing to define himself and his craft respectfully against a divine power within the confines of the sonnet. This shifts attention to the solace to be gained from making the distinction between self and other rather than the in-between states of engulfing abjection. In later years Wordsworth cannot afford to be enthralled with such border figures as he gradually takes on the perspective of the borderer himself.

No longer merely an observer of abject figures like the Leechgatherer and the Discharged Soldier who live where life meets decay, the mature Wordsworth begins to inhabit the space of abjection more than ever. The materiality of the epitaph and its manifestation in the sonnet form then correspond not only to ancient forms of earth, but also to ancient forms of mind and body attached to the maternal body, in Kristevan terms. The poet cleaves to and from this maternal body in the opposing senses of the verb: “to cling or hold fast to; to attach oneself,” “to remain faithful to,” “to abide” versus “to part or divide by a cutting blow,” to “split,” or “to pierce and penetrate” (OED). With the sonnet form, Wordsworth “cleaves” to mother earth.

In her chapter “Approaching Abjection,” Kristeva describes the “*deject*,”—the “one by whom the abject exists,” who “*strays* instead of getting his bearings”:

A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the *deject* is in short a *stray*. He is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. (*Powers* 8)

Kristeva’s formulation of abjection corresponds to the child’s painful self-definition before ego and object are properly established—hence the “non-object”—a process achieved through a series of near-separations from the mother. The abject is not fully an object for the self to desire, and thus the “fluid confines” which we may imagine metaphorically as the river of verse flowing through the *River Duddon* series which the sonnets help to demarcate. “Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be—maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out” (10). The poet for whom the “outline of the signified thing vanishes” has all the more reason to reinforce the signified thing and to name the “imponderable affect” within a fixed form. From the later memorial series mostly composed of sonnets by the journeying poet—*Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820; Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1833; Yarrow Revisited, and Other Poems* (1835); *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*—it is tempting to see the “tireless[ness]” with which he approaches his craft as that of the *deject* “on a journey.”

If the poet’s abjection gives us a way of comprehending his obsession with the sonnet’s borders, the use of the sonnet as a devotional form suggests Wordsworth’s way

through that abjection as he seeks purity and permanence. Hartman's notion of the border image throws additional light on the poet's quest. For Hartman, the border image "embodies the idea of something absolute—independent of nature even when within nature" (*WP* 239). I see the poet's emphasis on the sonnet's borders similarly, but the "idea of something absolute" is achieved specifically within the sonnet's finitude.⁴² The borders that interest me are self-imposed by the poet in the sonnet form against the felt dissolution of all borders. The process of making these borders which mark off human and divine manages abjection by humbling the poet before his God. This does not imply that Wordsworth must forego joyous suspensions within the security of the sonnet. Such closely-monitored moments are earthbound but feed on the sense of being outside the human categories of time and space. These visionary moments may be best described as a prayer-like vantage point from which Wordsworth offers himself to the deity via a vast consciousness and surveys the "best part of our species" as he described it in a letter to Sir George Beaumont in May 1825. There Wordsworth spoke of his "Religion of gratitude": "I look abroad upon Nature, I think of the best part of our species, I lean upon my Friends, and I meditate upon the Scriptures, especially the Gospel of St. John; and my creed rises up of itself with the ease of an exhalation, yet a Fabric of adamant" (*Letters Later Years Pt 1* 351). This easy and enduring religion reminds the reader of the spirit of language which "uphold[s], and feed[s], and leave[s] in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe" (*EE3* 185-86). To the degree Wordsworth's brushes with the divine cultivate gratitude for earthly things, constructing borders in sonnets may serve to comfort the poet not blindly, but knowingly.

Thus even as the poet submits to his God, the constitution of the sonnet—its predictable rhymes and rhythms—makes it possible for the speaker to step back from time and emotion to survey a more commanding prospect. The sonnet’s frugal design is suitable to the “*ritualized perfection*” which temporarily controls the uncontrollable events of ordinary life as discussed in Chapter 1 (Smith, *Imagining* 63). In discussing the “affinity between religion and poetry” in his “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface” (1815), Wordsworth implied how the sonnet’s economy enters the equation:

The religious man values what he sees chiefly as an ‘imperfect shadowing forth’ of what he is incapable of seeing. The concerns of religion refer to indefinite objects, and are too weighty for the mind to support them without relieving itself by resting a great part of the burthen upon words and symbols. The commerce between Man and his Maker cannot be carried on but by a process where much is represented in little, and the Infinite Being accommodates himself to a finite capacity. (*Prose Works* 3: 129-36)⁴³

Insofar as “much is represented in little” in the sonnet, “commerce” between “Man and his Maker” seems well-suited to this genre. The English sonnet of course has a history as a devotional form in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, exemplified by John Donne’s “Holy Sonnets.” For Wordsworth, the sonnet’s “finite capacity” might serve as a constant reminder of his human fragility in the face of the divine even as its borders provide a place for “resting” those concerns, religious and psychological, which are “too weighty for the mind to support.”

IV. “greater than we know”

Balanced between the finite and infinity, the meditative space of the concluding sonnets functions like the epitaph proper in Wordsworth’s poetry. The opening out of the series begins in earnest in the 31st sonnet as the traveler reaches sea-level calm and the “Majestic Duddon” glides “in radiant progress tow’rd the Deep / Where mightiest rivers

into powerless sleep / Sink, and forget their nature” (4-6). For a poet concerned with securing borders, these final sonnets threaten to blur those borders in a test of faith.

In the 32nd sonnet, the poet pauses before the river’s mouth as if to seize on the ways in which the sonnet provides a final stay against too much freedom, which is associated with death:

But here no cannon thunders to the gale;
Upon the wave no haughty pendants cast
A crimson splendour; lowly is the mast
That rises here, and humbly spread the sail;
While less disturbed than in the narrow Vale
Through which with strange vicissitudes he pass’d,
The Wanderer seeks that receptacle vast
Where all his unambitious functions fail.
And may thy Poet, cloud-born Stream! be free,
The sweets of earth contentedly resigned,
And each tumultuous working left behind
At seemly distance, to advance like Thee,
Prepared, in peace of heart, in calm of mind
And soul, to mingle with Eternity!

One can hear in the stately cadence of these last lines the poet bracing himself for the moment when he will “contentedly resig[n]” the “sweets of earth” and, like the wandering river, prepare for his identity to “mingle with Eternity.” If the poet lives as deject in a world of “fluid confines” (Kristeva, *Powers* 8), constantly marking off his territory, these last sonnets where the walls are at their most vulnerable represent death in more than one sense. The poet already has a precarious relationship with water: the gentle Derwent nurses the young poet in Book 1 of *The Prelude* and deluge is at hand in his friend’s dream of the Arab in Book 5. In the Snowdon scene in Book 13, the waters overwhelm: “A deep and gloomy breathing-place thro’ which / Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams / Innumerable, roaring with one voice” (57-59). In Wordsworth’s Postscript to the Duddon sonnets he refers to the “power of waters over the

minds of Poets,” citing “Flumina amem sylvasque inglorious” of Virgil’s *Georgics* (“Foregoing fame, I would be a lover of the rivers and the woods”).⁴⁴ Like the passions, Wordsworth prefers his water well-managed, such as the safety of a “dew-drop” or a sonnet.

Yet instead of journeying as the deject does, the poet pauses to reflect. The self-admonishment is thinly disguised: if the wandering river’s “unambitious functions fail” as it flows into the sea, by contrast, the wandering poet’s ambitious functions will do no more to keep him from slipping past an analogous threshold. Despite the concluding sonnet’s claim that the river’s “Form remains, the Function never dies,” the grim implication here is that all functions fail in the end—those which resist the transitory like poetic ambition and those which conform to their natural settings, like the river moving to the earth’s rhythms. Even so, the narrator seems to take some relief in the “seemly distance” where he can leave behind those “tumultuous working[s].” There may also be some comfort in the idea of the sea as a “receptacle vast,” a large-roomed sonnet which will collect and hold what is left of all function, ambitious or otherwise, until those diffuse remains are again transformed in nature’s cycle.

Matthew Arnold held that the “magnificent sonnet of farewell to the River Duddon,” when Wordsworth “is at his highest, and ‘sees into the life of things,’ cannot be matched from Milton. I will not say it is beyond Milton, but he has never shown it. To match it, one must go to the ocean of Shakespeare” (1883 Transactions Wordsworth Society). Originally entitled “Conclusion,” the speaker in this sonnet seems to find in the act of recollecting his thoughts, a form of refuge as he speaks from his most visionary perspective yet in the series:

I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
 As being past away.—Vain sympathies!
 For, *backward*, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,
 I see what was, and is, and will abide;
 Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
 The Form remains, the Function never dies;
 While *we*, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
 We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
 The elements, must vanish;—be it so!
 Enough, if something from our hands have power
 To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
 And if, as tow’rd the silent tomb we go,
 Thro’ love, thro’ hope, and faith’s transcendent dower,
 We feel that we are greater than we know.

“Conclusion” is later renamed “After-thought,”⁴⁵ when the sonnet “Fallen, and diffus’d into a shapeless heap” is restored to the sequence in 1827, delaying the poem’s ending by yet another 14 lines plus white space. The new title implies both completion and reconsideration, as if the poet has crossed a threshold of faith and stands before both the river and the anonymous sea. Here boundaries exist not only between man and God, but between life and death. At his most devotional, the speaker sees collectively, shifting from his own encounter with the divine—“I see what was, and is, and will abide”—to the fate shared with his fellow man: “While *we*, the brave, the mighty, and the wise . . . // must vanish;—be it so!” The poet yields to the “elements,” though not happily. The crucial position of the word “Enough,” the first word of the final sentence as the poem turns, following on the heels of his exclamation, suggests both that a limit has been reached and that the poet already has what he needs. “Enough” thus recalls the poet’s “Religion of gratitude”: “Enough, if something from our hands have power / To live, and act, and serve the future hour” (10-11). “After-thought” is ultimately about having “enough” in the present.

In later publications of the *River Duddon* series, all lines of “After-Thought” are italicized, not simply the words “*backward*” and “*we*,” giving the final sonnet the look of being stamped on the page, separate from what precedes it and occupying a liminal space in the series, yet one from which the series flows philosophically. Before the anonymity of the ocean, it makes sense for the poet to distinguish the final sonnet in italics and content, visually imbedding the sonnet in the page against the flow. Stewart C. Wilcox considers “After-thought” a passage worthy of being the poet’s own epitaph: “none would be more appropriate in ideas or sublime dignity, for the symbol of the stream becomes identified with the life-stream of Man himself, with the mighty current of creation to which each poet’s legacy to ‘the future hour’ is tributary” (140). “After-thought” cannot help but summon up the italicized epitaph for “*A Youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown*” that closes Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard” (1751). This epitaphic echo of an unknown poet fits with the quote from Virgil in Wordsworth’s Postscript in which the poet foregoes fame to be a lover of the rivers and the woods. The sonnets have all along been concerned with leaving a lasting work as if in compensation for the elusiveness of present fame. In Gray’s elegy, the epitaph describes a mutual relationship between the unknown youth and providence that would have appealed to the speaker of the *Duddon* sonnets: “*He gave to Mis’ry all he had: a Tear: / He gain’d from Heav’n (’twas all he wish’d) a Friend*” (123-24). We can imagine the desire of the *River Duddon*’s persona for regulated emotion and reciprocity with his God.

From the vantage point of the Duddon Sands, “After-thought” situates the poet’s work as emblemized by the river next to the rocky elements which will survive his bodily death as will the divine power he worships. Upstream the Duddon has “through this

wilderness a passage cleave[d] / Attended but by thy own voice” (14: 13-14), and thereby singly and indelibly shaped its environment. This process is reminiscent of Wordsworth’s reflections on the poet’s perceived task as one of making his solitary way by carving out his own audience. In another passage from the Essay, Supplementary to the Preface, Wordsworth tried to come to terms with harsh and unappreciative reviews of his poetry, using syntax similar to that used in the 33rd sonnet: “every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed: so has it been, so will it continue to be” (*Prose Works* 3: p.80).⁴⁶ By scooping out time in sonnet-sized moments of reflection, Wordsworth cleaves a path like the river’s to the poem’s conclusion and by analogy, to his impending death. It is a process akin to carving his name in earth in which he chooses to confront fears of overstepping proper authorial bounds by advancing cautiously in small steps and small forms. When the current slows at the river’s end, he is ready again to “feel” in the present “that we are greater than we know,” a line meant to echo Milton, which Wordsworth’s notes to the series make explicit, should there be any doubt about the poetic lineage.⁴⁷

In Paul de Man’s fine reading of the final sonnets, the “restoring power” that makes the bleak future bearable for Wordsworth, “does not reside in nature, or in history, or in a continuous progression from one to the other, but in the persistent power of mind and language after nature and history have failed” (“Time and History” 89). I think de Man is right up to a point, but I would stress that the “restoring power” is bound up in the signs of renewal and decay in nature which also apply to the spirit and counter-spirit of language. The poet is counting on history to succeed as a line of readers interprets those signs. Meanwhile, he may be at the river’s end, but the poet does not have to wait for

either nature or history to fail before the “power of mind and language” can make itself known. For Wordsworth, to “feel that we are greater than we know” is, on some profound level, already to know it.

Notes

¹ References to the *River Duddon* sonnets will indicate the sonnet and line number using the Cornell reading text. SS, 56-98.

² "Prefatory Sonnet" ("Nuns fret not at their Convent's narrow room") P2V, l. 11, p. 133.

³ Mark L. Reed notes that the first of the "Essays Upon Epitaphs" to be published was written by 22 February 1810, the other two Essays by 28 February (443), *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years*.

⁴ Letter to Sara Hutchinson, dated 1 December 1818. The asterisks refer to where the MS is blurred. *The Letters of Mary Wordsworth: 1800-1855*, ed. Mary E. Burton. Future references will be indicated by "LMW."

⁵ In America, the *Complete Poetical Works* appeared in 1837, edited by Henry Reed. See David Simpson's "Wordsworth in America" and *Wordsworth in American Literary Culture*, ed. Joel Pace and Matthew Scott.

⁶ See Benjamin Kim, for example, "Generating a National Sublime: Wordsworth's *The River Duddon* and *The Guide to the Lakes*."

⁷ The *Reply to 'Mathetes'* appeared in *The Friend* in two installments, 14 December 1809 and 4 January 1810. *Prose Works*, 2: 8-25. Line numbers are referenced parenthetically.

⁸ John Wilson and Dr. Alexander Blair wrote the letter under the pen name "Mathetes." See the Introduction to *Reply to 'Mathetes'* by Owen and Smyser, *Prose Works*, 2: 3-5.

⁹ The section describing Walker begins "A Priest abides before whose life such doubts / Fall to the ground" lines *Exc* 7: 335 ff.

¹⁰ Parenthetical references are to line numbers of the 1800 Preface, *LB*, Appendix 3, 749-50.

¹¹ "The world is too much with us; late and soon" P2V, l. 2, p.150. The last sections of *A Topographical Description* address the effects of inhabitants on the Lake District.

¹² Paul de Man makes a similar observation about the resistances in the 31st sonnet which also begins with the word "Not" although he emphasizes the stronger movement toward "steady descent and dissolution" ("Time and History" 86).

¹³ P2V, 123-29.

¹⁴ Jalal Uddin Khan provides a thorough context for the poet's reception in "Publication and Reception of Wordsworth's *The River Duddon* Volume."

¹⁵ *LB*, 47-50.

¹⁶ Preface to *Alastor, or, The Spirit of Solitude*, 14 December 1815.

¹⁷ There are a number of small changes in the 1849-1850 version of "Lines." In this passage, for example, the Yew tree is not described as "wild": "here taught this aged Tree / With its dark arms to form a circling bower" (10-11). In the later version, the solitary who in 1798 was "by genius nurs'd" (13) is in 1849-50 "by science nursed" (13). For the 1849-50 version, see *PW*, Vol. 1, 92-94.

¹⁸ Notes, *PW*, 3: 419.

¹⁹ "Epistle to Sir George Howland Beaumont, Bart. From the South-West Coast of Cumberland.—1811." *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*. Reading Text 2, 86-95.

²⁰ N.S. Bauer lists the anonymous author of the article as Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley in *William Wordsworth: A Reference Guide to British Criticism, 1793-1899* (351). The lines quoted by the author are from Wordsworth's poem "She Was a Phantom of Delight" (1807), ll.23-24; pp 74-75, P2V.

²¹ Poem 1263, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 494.

²² Letter to Sir George Beaumont, 10 January 1821. "Mrs. W. I find has mentioned our return by Duddon-side, and how much we were pleased with the winter appearance of my favourite River." Wordsworth's *Fenwick Notes* recall a childhood fishing expedition on the Duddon and several trips during the college years (30-31). Mark L. Reed's *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years* records two visits besides the one with the family for sea-baths in 1811: one with Dorothy to the Duddon valley in 1804 and a brief tour with Coleridge and "probably" Sara Hutchinson in September 1808 (271; 396). *The Letters: The Later Years Pt 4* recount a two-day excursion by the Duddon in September 1844 as well (592-3; 597).

²³ Lady Richardson noted: "He said he had not slept well, that the recollection of former days and people had crowded upon him, and 'most of all, my dear sister; and when I thought of her state, and of those who had passed away, Coleridge, Southey, and many others, while I am left with all my many infirmities, if not

sins, in full consciousness, how could I sleep? and then I took to the alteration of sonnets, and that made the matter worse still” (447), *The Prose Works*, ed. Grosart.

²⁴ *LB*, 351. Line numbers are noted parenthetically.

²⁵ In Peter M. Sacks’s psychoanalytic study of mourning in elegy, he argues that mourning returns the mourner to aspects of the Oedipal conflict and resolution. While both Sacks and I stress the child’s entry into language as pivotal in this mourning process, my Kristevan reading sees this as a return to the pre-oedipal stage as well. Sacks and I both emphasize the aesthetic compensation for loss, although I am more interested in the unfinished nature of that compensation and the earth as holding part of that sorrow for the bereaved.

²⁶ *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*, 248-251.

²⁷ Wyatt notes that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* would have been a logical resource for Wordsworth to consult for his knowledge of geology. According to Wyatt, the 1797 *Encyclopaedia*, which Wordsworth owned, covered “thirty pages of double columns” on theories of earth, including the theories of James Hutton (58-59).

²⁸ The three texts I have located with the introductory paragraphs along with the “Essays Upon Epitaphs” are Paul M. Zall’s edition of Wordsworth’s *Literary Criticism*, the Owen-Smyser edition of the *Prose Works* and *The Friend* in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, No 4 Pt 2, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, 335.

²⁹ Barbara E. Rooke, ed. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, No. 4 Pt. 2. *The Friend*, 336n. Also, Mark L. Reed’s *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Middle Years 1800-1815*, 443.

³⁰ In its 1823 form, its fourth edition, *A Topographical Description* was amplified and published as *A Description of the Scenery of the Lakes in the North of England*. Wordsworth continued revisions and issued another edition of the work in 1835, *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes in the North of England*. Each edition gained in popularity. See Introduction, *Prose Works*, Owen and Smyser, Vol. 2, 134; 120-135.

³¹ In its 1849-50 form, this poem begins “Brook! whose society the Poet seeks.” *PW*, Vol. 3, 35. Changes to the first five lines of the sonnet appeared in 1815.

³² Concerning the fragments “An Unpublished Tour” and “The Sublime and the Beautiful,” Owen and Smyser “believe that the composition was not earlier than September 1811 and that it ceased about November 1812” (Introduction, 128). Appendix 2 [An Unpublished Tour] *Prose Works* 2: 287-348.

³³ The letter is dated 19 Sept. 1822.

³⁴ *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*, 123.

³⁵ In an 1818 letter to Richard Woodhouse, Keats famously uses the term “wordsworthian or egotistical sublime” in contrast to his own more diffuse make-up which he characterizes as a “camelion Poet.” The term “egotistical sublime” caught on with critics for describing varying degrees of egotism and sublimity in Wordsworth’s poetry: “As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing . . .” (*Letters* 387).

³⁶ As discussed in the next chapter, many Victorians read the “egotistical sublime” within the poet’s universal persona as both a personal and impersonal power.

³⁷ Geoffrey Jackson cites figures from Lee M. Johnson’s and Thomas Hutchinson’s studies of Wordsworth’s sonnets, and then gives his own count: “According to Hutchinson, Wordsworth “produced no fewer than 523 sonnets. Johnson counts 535. In fact, there are around twenty more than this” (926). Appendix 2, “Wordsworth and the Sonnet,” SS.

³⁸ Hartman’s notes (“Inscriptions” 212n) directed me to this quotation.

³⁹ For example, in *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision*, Jonathan Wordsworth writes “No doubt it was the death of his favourite brother, John, in February 1805 that carried the poet over into acceptance [of a belief in the afterlife], but the signs had all been there the previous year” (33). Wordsworth’s “border poetry” around this time “is itself on a verge of too comfortable belief” (33). Jonathan Wordsworth contextualizes this period of mourning, though, to conclude that the poet “is never content to rest his belief upon passive acceptance of revelation. The aspiring human mind continues to be of more importance to him personally than the faith it may achieve” (35). I would differ with this assessment by saying that despite the poet’s occasional statement to the contrary, belief is never completely comfortable for Wordsworth, nor can the “aspiring human mind” be separated from his faith, especially in the later poetry.

For an in-depth study of the effect of his brother's death, see Richard E. Matlak's *Deep Distresses: William Wordsworth, John Wordsworth, Sir George Beaumont: 1800-1808*.

⁴⁰ "Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont" *P2V*, 266-268.

⁴¹ See *WP* 198ff and the "border image," 239.

⁴² Jonathan Wordsworth also writes of a "border state" in which Wordsworth revels in the imagination moreso than in "the faith it may achieve" (35). As I understand Wordsworth's sublime moments of imagination, they are inseparable from his notion of faith.

⁴³ In this section of the Essay, Wordsworth advises the reader of religious verses of the errors to which he may be prone: "no poetry has been more subject to distortion, than that species, the argument and scope of which is religious; and no lovers of the art have gone farther astray than the pious and the devout" (*Prose Works* 3: 144-147).

⁴⁴ *Georgics* 2: 486 (*SS* 110n.)

⁴⁵ "After-Thought" becomes sonnet 34 in 1827 when "Fallen, and diffus'd into a shapeless heap," is added to the sequence after Sonnet 26, "Return, Content! For fondly I pursued" (50), ed. Geoffrey Jackson, *SS*.

⁴⁶ In a letter to Lady Beaumont of Tuesday, 21 May 1807, Wordsworth made similar comments. He defended his poems against criticism by people who do not really "read books" but "merely snatch a glance at them" in order to talk about them: "And even if this were not so, never forget what I believe was observed to you by Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen . . ." (150), *Letters Middle Years Pt 1*.

⁴⁷ For the concluding sonnet, Wordsworth's notes indicate: "And feel that I am happier than I know."—Milton (*SS* 98).

The primal duties shine aloft—like stars;
 The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,
 Are scattered at the feet of Man—like flowers.
 —W. Wordsworth (*Exc.* 9: 238-40)¹

Chapter Four

Wordsworth's Victorian Critics and the "Paramount Duty" of Hope²

For Victorian critics, Wordsworth's poetry issued a call to duty—patriotic and personal—that played no small part in its capacity to console. The appeal of this summons to Victorian social sympathy may seem obvious, but the resultant interaction between poet, reader, and remote persona proved varied and intense. Even so, we can track the divergent views on the nature of Wordsworth's "healing power" within this dynamic engagement. For in spite of their differences, all roads of inquiry into the source of this power seemed to lead to the man himself: In many cases, the force of the verse rested not only on the rhetorical figures within the poem, but also on the figure of the poet who loomed beyond it. Just as there was always for Wordsworth a person behind the epitaph whose worth was uppermost in the epitaph writer's mind, so there was an historic person behind the poem guiding the poet's nineteenth-century readers as they set about the delicate and strenuous work of interpretation. Critics generally agreed that the poet placed his persona at a watchful remove. Effectively blended with the poet's life, this distant persona modeled a vantage point from which the reader could learn to generalize sorrow in an ordered way. Further, the real-life recluse who lived in the speaker's shadow implied the Wordsworthian persona was one the reader could trust.

To comprehend the workings of this speaker, the epitaph writer's goal of effecting a "general sympathy" is a good place to start. In Wordsworth's theory, the epitaph "is a

tribute to a man as a human being; and . . . includes this general feeling and something more” (EE1 153-56). That “something more” honors the particular aspects of a life which “ought to be bound together and solemnised into one harmony by the general sympathy” (EE1 324-25). The epitaph writer who stirs this “general sympathy” has an analogue in the Wordsworthian speaker who similarly stirs the reader’s imagination. The epitaph writer and the persona both summon up a broad sympathy which evokes a longer view on life and death discernible within natural cycles of renovation and decay. This long perspective makes grief at once dignified and bearable in waves. The epitaphic double of the distant persona must be considered when ascertaining how Wordsworth’s poetry aided in “‘transmuting’ sorrow into strength” (“Ethics” 222).

While nineteenth-century critics could agree on some aspects of Wordsworth’s detached poetic stance, it remained harder to pin down whether the poet behind the voice was impassioned or cold, helped or hindered as a teacher by the “deep seclusion” he famously celebrates in “Tintern Abbey.” Nor was there consensus on whether one should “dismiss his formal philosophy,” in order to “do him justice” as a poet as Matthew Arnold posited (“Wordsworth” 48), or if such a task would prove futile because his philosophy was of a piece with the poetry as Leslie Stephen maintained (“Ethics”). But how did this debate over poetry and philosophy relate to the poetry’s efficacy? Noting that “philosophy” for the Victorians meant “moral philosophy,” Paul de Man has more recently remarked that the same tension between poetry and philosophy which dogged Victorian critics has “shaped Wordsworth criticism for generations . . .” (“Wordsworth and the Victorians” 85). Although he does not explain fully how he reaches his specific interpretation of Stephen’s essay, I am sympathetic to de Man’s conclusion that

“Stephen’s claim for Wordsworth’s consoling power was less convincing than his awareness of the threat which these powers were supposed to console one from” (86). De Man enlarges our conception of Victorian readers by suggesting their interpretive struggles have become our own knotty problems in another form: “The effort of all subsequent interpreters has been, often with the poet’s own assistance, to domesticate [this threat] by giving it at least a recognizable content” (86). In modern and postmodern criticism, “‘philosophy’ is thus displaced from moral philosophy to a phenomenology of mind The threat from which we were to be sheltered and consoled is now identified as a condition of consciousness” (87). By revisiting the Victorian debate over Wordsworth’s poetry and moral philosophy, I further complicate the view of Victorians who sought in the morality of Wordsworth’s verse “shelter” from changing religious beliefs and practices, an increasingly fragmented modern self, and individual loss. If these writers found in Wordsworth’s poetry a way to “domesticate” perceived “threats,” they also both intuitively and consciously exploited that “certain enigmatic aspect of Wordsworth” (84) which has so fascinated critics, in order to face those threats by degrees.

With the poetry’s help, Victorian critics met the dangers of modernity by extending consciousness outward in the form of responsibilities to humankind, a spiritual response which was for many grounded in a spirit of nationalism. Despite the different takes on Wordsworth’s verse, the removed persona sounded a charge to those who read the speaker as a type for humanity whose “recognizable content” was validated by the facts of the poet’s life. Elizabeth Barrett Browning captured why the “wonderful unity” of the poems and the life mattered: the poems “are ‘bound each to each in natural piety,’

even as his days are—and why?—because they *are* his days—all his days, work days and Sabbath days—his *life*, in fact, and not the unconnected works of his life . . . but the sign, seal and representation of his life . . .” (Rev. of *Poems* 758). Through a connection to a type which was coterminous with Wordsworth’s life, readers moved closer to “turning grief and disappointment to account” in Stephen’s words (“Ethics” 222) by raising themselves to an ideal in the form of service to their fellows. Even if this ideal was impossible to attain, it stoked the courage needed to face loss, and it further resituated that loss so as to mourn it slowly. We see this summoning of strength in the often-cited poems “Ode to Duty” and “Character of the Happy Warrior,” for example. The problem of poetry versus moral philosophy may have been undecidable for Victorians, but it did not stop them from approaching Wordsworth’s poetry as wisdom literature and deriving from it laws for living and grieving. They found this wisdom through reading the Wordsworthian persona as a type for mankind.

At the risk of adopting the methodology of the readers I study, I take individual poetic encounters as types for secular and religious reading experiences of other readers in the period. Bearing in mind the pitfalls of succumbing to the Romantic ideology as analyzed in Jerome J. McGann’s important study, these writers on Wordsworth for the most part read the poet sympathetically and devotedly but not without an awareness of the poetry’s defects. Taking these critics seriously thus need not violate the task of “mov[ing] easily between the shifting poles of judgment and sympathy which criticism is always obliged to negotiate” (McGann 38-9). There are new readings to be gained by traveling the demanding course with Victorians who responded spiritually to Wordsworth’s poetry.

In this chapter, I recur most often to the lives and writings of John Stuart Mill and Leslie Stephen, two Victorian writers with complex attitudes toward established religion who derived spiritual solace from Wordsworth's verse and left exquisite records of those interactions. The other critics cited in this chapter came from a variety of religious orientations but nevertheless recorded spiritual responses similar to those of Mill and Stephen. For the "godless"³ as well as the faithful amongst these Victorians, transmuting sorrow came down to realizing the Wordsworthian creed of the "paramount *duty*" of hope.⁴

I. Spiritual Reading Practices: Types of Types

Victorian critics shared with Wordsworth a ritual of reading that pursued poetry "*as a study*," as he had encouraged readers in his "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (1815).⁵ In practice, regular returns to the "text" included the page as well as the meaningful place. Because these returns also did the work of mourning, they were all the more valuable, even if the scenic route often proved the most efficient path around and through the sufferer's pain. Wordsworth's poetry eased sorrow from more than one direction: through the reader's engagement with the poem's persona, through techniques of "enstranging" humans and things under one vast natural canopy, and through allegories of mourning enacted by wandering characters within the poems. This chapter examines the first two; the next chapter treats allegories of mourning.

Depending on the reader, "transmuting sorrow into strength" could be seen as the workings of a scientific or a devotional imagination. As noted in the first chapter, the word "transmute" contained both kinds of overtones.⁶ An American scholar, Charles F.

Johnson, described the critical consensus on Wordsworth's aesthetic in 1886 as spanning both of these categories of thought:

Wordsworth presented a new view . . . fitted, in its half mystical, half realistic, altogether loving and truthful spirit, to the scientific spirit of the age; not to that lower manifestation of the scientific spirit which could 'peep and botanize on a mother's grave,' the spirit which scrutinizes and classifies without seeking to interpret, but to the higher spirit which takes up and transmutes the work of the scrutinizer and classifier into, at least, the semblance of an orderly and purposeful Cosmos. (338)

As Johnson phrases it, "to interpret" in the context of an "orderly and purposeful Cosmos" (or the "semblance" of one) and to "tak[e] up and transmut[e]" seem parallel if not equivalent activities. In his analysis, the "higher spirit" transmutes the "work" or the practice of the one ordering his universe through an act of interpretation. The reader's disposition then determines the exact means of transmutation. Scientific or devout, that process depended on what Tilottama Rajan has called a "supplement of reading" (30). The work of mourning as it is done through the work of interpretation could dawn on the sufferer in his own time as he necessarily and uniquely supplied the meaning of Wordsworth's poems by their pedagogical design. This built-in need for completion was thus a facet of the poetry which participated in a larger shift from authorial to readerly generation of meaning within Romantic texts. Because of the reader's interpretive control, in theory, multiple aesthetic layers could cushion pain and death for Wordsworth's nineteenth-century audience as it did for the poet who reached back in time to change the text of *The Prelude*. Repeated returns to the text would then afford a portioning out of pain for poet and reader as they engaged in their separate tasks of revision: for the poet as he revised his words; and for both parties as they revised painful emotions, past and present.

Qualities of the poetry which helped Victorian critics to scrutinize their thoughts and painful feelings, or to meditate religiously, were ironically attributed to the poet's egotism in some cases. For William Hazlitt, "Mr. Wordsworth is the last man to 'look abroad into universality,' if that alone constituted genius: he looks at home into himself, and is 'content with riches fineless' He is the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day, only because he is the greatest egotist" ("On Genius" *Complete Works* 8: 44). Hazlitt was partially right if remarks of critics on Wordsworth's egotism are any guide; those responses indicate that Wordsworth did look "at home into himself" even as he "look[ed] abroad into universality." In 1857, R.H. Hutton specifically cited this passage from Hazlitt's essay to counter the implication that with respect to Wordsworth's egotism and his genius, "the worse quality had the deeper root" (Rev. of *William Wordsworth* 23). Hutton argued that "There are two selves in every man—the private and the universal;—the source of personal crotchets and the humanity that is our bond with our fellow-men, and gives us our large influence upon them. Half Wordsworth's weakness springs from the egotistic self But all his power springs from the universal self" (24). Hutton seemed to find ample room in Wordsworth's genius for his egotism.

It is instructive to compare Walter Bagehot and R. H. Horne on the subject of poetic egotism. In 1864 Bagehot spoke of a poet's egotism generally as a transcendent characteristic: "the business of the poet, of the artist, is with *types*; and those types are mirrored in reality" (333). When a poet ponders his own moods, his aim is not autobiography. Rather, "he takes himself as a specimen of nature; he describes, not himself, but a distillation of himself . . ." (Bagehot 336).⁷ Speaking of Wordsworth in particular in *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844), Horne portrayed the poet's observation of

nature from another angle altogether: “not that he loses himself in the contemplation of things, but that he absorbs them in himself, and renders them Wordsworthian This is the sublime of egotism, disinterested as extreme . . . he makes a subjectivity of his objectivity” (312). Bagehot might have reversed Horne’s wording to say a poet’s concern is to make an objectivity of his subjectivity, but one wonders if the end result in either case was not a representative persona at different distances of self-scrutiny.

While the poet’s “business” may have been with “types” for readers like Bagehot, other Victorians habitually read representative figures in the poetry within a more explicit tradition of Biblical typology, as George P. Landow has shown. Such interpretive habits in the Protestant faith viewed events or historical persons such as Moses from the Old Testament as prefiguring Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection in the New Testament Gospels. Both High and Low Churchmen were trained to read typologically, a way of seeing, in effect, which carried over from divinely inspired texts to art, politics and scientific aspects of Victorian culture. Broad Churchmen read in a similar style, but their scriptural understandings were more mythical than those of their High and Low Church brethren who interpreted the type as a literal prefiguration.⁸ One of the advantages for the writer employing such figures and for the reader interpreting them, is that typology automatically entails an ordered universe (Landow 40). The fact that readers found Wordsworth’s speaker to be situated in an ordered world was certainly part of his appeal. Reading the poet in this way did not fulfill a true typological reading, however. Even though Wordsworth’s poetry was continually compared to Holy Scripture,⁹ for Victorian readers, Wordsworth’s persona did not seem to prefigure Christ; their procedures instead suggest a partial and secularized method of such reading. Carolyn Williams’s study of

“typology as narrative form” in Pater points out: “A fully typological interpretation must be grounded in historical actuality, must preserve the integrity of separate historical events, and must not allow the linear, ‘horizontal’ dimension of history to disappear in allegorical, ‘vertical,’ spiritualizing or symbolic substitutions” (*Transfigured World* 202; 209). The most common readings of Wordsworth’s persona as a “type” depended upon the historical fact of the poet’s life, but this life was then spiritualized on the plane of the human race, so that any human life could be substituted for the poet’s, including the reader’s own. The upshot of comparing these varied practices of reading for types is to suggest that Wordsworth’s egotism may have evoked scorn for some, but for many critics, this egotism was part of a methodical prelude to spiritual practice.

As Bagehot and other critics conceived of it, a poet’s voice was defined by its universal tone. For Robert Browning, this was the case even if the persona simultaneously participated strongly in the poet’s personality. In his “Essay on Shelley” (1852), Browning articulated his idea of the “subjective poet” or “seer” (139) who has to do “not with the combination of humanity in action, but with the primal elements of humanity . . .” (139). The artistic product in the case of the “seer” is an “effluence [which] cannot be easily considered in abstraction from [the poet’s] personality,—being indeed the very radiance and aroma of his personality, projected from it but not separated” (139). Appreciating the “projected” work thus implicates the poet every step of the way: “in apprehending it we apprehend him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him” (139). Edward Dowden came close to Browning’s idea of the “subjective poet” in speaking of Wordsworth in particular, but Dowden nevertheless appeared to generalize from the poet’s personality more easily than Browning implied he

might: “Wordsworth’s egoism is, so to speak, of an abstract kind: through the operation of his own mind he contemplates the universal laws” (“Text of Wordsworth’s Poems” 128). Like other readers I examined, Francis Turner Palgrave, editor of the stunningly successful poetry anthology, *The Golden Treasury* (1861) which featured Wordsworth prominently, resounded Dowden’s take on the poet’s egotism: “Wordsworth, speaking for and from himself, speaks most often for humanity in general; he has, we might perhaps say, an impersonal personality” (Preface xvi).

Wordsworth’s epitaphic aesthetic relied on a poetic speaker who served as a type for humankind, but it also depended on the grateful disposition of a reader who came to the text ready to be interpreted by it. This version of reading typologically was encouraged by the sense that Wordsworth had anticipated the sorrows of the age. Victorian readers attended to the speaker’s mode of interpretation even more closely for the prescient gift they perceived the poet to be extending.¹⁰ Mill said it memorably after recounting the value of Wordsworth’s poetry for his “habitual depression”: “I long continued to value Wordsworth less according to his intrinsic merits, than by the measure of what he had done for me” (CW 1: 153). For the consenting reader, the Wordsworthian speaker elicited the poet’s generic “Religion of gratitude.”

Wordsworth’s poetry thus made it easier for Victorian readers to glean “Knowledge not purchas’d with the loss of power” (*Prel* 5: 449) not only because painful knowledge arrived through several removes, but also because power had already been robbed by circumstance or resigned by the pliant reader. In order for the poetic persona to model ways of seeing, it operated on the assumption that the reader was willing to submit to the powers of the poet as the speaker intones in “A Poet’s Epitaph”: “And you must

love him, ere to you / He will seem worthy of your love” (*LB* 43-44)—lines quoted frequently in Wordsworth criticism of the period. As discussed in previous chapters, the open attitude cultivated by Wordsworth’s poetry in general defines the epitaphic aesthetic as a “mode of thought” in my extension of Frances Ferguson’s term (166), a way of seeing which amounts to a form of faith in the poetry’s applicable method, not to mention faith in the poet himself. This ardent faith in the poet and poem seemed temporarily to cover over the gap between theory and practice of transmuting sorrow. Dowden characterized this submission to the text: “Wordsworth’s poetry, or all that is highest in it, is as a sealed book. But one who is in any true sense his disciple must yield to Wordsworth, so long as he is his disciple, the deep consent of his total being” (“Transcendental” 66). Walter Pater’s 1874 essay on Wordsworth opens up the notion of the poetry as a “sealed book” as well as the reader’s willingness to “yield” to the poem: “[Wordsworth] meets us with the promise that he has much, and something very peculiar, to give us, if we will follow a certain difficult way, and seems to have the secret of a special and privileged state of mind” (“Wordsworth” 42). That “peculiar” gift was one which inspired a group of loyal readers.

Even though they were called “zealous”¹¹ in their own time, the “Wordsworthians” or “disciples” of the poet—familiar names in Victorian intellectual life such as Stephen, J.C. Shairp, Stopford Brooke, Aubrey de Vere, William Knight, and Dowden himself—engaged deeply with the poetry because they repeatedly sought its steadying influence. This is not to say that readers did not advance to a more balanced position on the other side of discipleship. In another essay, Dowden cautioned about the “spirit of reverence” in the “study of a great writer”: “this is well said when it means that

we should be neither impertinent nor impatient; but it is ill said if it tend to foster in us the spirit of hero-worship. Approach a great writer in the spirit of cheerful and trustful fraternity . . .” (“Interpretation” 710). Wordsworth’s poetry worked for Victorian readers because of their “trustful” orientation which allowed them to bend with the poem. For a supple audience, Wordsworth’s verse modeled interpretation through a dialectic which turned the reader’s seeking into new ways of seeing his own suffering. With the poet and poem as guides, the reader then learned how to bring his powers of interpretation to bear on his own pain.

In order to utilize these habitual ways of seeing, the reader had to register the changing perspectives on humans and natural objects as they entered the poem’s field of vision. Shairp explained the necessity of seizing on the poet’s train of thought in an article for the *North British Review*, later revised for *Studies in Poetry and Philosophy* (1868):

[M]any of [Wordsworth’s] thoughts are of such a nature, so near, yet so hidden from men’s ordinary ways of thinking, that the reader, ere he apprehend them, must needs himself go through somewhat of the same processes of feeling and reflection as the poet himself passed through in creating them. The need of this reflective effort on the part of the reader is inherent in the nature of many of Wordsworth’s subjects and cannot be dispensed with. (8)¹²

The reader’s job is to follow the poet’s out-of-the-ordinary modes of thinking. This is particularly difficult, though, when the poet uses vague language and leaves much unsaid for guiding the reader’s interpretation as he does in the “Ode to Duty,” for example.

Walter Pater’s Preface to the *Renaissance* (1873) regarded this unfinished quality of Wordsworth’s poetry as a “virtue” insofar as it appropriately enacted the content which lies beyond words: the “fine crystal” which the poet leaves “here or there, in a matter it does not wholly search through and transmute” is where the critic can locate the

“incommunicable faculty, that strange, mystical sense of a life in natural things, and of man’s life as a part of nature . . .” (xxii). For Pater, the reader’s active search for meaning defined Wordsworth’s “active principle”: the critic must work “to disengage it, to mark the degree to which it penetrates his verse” (xxii). In his essay on “Wordsworth” (1874) in *Appreciations*, Pater went even further to suggest the poetry cultivates literary discretion in the reader who carefully sifts for these “precious morsels” mixed in with the “alien element” (42). By contrast, Shairp stressed the reader’s investment not because the gems are scattered or few, but because they are so deep-buried: “to receive the full benefit, to draw out not random impressions but the stored wisdom of his capacious and meditative soul, he, above all modern poets, requires no cursory perusal, but a close and consecutive study For what is best in him lies not on the surface, but in the depth. It is so far hidden that it must needs be sought for” (7). The “close and consecutive study” advocated by Shairp implies the pattern of returning to Wordsworth’s poetry which the poet himself engaged in revision.¹³

Dowden intimated the process of returning to the text was essential for esteeming the works written after the “Great Decade” (1797-1807), as it is now known: “A reader who lives long with Wordsworth’s poetry comes gradually to set a high value upon a considerable body of the later writings” (“Introduction” lxxvii). Dowden thought de Vere went too far in asserting that the last poems written “have more ‘latent imagination’ than those of earlier years, or that they ‘exhibit faculties more perfectly equipoised’ but we feel,” Dowden made clear, “that Wordsworth’s work would lack something of great worth if we were not shown how the radiance of youth passes into the light—solemn and serene—of his old age” (lxxvii). Victorians in general appreciated a larger portion of

Wordsworth's body of works as compared to our contemporary sensibilities, even if his "disciples" agreed to disagree about the merits of the later works. This openness to the wider oeuvre no doubt colored their view of the poet's fulfillment of a career.¹⁴ The stylistic transitions evident across a broader sampling of the canon appeared to give rise to just as many family resemblances as radical differences for Victorian critics writing on Wordsworth, most of whom, it is safe to say, "live[d] long" with his verse.

For Shairp, Taylor, Dowden, and like-minded critics, the rigors of Wordsworth's verse which required the reader actively to participate in the poet's imaginative processes shaped the meaning of the poetry just as nature shaped the young poet in *The Prelude*. The poetry's open-endedness made it possible for the orthodox and agnostic reader alike to see himself as much as he saw the poet there. This reciprocal engagement meets with Paul Ricoeur's idea of the "world of the text" which "constitutes a new sort of distanciation that we can call a distanciation of the real from itself" (*Figuring* 43). The aesthetic interval described by Ricoeur also concurs with Dowden's reading of the way the ideal light of Wordsworth's poetry shows up aspects of the real that we cannot see otherwise. Ricoeur regards religious texts as "kinds of poetic texts [which] offer modes of redescribing life, but in such a way that they are differentiated from other forms of poetic texts" (43). From the perspective of secular poetry, Wordsworth's verse served Victorians as a tool for "redescribing" their lives in such a way that his poetic texts took on the role of wisdom literature alongside traditional sacred works. As evidenced by references in books and periodicals which repeatedly compared the reading of Wordsworth's verse to the Holy Scriptures, we can imagine how returning to the poetry functioned as a religious ritual shorn of dogma but not the consecrating power of ritual.

Distanciation is only part of the story for Ricoeur, though: in dialectic with distanciation is an interpretive “event” described as the act of “appropriating” the text (“Appropriation” 185). Ricoeur translates as “appropriation” the German *Aneignen* which means “‘to make one’s own’ what was initially ‘alien’” (185). The process of making the text one’s own paradoxically occurs through “relinquishment of the self” (183). The reader turns himself over to the fiction of the text in an exchange which requires “divesting oneself of the earlier ‘me’ in order to receive, as in play, the self conferred by the work itself” (190). For Ricoeur, the world of the text which is opened up for revelation, however, is not only distinct from its author, but also from its original audience (192). And yet this revelatory process which exceeds author and audience brings the reader closer to Schleiermacher’s sense of understanding the author better than he understands himself in Ricoeur’s view (191). In such a reading, the author bestows upon the reader the burden of interpretation as informed creation.

Stephen Prickett critiques Ricoeur on this point in two ways. First, Prickett finds the fictional world created by the reader by means of the text, the “third term” which is neither fact nor fiction but which transcends both, comes at a high cost (*Words and The Word* 78). The virtue of Ricoeur’s approach is that it focuses on the text itself, but in abstracting to a “third term,” Prickett finds the historical facts of the form (narrative, wisdom, hymns, etc.) are flattened into one metaphorical representation (78). Related to this problem for Prickett are the dangers of appropriation which include a too-subjective interpretation of the text, one that does not attend enough to genre and history. Prickett’s study of the *Origins of Narrative* recognizes, however, that appropriation is part of the regular assimilation of knowledge and thus subject to such difficulties: “there is in the

very idea of ‘appropriation’ *both* a quality of thinly disguised theft *and* a recognition that such a take-over is a necessary part of the way in which any person, or even society, makes an idea its own” (32). Wordsworth’s readers appropriated his text as wisdom literature in giving themselves over to the text and constructing their own meanings within this revelatory space on a model like Ricoeur’s. This does not compromise the reader’s interpretation of the genre of wisdom literature, however. If anything gets flattened, it is the poet’s stern persona which functions better for the reader than it does for the poet. In this regard, his readers may have understood Wordsworth better than Wordsworth understood himself.

In *Origins of Narrative*, Prickett charts historical changes in interpretation which gave rise in the Romantic era to the Bible as a “metatype,” a “‘type’ of wholeness” by which all other books were to be judged (221). Prickett argues that a new way of reading the Bible as “novel-like narrative” (264) began in the eighteenth century in such a way that interpreting the Bible as a “God-given polysemousness was replaced by a man-made polyphony” (155) and a corresponding sense of loss. On this view, the Romantic appropriation of the Bible, which stressed self-conscious, individual interpretation, replaced more collective, typological ways of reading. The Bible became a less stable work, a “model of textual fluidity, a moving target” (267) even as it attained its “metatype” status. I argue that viewing the Bible as a “metatype” did not necessarily mean the immediate loss of variations on typological reading in the nineteenth century. Wordsworth’s readers may have been participating in a larger shift in reading the Bible as a novel based on true characters, but the vestiges of the collective ways of reading are evident throughout the century. Insofar as readers saw Wordsworth as a type for

humanity, a type situated in an ordered natural world of “God-given polysemousness,” the old ways of reading hung on.

Although their historical circumstances were different, the Victorians who read Wordsworth with their own version of typology shared with monastic readers a conception of an ordered universe and a supple self which made way for the text. In the Middle Ages, *lectio divina* (“sacred study”) exemplified an approach to reading which was less a mode of interpretation than it was a “contemplative practice” that joined meditative reading practices from Greek, Jewish and Christian traditions (Stock 105). This was the way of the twelfth century practice of Hugh of St Victor, for instance, the author of the *Didascalicon*, the “first book written on the art of reading” according to a commentary on that text by Ivan Illich (5). Hugh encapsulated the reader’s needs in the *Didascalicon*: “Three things are necessary for those who study: natural endowment, practice, and discipline” (90). In Hugh’s practice, the transition from youthful to adult ways of reading involved a disciplined process of searching for order, or *ordo*: “‘To order’ is the interiorization of that cosmic and symbolic harmony which God has established in the act of creation The reader’s order is not imposed on the story, but the story puts the reader into its order. The search for wisdom is a search for the symbols of order that we encounter on the page” (Illich 30-31). In this kind of monastic practice, the reader sought out the “symbols of order” in the world which were already there and represented in the holy book before him. We can apply this method readily to the “active universe” in Wordsworth’s poetry, a natural setting which placed the reader in a similar sacred space which was experienced collectively.

Aubrey de Vere's correspondence reveals the desire for a similar way of seeing based on a medieval mindset. While Hugh's *ordo* refers specifically to the creation as the means of ordering one's mind, de Vere looks to church history in particular to provide another lens for his worldview. In an 1850 letter to his friend Sara Coleridge, the daughter of the poet, de Vere described his idea of faith in terms of the relationship of the individual mind to the collective Christian mind. De Vere, who wrote poetry on the Middle Ages, put this relationship in a medieval context:

Thomas Aquinas was confessedly a thinker as well as Luther or Calvin, but the *method* which he pursued gave him as data the authentic and authoritative conclusions of the whole Christian world up to his time, and imparted to him thus, beside his own mind, another mind as large as that of Christendom. The supplemental use of this larger mind no more involved the suppression of the individual mind, than the use of the telescope involves the loss of one's eyesight. (Ward, Appendix 412)

In de Vere's description of the medieval disposition, the collective past proves "supplemental" to the single thinker. De Vere was seeking a "*method*" of imagining the individual life within an ecclesiastical history which would enhance, not diminish, authority. In his *Mediaeval Records and Sonnets* (1893), de Vere quoted Wordsworth to characterize another aspect of the medieval mind he so admired, which he also imaged in visual terms: "'We live by admiration, hope, and love' and in those qualities the nobler of the mediaeval men were especially rich. It was their happy gift to look on all things with a child-like gaze of wonder, not with the spectacl'd eyes of the 'minute philosopher'" (Preface xii). The lines from *The Excursion* may have sprung to de Vere's mind because of the large-minded Wanderer who serenely views the universe as an interconnected whole, and who "looks round / And seeks for good; and finds the good he seeks" (*Exc* 4: 1223-4).

Wordsworth's poetry could summon up this order in great part because the persona, solidly supported by the secluded poet of Rydal Mount, could envision it. One critic writing in the *Eclectic Review* in 1850 described it this way: "belief seems to flow in Wordsworth's blood; to see is to believe with him" (Rev. *The Prelude* 552).

Nineteenth-century readers tended to tie Wordsworth's withdrawal from the world in search of spiritual fitness to a certain impracticality, but also to a heightened ability to conceive of the individual within a vast order. Writing anonymously in *The Athenaeum* in 1828, the Broad Churchman F. D. Maurice expressly connected Wordsworth's removal from "customary interests and busy competitions of society" to this long-range vision: he "has endeavoured to see, in his own breast, and in the less artificial classes of mankind, the being of his species as it is, and as it might be, and in the outward world a treasury of symbols, in which we may find reflections of ourselves, and intimations of the purport of all existence." Further, Wordsworth's "embodi[ment]" of the process is the means by which he has tried "to impress it upon his kind" (113).¹⁵ The poet's own ascetic practices seemed deeply linked to the order and confidence he inspired in his readers.

In addition to the typological frame of mind, the changing roles of religious and poetic texts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century give us a means of measuring Wordsworth's poetry as meditative literature. Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) famously argued for a close kinship between poetry and prose, finding the same "human blood circulat[ing] through the veins of them both" (*LB* 259-60).¹⁶ His Preface in turn shows the influence of Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, which was published in English in 1787, and brought about a shift in the definition of poetry by its attention to the form of prophetic literature as Prickett

has detailed (*Words and the Word* 41-3). Lowth in particular stressed the structure of parallelism of Biblical poetry as compared to the poetic devices of European poetry such as rhyme and meter which depended upon the effects of sound. Parallel sentence structure made the translation of Hebrew verse to prose one which could retain its versification if the form of the sentences remained the same (41-42). That is, prose translations of scriptural verse could still be poetical. Coleridge's aesthetic incorporated this interchangeability of verse and prose, but his claims for poetry as the language of religious experience went beyond it (43-44): "The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity . . ." (*BL*, *CW* 7 pt 2: 15-16).

As the century progressed, not only were poetry and prose being viewed more poetically, but poetic literature in particular gained ground as the appropriate vehicle for religious sentiment. The theories of John Keble, influenced by Coleridge's idea of the Bible as poetic, played into this stream of ideas shaping poetry as sacred literature (*Words and the Word* 44-45).¹⁷ Keble's interdisciplinary stance on the "poetic" valued lyrics composed with controlled affect: "deep but subdued emotion are what our minds naturally suggest to us upon the mention of sacred *music*—why should there not be something analogous, a kind of plain chant, in sacred *poetry* also?" ("Sacred Poetry" 91) Like Lowth, Keble associated sacred poetry with "plain" song.

As poetry grew more sacred, there was another kind of growth—an "explosion of reading" in the Romantic Era—which bore on the spiritual practices of Wordsworth's readers (St Clair 103-121). Documented in William St Clair's detailed legal and economic analysis of publishing and reading practices, this leap in literacy corresponds to the greater availability of a variety of sacred and secular reading materials in everyday

English life. The 1774 legislation which ruled against perpetual copyright protection, enforced the act of 1710 and unleashed a “previously suppressed” audience whose demands could be met with a “huge surge” of book-publishing (115). The 1774 law made possible a “brief copyright window” which remained open until new copyright legislation was passed in 1808 (121). This window made plentiful and inexpensive what St Clair characterizes broadly as “conduct literature” (133) consisting of poetry from Chaucer to Cowper, abridgements, school texts, literary anthologies, and essays (137).¹⁸ As a result, school anthologies featuring literary extracts which encouraged virtuous behavior began to share instructional space with the religious literature children studied in church. Such anthologies included the *English Reader* by Lindley Murray, an author whose textbooks sold an estimated three million copies by the middle of the nineteenth-century (St Clair 137).¹⁹ One of the most far-reaching consequences of these changes in intellectual property law, according to St Clair, was the impression of “pre-Enlightenment rural religious culture” (137) as it was transmitted through excerpted literary passages in school texts. This widely disseminated “old canon” became the “first truly national literature” (138). Assisted by the availability of texts, the Romantic-era pedagogical practice of cultivating moral citizenry through literary wisdom may have been one factor which made it possible for readers seeking spiritual instruction to turn to Scriptures *and* to secular poetry.

The sheer volume of religious literature generated in nineteenth-century Britain must be balanced against the secular influence of English literature in school texts with regard to forming moral dispositions in young readers at home. The supply may have preceded demand for the production of these religious tracts, but the sustained body of

pamphlets and English Bibles generated by evangelical agencies in the Romantic and Victorian periods speaks for itself (Altick 100-101).²⁰ Religious works as a category consistently topped the kinds of books published in the nineteenth century. Citing Charles Knight's breakdown of the *London Catalogue of Books* for the period 1816-1851, Richard Altick reports that "works of divinity" comprised 10,300 of the 45,260 titles published in this period. Thus more than one-fifth of the titles were religious texts, compared with 3,500 fiction works, 3,400 drama and poetry texts, and 2,450 books on science,²¹ a trend which prevailed for the rest of the century.²² These figures support the findings of Talal Asad and Colin Jager which show that the histories of secularization and religion are simultaneous and inseparable.²³ Even as orthodox religious practices in the period were being reconfigured, religious literature flowed from the printers.

Although St Clair concludes that "the advice of the Victorian critics and professors seems to have had little effect on production, sales, or reading patterns" of Romantic poets in the Victorian period (421), my approach to Wordsworth's critics considers their influence as operating subtly but profoundly. In my view, the work of critics bore fruit with contemporary and future reading patterns in incalculable ways. The conversation which transpired in the periodical press and in private letters between Wordsworth's critics played an important role in scholarly efforts aimed at preserving the poet's many manuscripts and memorabilia through the Wordsworth Society, which was established in 1880 under William Knight's initiative, for instance—a move which contributed to the kind of detailed textual criticism now possible with the Cornell editions of Wordsworth. Despite differing with St Clair on the range of their influence, the voices I hear in my smaller sampling of Wordsworth's Victorian critics do correspond to his

more comprehensive account in which English literature accommodates more and more of the function of religious ritual. Thus “Scott, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley and the now universal Shakespeare would not supplant the English-language Bible as the defining texts of the nation, but would be elevated to a near equal status in official esteem” (St Clair 429). The words “near equal status” carry a great deal of weight: the lines between sacred and secular are not always distinct and thus measurable with accuracy as it concerns the reverence of Victorians reading Wordsworth.

With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -
 Between the light - and me -
 And then the Windows failed - and then
 I could not see to see -
 —Emily Dickinson (1863) ²⁴

II. Seeing to See: Wordsworth’s “Ode to Duty”

When Wordsworth cautions that an epitaph writer “is not an anatomist, who dissects the internal frame of the mind” (EE1 329-330), he implies that the writer must lovingly depict the life of the deceased. What he fails to mention in the “Essays Upon Epitaphs” is that in order for the mourner to imagine his loved one in the light of the human race as his theory advocates, something like a “dissect[ion] of the internal frame of the mind” is required for poet and reader. Fortunately, the methodical speaker facilitates this process even as the poetry goes hand in glove with a scientific age. For Victorian readers especially, Wordsworth moves closer to the idealized definition he advanced in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: “Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge: it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science” (LB 390-392). On some accounts, however, Wordsworth may have served his

readers more effectively than he did himself aesthetically in bringing about the reader's new disposition through this analytical persona. The removed persona which worked to the reader's advantage led John Stuart Mill to deem Wordsworth the "poet of unpoetical natures" in his posthumous *Autobiography* (1873). As is well known, Wordsworth's poetry was credited with correcting the young Mill's despondency. Wordsworth was peculiarly qualified for this task in Mill's eyes because he was teaching someone of his own ilk: "unpoetical natures are precisely those which require poetic cultivation. This cultivation Wordsworth is much more fitted to give, than poets who are intrinsically far more poets than he" (CW 1:153). Victorian response bore out Mill's comments in a number of ways.

Early steeped in Benthamite philosophy, Mill became in his lifetime a public figure of considerable influence on the major intellectual issues of his day, especially from the late 1850s to his death in 1873.²⁵ In an article written in 1833, a time when he was under the sway of Coleridge and Carlyle, amongst others, Mill identified a quality in Wordsworth's poetry which appealed to rational-minded readers just as it had done for Mill in his misery. In this essay, "The Two Kinds of Poetry," Mill revised the view espoused in his more frequently-cited article "What is Poetry?" (1833) by arguing that in Wordsworth's poetry the thought predominates over the feeling (CW 1:358).²⁶ He situated Wordsworth alongside Shelley to argue that Shelley was a poet who was not a born poet, but disposed to become one—a fine line Mill walks in the essay. "What is Poetry?" on the other hand, is well-known for its discrimination between poetry and eloquence: "eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*," and for shaping our notion of the English lyric as "feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude, and bodying

itself forth in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind" (CW 1:348). Judging by period commentary, I rely more on Mill's second essay which attends to Wordsworth's methods of tamping down emotion by disciplining thought: "There is an air of calm deliberateness about all he writes, which is not characteristic of the poetic temperament: his poetry seems one thing, himself another; he seems to be poetical because he wills to be so, not because he cannot help it . . . He never seems *possessed* by any feeling" (CW 1:358-359). This sentiment seems most in line with Victorian critics writing on the poet.

Paradoxically this steely quality seemed to enhance the poetry's spiritual effectiveness when paired with the narrator's occasional close-up views of the subject. Such tempered passion might at first appear to contradict Mill's claims in *The Autobiography* as to how the *Poems* (1815) came to his emotional rescue: "What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of" (CW 151). Perhaps because the word "feeling" appears three times in this often-quoted formulation of the effect of Wordsworth's lyric, and because Mill defined lyric in terms of "feeling confessing itself to itself" in solitude, critics have tended to emphasize Mill's response as straightforwardly emotive. However, the phrases "states of feeling," "thought coloured by feeling" and "culture of the feelings" may suggest that what Mill sought and found for his sorrow was the manipulation of feelings by abstract thought. For these reasons, the second essay on poetry may tap into the techniques by which Wordsworth's poetry raised Mill up from despair.

It must be noted, however, that for Mill, the “culture of the feelings” which comforted him were first primed by an affinity for nature: “In this power of rural beauty over me, there was a foundation laid for taking pleasure in Wordsworth’s poetry; the more so, as his scenery lies mostly among mountains . . .” (CW 1: 151). Mill cancelled from the Early Draft of *The Autobiography* a moving description of a walking tour he took in July of 1828, the year of his mental crisis where the “splendid colouring . . . and the calm river, rich meadows and wooded hills . . . insensibly changed” his depressed mood (CW 1:150n).²⁷ As Mill tends to minimize imagery and mute conflict in the “expository mode” of his autobiography (Shumaker 142-43), it is no wonder the excised passage, which is remarkable for its surrender to the scenery, did not make the final cut.²⁸

Although Mill had read Wordsworth’s poetry before his bout with depression, he read it even more deeply in the autumn of that year. His identification with the persona of the *Intimations Ode* may have been a turning point in learning how to reform his feelings:

At the conclusion of the Poems came the famous ‘Ode,’ falsely called Platonic, ‘Intimations of Immortality’: in which, along with more than his usual sweetness of melody and rhythm, and along with the two passages of grand imagery but bad philosophy so often quoted, I found that he too had had similar experience to mine; that he also had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it. The result was that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never again subject to it. (CW 1: 153)

We can fill in some of the blanks that Mill did not: Because of his strong identification with the persona’s sense of “something that is gone” (53) and the resolve to “grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind” (180-1),²⁹ Mill was enabled to make use of his own painful moods. The sincerity of the poet’s desire to find a substitute for his loss must have been conducive to Mill’s “yielding” to the poem in the way Dowden described. De Vere maintained that the philosophy of the “*Intimations Ode*” gained

“authenticity” because its “passion” was based on the poet’s own memories rather than an “argument” (“Wisdom and Truth” 251). Otherwise, noted de Vere, “its author would have seemed to expound a system, not to bear a witness” (251).

Sir Henry Taylor gives us a way of imagining how that persona transformed Mill’s thinking. Taylor described the reach of the poet’s influence through the poem and to the reader. “The poetry of Mr. Wordsworth, permeating, as it does, the mind, modes of thinking, and character of those who admire it, constitutes something in the nature of a personal tie between him and them . . .” (“Poetical Works” *Works* 5: 51). Here “character” is critical to the process of “transmuting sorrow” in the reader. There is an exchange from the character of the poet to the character of the individual reader which adheres to Wordsworth’s epitaphic theory: “an Epitaph was not to be an abstract character of the deceased but an epitomized biography blended with description by which an impression of the character was to be conveyed” (EE3 328-31). As the poetry is absorbed by the receptive reader, it leaves a representative mark of the poet’s character, “epitomized” through the particulars of the poem. From this approach, the persona represents far more than the poet writing. In this transfer of “character” or “moral qualities strongly developed” (OED) from persona to reader, which occurs by a “character” or “a distinctive mark impressed, engraved, or otherwise formed” (OED), we have a model of a living epitaph: the imprint made on a life via the poem’s larger-than-life persona.

In Mill’s case, his clear sympathy with the persona of the Ode is one of the few details we have as to how the poetry drew out its response formally. In addition to a kinship with the poet as a type, we can also infer that the new way of thinking inspired by

the “personal tie” with the poet involved re-imagining his role within the human race, perhaps assisted by the universal persona. Wordsworth taught Mill “permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation . . . not only without turning away from, but with a greatly increased interest in, the common feelings and common destiny of human beings” (CW 1:153). I quote from Mill’s *Autobiography* liberally because the pattern in which the poetry helped him through his melancholy—an identification with the poet followed by an abstraction and refinement of sorrow through duty—matches up with the experiences of other nineteenth-century critics.³⁰ In tandem with his response to the poems themselves, I wish to emphasize that aspect of Mill’s recovery which occurred on his prior encounter with the natural setting along the River Thames. Like the returns to specific scenes in *The Prelude* and *The River Duddon* sonnets, physical contact with nature completed the circuit required to make the poetry and the reader’s experience real because it verified the felt connection to a larger order. With allowances for individual poems and readers, Mill’s experience, like Stephen’s, serves as a template for comprehending the means by which Wordsworth’s poetry encouraged self-transforming thoughts for a number of critics, and by extension, regular readers.

Mill was not alone in noticing the stoic persona whose style tended to favor intellect over affect.³¹ The Broad Church theologian Stopford Brooke, one of the leading preachers in London in the latter part of the century, compared Shelley to Wordsworth on this point as it applied to “things”: “As the poet of Nature, [Shelley] had the same idea as Wordsworth, that Nature was alive; but while Wordsworth made the active principle which filled and made Nature to be Thought, Shelley made it Love. As each distinct thing in Nature had to Wordsworth a thinking spirit in it, so each thing had to Shelley a loving

spirit in it . . .” (*English Literature* 163). In an essay in which he responded approvingly to Arnold’s famous Preface, Edward Caird develops this idea of a “thinking spirit” in nature by singling out an analogous spirit behind the poem. For Caird, the poet’s deliberate way of looking at things tended to make and break Wordsworth as a poet: “[his] defects of genius are strangely bound up with its qualities—this *prosaic* exactness has for its counterpart what we may call a *poetic* exactness of mind; a simple and direct grasp of the truth which gives to Wordsworth’s treatment of the most subtle and evanescent of spiritual influences, something of the precision of a scientific definition” (158). In like-minded comments at the beginning of the twentieth century, William Ralph Inge in his St. Margaret’s Lecture entitled “The Mysticism of Wordsworth,” also hooked onto the persona’s strict self-awareness: “This calm and scrupulous care in registering his own emotions, which some have called egoistical, has a real scientific value, and adds greatly to his usefulness as an ethical guide” (200). It was the emphasis on intellect over affect which made the thought “scrupulous” and served to orient the reader’s own thought.

Several writers on Wordsworth who were notably grateful for his verse described the persona’s regulated emotion in similar terms. Felicia Hemans was recorded by a companion as saying that when one makes the “distinction between the genius of Wordsworth and that of Byron . . . it required a higher power to still a tempest than to raise one, and that she considered it the part of the former to calm, and of the latter to disturb the mind.”³² Along the same lines, Elizabeth Barrett Browning suggested that the poet was neither of a “passionate temperament” nor “cold.” Rather, she implied the persona was of a sublime sensibility: “saying himself of his thoughts, that they ‘do often

lie too deep for tears' . . . does not mean that their painfulness will not suffer them to be wept for, but that their closeness to the supreme Truth hallows them, like the cheek of an archangel, from tears" (Rev. of *Poems* 757). The American Shakespeare critic Henry N. Hudson writing later in the century likewise observed the means by which Wordsworth tames emotion: "the deeper and stronger his passion was at any time, the more careful he was lest it should master him and run away with him, the more intent on holding it in and keeping the upper hand of it, till, by predominance of intellect, the passion became strained and transmuted into pure intelligence" (110).³³ This movement from passion to "pure intelligence" mirrors Mill's sense of Wordsworth as a poet of thought over feeling wherein the "culture of the feelings" includes the process by which distance is gained on loss is order to grieve it.

These readers were responding to the way in which thought and feeling coexist in varying tension in the poetry, moving from mainly feeling to thinking in a process of "strain[ing] and transmut[ing]" for Hudson in particular. Although Dowden and Palgrave considered the thought and feeling to be balanced in Wordsworth's best work,³⁴ other critics mentioned the preponderance of thought over emotion and the resultant forced quality of much of the verse as Mill had found it. Hutton described the controlled method as one which lent the poetry its solitary mood: "It is this strange *transmuting* power, which his meditative spirit exercises over all earthly and human themes, that gives to Wordsworth's poems the intense air of solitude which every where pervades them" (Rev. of *William Wordsworth* 5). Hutton went on to explain: "It is mainly that he makes you feel his isolation of spirit, by never *surrendering* himself to the natural and obvious currents of thought or feeling in the theme he takes; but changes their direction by cool

side-winds from his own spiritual nature” (5). Whereas the reader must surrender to the poem in order for this process of transmutation to take hold, the persona does not appear to have as much flexibility. Instead, the persona seems to inhabit a more rigid position than the reader who follows in his imaginative footsteps—as if to pull the reader with him into a new range of thought. It is this willed quality that led Hutton to describe Wordsworth as “deliberately withdraw[ing]” (8) from the center of the poetic scene in order to meditate upon the spiritual nature of his own mind.

The importance of an orderly perspective to transmuting sorrow is evident in the well-loved poem “Ode to Duty” (1807), regularly cited in nineteenth-century criticism on Wordsworth and a reliable presence in school texts and anthologies of the period, including those of sacred verse:

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!³⁵
 O Duty! if that name thou love
 Who art a light to guide, a rod
 To check the erring, and reprove;
 Thou, who are victory and law
 When empty terrors overawe;
 From vain temptations dost set free;
 And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity! (1-8)³⁶

We perceive the familiar images of the 23rd psalm of the Old Testament, “The Lord is my shepherd” which places the poem in the tradition of wisdom literature: “he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (3); “thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (4). Wordsworth overlays the Biblical heritage of the “Ode to Duty” with the generic tradition of the ode; the poem is based on Thomas Gray’s “Ode to Adversity,” which is in turn founded on Horace’s Ode to Fortune (*Fenwick Notes* 40). He does so while striking a tone of generality in the first lines of the poem. Through abstract images (“Daughter of the Voice”) we get the impression, reinforced in subsequent stanzas, of the speaker

submitting to a firm and pervasive power, a relationship which echoes that of the reader and the poem's presiding intelligence. Gray, by contrast, uses a host of personified figures—Folly, Wisdom, Charity, and Melancholy to name a few—but the instruments of discipline are given much more graphically: “Daughter of Jove . . . Whose iron scourge and torturing hour, / The bad affright, afflict the best! / Bound in thy adamant chain / The proud are taught to taste of pain” (1; 3-6).³⁷ Wordsworth's most revealing metaphors in the first stanza (“a light to guide, a rod / To check the erring”) are by comparison vague enough to absorb some of the implied violence.

The general diction of this “I” works both to “empty” the poem of specific “terrors” and subsequently to require the reader to supply the specific pain. The imprecise language protects the reader in one sense, but in another, it enacts the unpredictability of terror. The absence of concrete imagery early on suggests the “empty terrors [which] overawe” are like the “blank confusion” (7: 722) of Wordsworth's urban encounter in *The Prelude* or the “visionary dreariness” (*Prel* 12: 256) of the “spots of time.” The generalities of Wordsworth's language must be “clothed in circumstance,” as Leslie Stephen observed in his comments on the Simplon Pass episode in Book 6 of *The Prelude*: “Even when [Wordsworth] speaks, not of external facts, but of the history of his own opinions, he generally plunges into generalities so wide that their precise application is not very easy to discover Between the general truths and the particular application there are certain ‘middle axioms’ which Wordsworth leaves us to supply for ourselves . . .” (“Wordsworth's Youth” 230-31). The same is true of his persona in the “Ode to Duty.” If the vague language in the opening stanza somewhat softens the rigors of Duty, it could be argued that this language stimulates a different rigor on the part of

the reader for whom the “particular application” of the speaker’s guilt-laden submission must be left to the imagination or filled in with personal experience. Importantly, this act of naming corresponds to the act of self-forgiveness by which the speaker answers the call of conscience, thereby hedging against grief through a heightened devotion to others. The poem is at bottom an anticipation of and preparation for grievous loss.

The poem gets at that loss by contrasting maturity and youth in the second stanza. Relying on varying levels of self-consciousness of one’s dutiful role, this stanza recalls the way in which the “*active principle*” is enacted by the different levels of conscious awareness in Wordsworth’s natural world.

There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them; who, in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth;
Glad Hearts! without reproach or blot;
Who do thy work and know it not:
Oh! if through confidence misplaced
They fall, thy saving arms, dread Power! around them cast.
(9-16)

Like the “dear Girl” (9) in the sonnet who worships when she “know[s] it not” (14),³⁸ the youthful “Glad Hearts” are unaware they do the work of Duty. Sir Henry Taylor analyzed the way in which the youthful simplicity in this stanza points up the adult’s burden. “Wherein, then, is to consist the freedom of *his* heart? The answer is, in self-government upon a large scale,—in so ordering the circumstances of his life and determining the general direction in which his powers and feelings shall be cultivated . . . in so dealing, that is, with his years and months, as shall impart a certain orderly liberty to his days and hours” (*Works* 5: 34-5). The epigraph from Seneca’s *Moral Epistles* added in 1836 supports this habitual ordering of a life as the means to a kind of freedom, as

does the regularity of each stanza in the poem: “Jam non consilio bonus, sed more eo perductus, ut non tantum recte facere possim, sed nisi recte facere non possim” (“Not only sound in his judgment but trained by habit to such an extent that he not only can act rightly, but cannot help acting rightly”) (*P2V* 407n).³⁹ Stephen, who appreciated the disciplined thought of Wordsworth’s persona, connected the “Ode to Duty” to the “Intimations Ode,” a poem which also appealed widely to Victorians, and has been well-studied in that regard.⁴⁰ In Stephen’s view, Wordsworth summons the “Stern daughter of the Voice of God” “to supply that ‘genial sense of youth’ which has hitherto been a sufficient guidance” (“Ethics” 214). The notion of bridging adulthood and youth by means of duty unites the “Ode to Duty” with the self-transmutation scene discussed in Chapter 1 in which the young poet traverses the gap between animal instincts and responds to the call to “be, else sinning greatly, / A dedicated Spirit” (*Prel* 4: 336-337).⁴¹ In the “Ode to Duty,” the knowing persona initiates that call.

Although critics have noticed the generality of diction in the “Ode to Duty,” they have not emphasized its explicit connection to transmuting sorrow. Geoffrey Hartman argues that Wordsworth “consciously fashion[s] his own diction of generality” (*WP* 283) in this poem and the “Intimations Ode” as he “enter[s] a new stage of life” (283). Believing the poem’s notion of duty is most likely shaped by Milton, to whom it alludes, “rather than an abstract ethics” (279), Hartman reads the “‘awful power’” of Duty as “simply the inner strength of voluntarily dedicating oneself to the household bonds of life” (281). In a complex argument, Thomas Pfau draws on Hegel to argue that the “Ode to Duty” evinces the poet’s movement “from writer to author, from an affective ‘individuality’ to a literary ‘personality’” by creating a “‘moral community’” (413).

Through general diction, the ode represents the “inward drama of the speaker’s transfiguration” from internal self to external “social, and morally exemplary personality” (416), complicating the traditional lyric “I” in the process. In determining how the poetry turns sorrow outward for its readers, the “I” which most interests me follows the trajectory that Pfau outlines, a “transfiguration” from inner to outwardly-directed authority. But this “I” also acts as an interface in the work of mourning. The “I” mediates between what the poem gradually unveils as “Duty” for the persona, and what it indirectly charges the reader with seeing as his own sorrows and obligations.

Some of those worries are palpable as the speaker seeks the “orderly liberty” outlined by Taylor. Beneath the systematic atmosphere the speaker labors to sustain, the angst of ambition eats away at the poem, as it does in *The Prelude* and the *River Duddon* sonnets.

Through no disturbance of my soul,
Or strong compunction in me wrought,
I supplicate for thy control;
But in the quietness of thought:
Me this unchartered freedom tires;
I feel the weight of chance-desires:
My hopes no more must change their name,
I long for a repose that ever is the same. (33-40)

Towards the end of managing that ambition, the persona seeks a suspension where his “hopes no more must change their name,” a move which will quiet the restlessness of abjection as Kristeva portrays it. De Vere noted that the poet does not name the “excesses into which human nature falls” when he is disconnected from Duty (“Wisdom and Truth” 182). Rather, the poet speaks of “‘omissions’”(182)—what he has not done and, implicitly, what has not happened. It is no accident that the narrator chooses a calm moment to devote himself to Duty instead of waiting for the storm to prompt him to pray

to a higher power. While he “feel[s] the weight of chance-desires” even as he longs for release, the acceptance of his limitations and his promise to serve Duty anyway further demonstrate discipline and self-awareness in stark contrast to duty which is done unawares in the second stanza. In this thoughtful posture, “meditated action” (*Exc* 9:21) lifts the persona above his “terrors” so that he can “see to see” in the words of Emily Dickinson.

In the much-praised penultimate stanza, the poet “enstranges” the reader by giving the “Daughter of the voice” a face in a variation on the de Manian sense (“Autobiography”). By clothing the generality of the “Daughter of the Voice” with the sensuous particulars of nature, the poet names and gives Duty a face before he makes his closing plea:

Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead’s most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face:
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong.

To humbler functions, awful Power!
I call thee: I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour;
Oh, let my weakness have an end!
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice;
The confidence of reason give;
And in the light of truth thy Bondman let me live! (49-64)

Hudson provides a perspective on the transformation in the second to last stanza as one which occurs between feeling and thought: When “the passion is too great for the proper language of passion to carry: it has to voice itself in the language of thought, and so is

lost in the intellectual power and working which itself evokes” (108). The “language of thought” may be seen as the “enstranging” personification of the earth and heavens which metaphorically “preserve[s] the stars from wrong” in the way the speaker hopes the “saving arms” of the “dread Power” will protect the innocents in the second stanza should they “fall.” At the same time, this language “preserve[s]” the memory of those youthful impulses in the laughing flowers. The entire poem for Hudson exemplifies this controlled passion, “hidden under deep, pure, eloquence of thought” (108-109). The transition in the penultimate stanza is at least two-fold: there is a passage from feeling to thought and a corresponding motion from moral law to the cosmos which affirms the inner order.

The poet himself described this transition in the closing stanzas to his *Reply to ‘Mathetes’* (1809), published in Coleridge’s periodical *The Friend* around the time Wordsworth was writing the “Essays Upon Epitaphs.” In the *Reply*, Wordsworth responds to the young man, “Mathetes,” who seeks the poet’s moral direction. Wordsworth invokes the last stanza of the “Ode to Duty” to explain the illuminating movement in the poem as one in which the “character of Philosophical Poet” extends the laws of the imagination to those of the natural universe: As the Poet conceives of “Morality as implying in its essence voluntary obedience, and producing the effect of order, he transfers, in the transport of imagination, the law of Moral to physical Natures, and, having contemplated, through the medium of that order, all modes of existence as subservient to one spirit, concludes his address to the power of Duty . . .” (*Prose Works* 2: 636-42).⁴² Although he was not referring to the “Ode to Duty,” Edward Dowden’s comparison of Wordsworth’s own imaginative “forces” to the laws of nature suggests

how the poet “transfers” from one law to another so as to find himself in an ordered universe:

The forces of Wordsworth’s nature, like the forces of the physical universe, were correlated by a marvelous law, according to which one could pass and be transformed into another, what was at this moment a sensuous affection becoming forthwith a spiritual presence, what was contemplation appearing presently as passion, or what was now a state of passive, brooding receptivity transforming itself into rapturous advance, and controlling mastery of the imagination. (“Prose Works” 128)

We might say that the “sensuous affection” of youth from stanza two is idealized in the “spiritual presence” of the “*active* universe” (*Prel* 2: 254) in the concluding stanzas. At the same time the laws ordering the individual life radiate outward. Speaking of the “Ode to Duty” in particular, de Vere builds on Dowden’s comments by arguing that the poem showcases universal laws which elicit from nature and humans analogous responses. We are reminded of Hugh of St Victor’s method of ordering, one aspect of a life of prayer and study in the medieval monastery. For Hugh, this method

will be effective only when the reader remembers one fundamental point: all things and events of this world acquire their meaning from the place at which they are inserted in the history of creation and salvation. It is the reader’s task to insert all that he reads at the respective point where it belongs in the *historia* between Genesis and the Apocalypse. Only by doing this will he advance toward wisdom through reading. (Illich 32-33)

De Vere sees the poet as seeking the place in time to situate his dutiful life just as Hugh urges. Part of the problem, de Vere implies, lies in learning how to “see to see,” in Dickinson’s phrase, the laws in evidence everywhere: “He looks around him, and from every side the same lesson is borne in upon him. It is because they obey laws that the flowers return in their seasons and the stars revolve in their courses; the law of Nature is to inanimate things what Duty is to man” (“Wisdom and Truth” 182).⁴³

It is tempting to read “Duty” as coexistent with nature from the beginning of the poem in which the created earth itself is the “Daughter” of God’s voice in the Book of Genesis. Nature’s harsh and loving lessons, presented abundantly in *The Prelude*, would support such a reading. Whether the movement is from the physical laws of nature to the laws of the imagination, or the other way around, the entire poem orients the mind toward self-forgiveness and facing loss in sync with the process of ordering one’s sorrow. Once a confession of inadequacy is made (“And oft, when in my heart was heard / Thy timely mandate, I deferred / The task” 29-31), the impediments to seeing seem to fall away. The newfound perspective is tinged with sorrow.

In the second to last stanza in particular, Algernon Swinburne, who did not consider himself to be a “disciple” of Wordsworth, drew attention to its muted sorrow: “the unforeseeing security of a charmed and confident happiness is opposed to the desolate certitude of unforeseen bereavement by a single touch of contrast, a single note of comparison, as profound in its simplicity as the deepest wellspring of human emotion or remembrance itself” (130).⁴⁴ For Swinburne these lines conveyed what a longer elegy could not: “that sense of absolute and actual truth, of a sorrow set to music of its own making . . .” (130). Swinburne did not specify the “single touch of contrast,” but we have to think he meant the line “Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong” since that “wrong” is the only hint of sorrow in the stanza. While Duty has been named in earthly signs, the “empty terrors” (6) feared from the first stanza go unnamed in the poem. The persona and perhaps the reader, however, now have the metaphorical means to do so by imagining their inevitability.

Through her notion of forgiveness, Kristeva gives us a way of appreciating how these “eight faultless and incomparable verses” could be “a sorrow set to music of its own making” (130) as Swinburne phrased it. Because the speaker acknowledges his “weakness” and offers himself up to Duty (“I now would serve more strictly, if I may” 32), he accepts the “certitude of unforeseen bereavement” as evidenced in the depiction of Duty “preserv[ing] the stars from wrong” (47). As if in recompense, the speaker acquires the “confidence of reason” (55) to aspire to Duty’s demands. The anticipation of suffering may factor into the psychology of seeking to serve as a bulwark against more sorrow, but self-forgiveness and -acceptance implicit in a speaker “made lowly wise” (53) suggest an intimacy with loss already. As Kristeva conceives of it, by “[r]ecognizing the lack and the wound that caused it,” an act of forgiveness “fulfills” this lack with a gift which “fit[s] the humiliated offended being into an order of perfection, and giv[es] him the assurance that he belongs there” (*Black Sun* 216). In an act of self-forgiveness, then, one imagines an ideal order or home which can accommodate the abjected self. For the Victorian reader of “Ode to Duty,” the “confidence of reason” (55) enabled by the poem may have depended in part on the dutiful laws of the living natural world in the second to last stanza. But it also may have depended on the flesh-and-blood poet behind the idealized persona who served as a kind of “father in individual prehistory.” As Kristeva revises Freud’s term, this is the unisex “father” whose gift of love supports the child across the “zero degree of the imagination” (*Tales* 24) and into the laws of language.⁴⁵

This means that like the “Stern Lawgiver” Duty, the persona carries the reader across a threshold in which he writes his own ending to the poem, “a sorrow set to music

of its own making.” Kristeva explicitly connects writing and interpretation to forgiveness. By fitting his words to his affliction, the sufferer binds himself to the ideal of forgiveness. The subject can then forgive himself and others (*Black Sun* 216-17). If the reader supplies the words which are appropriate to his own suffering in the “Ode to Duty,” he will be in a position to forgive and to act, to live “in the light” of his own “truth” (56) to which the Ode aspires. Kristeva conceives of this act of writing in Thomistic terms:

Writing causes the *affect* to slip into the *effect*—*actus purus*, as Aquinas might say. It conveys affects and does not repress them, it suggests for them a sublimatory outcome, it transposes them for an other in a threefold, imaginary, and symbolic bond. Because it is forgiveness, writing is transformation, transposition, translation. (217)

In the “Ode to Duty,” one might say the self-interpreting task of naming one’s terrors leads to self-transmutation in the form of service for “an other” who is also the “enstranged” self. Such a self-renewing mode of change is not instantaneous or complete; rather it is incremental and never done.

III. Ordering Sorrow: Leslie Stephen’s Modern Wordsworth

We may be all too familiar with Matthew Arnold’s warning against “the Wordsworthians” provoked by Leslie Stephen’s article “Wordsworth’s Ethics.” Subsequent criticism turned on Arnold’s crucial essay in the *Poems of Wordsworth* (1879), an answer to Stephen which in turn justified Arnold’s selection of poems: Wordsworth’s “poetry is the reality, his philosophy,—so far, at least, as it may put on the form and habit of ‘a scientific system of thought,’ and the more that it puts them on,—is the illusion” (“Wordsworth” 48). Critics may be less acquainted with the claim that occasioned the reply, however, and with what made Wordsworth’s poetry modern for

Stephen in the first place.⁴⁶ In his essay Stephen argued that by putting in “plain prose” the ethical underpinning of Wordsworth’s body of poetry, “we shall see how the poetical power implies a sensitiveness to ideas which, when extracted from the symbolical embodiment, fall spontaneously into a scientific system of thought” (“Ethics” 210). What exactly did Stephen mean? This “sensitiveness to ideas” refers to a kind of sympathy by which a world could be read and ordered—a sympathy which rhymed with Stephen’s own aesthetic of reading. It was a shared sensibility through which he could fathom the “form and habit of a ‘scientific system.’” Arnold discerned this, but without fully appreciating the import of this “form and habit” and thus where he and Stephen were aligned. Stephen’s yielding to the poet’s worldview which situated him so solidly in the “Wordsworthian” camp was a more critical move than Arnold’s cautionary remarks implied.

To understand what Stephen meant by inducing a “scientific system” from the poetry, it is necessary first to understand Stephen’s Wordsworth. Although readers today might first think of Stephen as the father of Virginia Woolf, in his day he was a thinker in his own right, earning the respect of the intellectual elite. By the time he wrote his essay on Wordsworth in 1876, Stephen was editor of the family publication the *Cornhill Magazine*, where he served for over a decade before becoming editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. In 1876 he also published a work which gained him public notice, the *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. Whereas Stephen distilled his “scientific system” from a reading of Wordsworth’s poetry across the oeuvre—including *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*—Arnold favored the shorter lyrics of the so-called “Great Decade.” In fact, Arnold, one of the most influential voices in the period,

characterized *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* as “by no means Wordsworth’s best work” (42). From the long view of the twenty-first century, it appears that Stephen’s Wordsworth was initially eclipsed by Arnold’s Wordsworth in a selection of lyrics which would ideally impress themselves deeply at home and abroad: “We shall recognise him in his place, as we recognise Shakespeare and Milton; and not only we ourselves shall recognise him, but he will be recognised by Europe also” (“Wordsworth” 41). Yet by means of Stephen’s aesthetic of reading, scientific and sympathetic, he, too, deemed the poetry ripe for modernity.

Paradoxically, Stephen’s “scientific system” agrees with Arnold’s Introduction to the *Poems of Wordsworth* in important ways.⁴⁷ Although they experienced Wordsworth’s poetry distinctly, the call to duty they perceived from the verse constitutes an epitaphic “midway point” between the two critics, and affords “a finer connection than that of contrast” (EE1 148; 134-35). Stephen discovered in the deliberative method of the poet’s imagination a model for gaining distance on his own loss. From an idealized vantage point, he could name this loss by privileging its sublimation through duty to others. At the same time, for Stephen the poetry’s perspective meshed with contemporary trends toward rational thought which he valued. When we think of Arnold’s Wordsworth, we think of “Nature herself . . . tak[ing] the pen out of his hand” to compose for the poet (“Wordsworth” 53). But nature also functioned for Arnold by being paired with social responsibility in an emotionally transparent poetics: “Wordsworth’s poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties; and because of the extraordinary power with which, in case after case, he shows us this joy, and renders

it so as to make us share it” (“Wordsworth” 51). The dutiful context in which the poet presents this joy in nature “so as to make us share it” has received less critical attention than has the sheer fact of the joyous engagement. The “paramount *duty*” of hope is perhaps the most relevant of these obligations for anchoring Stephen and Arnold in their separate ways to Wordsworth through a theory of ennobling grief.⁴⁸ In “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse,” for instance, an Arnoldian persona mourns “The nobleness of grief is gone— / Ah, leave us not the fret alone!” (107-08)⁴⁹ When we return to Arnold’s “Memorial Verses” on Wordsworth with this particular loss in mind, we can hear the cry “But who, ah! who, will make us feel?” (67) more distinctly as “who will make us feel worthy as we suffer”? For Stephen, Wordsworth gave grief that dignity by the way he “t[ought] in many forms the necessity of ‘transmuting’ sorrow into strength” (“Ethics” 222).

The “scientific system” laid out in “Wordsworth’s Ethics” conveys a moral philosophy intertwined with the forms of poetry and of nature—the “many forms” in which Stephen experienced the poet’s theory of “transmuting sorrow.” Further, he managed to reconcile those forms with his positivism even if the poet might not have seen eye to eye with him on the details. Whereas Stephen found the “shadowy recollections” (152) of the “Intimations Ode” consistent with Darwinian inherited characteristics, for example, he suspected that Wordsworth would have “repudiated the doctrine with disgust. He would have been ‘on the side of the angels’” (“Ethics” 211). Peter Allan Dale has contextualized Stephen’s scientific reading of the poetry, calling Wordsworth a “key transitional figure” for Stephen linking deist philosophy of the eighteenth century to positivism in the next: “Far from being Arnold’s backward-looking

metaphysician, Wordsworth is a very pioneer in the modern spirit in Stephen's positivist reading of that spirit" (195). Dale concludes that Stephen's essay is less significant as literary theory, though, than as a preparatory piece for *The Science of Ethics* (1882), Stephen's thick tome on morality as evolutionary.⁵⁰ Although it no doubt paved the way for Stephen's ethical theory, "Wordsworth's Ethics" analyzes the poetry by means of melding the disciplines: "psychology, stated systematically, is rational; and, when expressed passionately, turns into poetry," explained Stephen. "To be sensitive to the most important phenomena is the first step equally towards a poetical or a scientific exposition" (226). In Wordsworth's universe, this act of "be[ing] sensitive to the most important phenomena" is pivotal in recognizing order in the world at large, a process by which things are also ordered in small, at the level of individual sorrow. These hints at how Stephen's positivism inflected his reading of Wordsworth's epitaphic aesthetic will help to unfold the psychological element in which the poet's Romanticism enacted a theory of mourning for Stephen and for a melancholy age, one reader at a time.

It is not incidental to his essay on Wordsworth that during its composition, Stephen was grieving the death of his first wife in November 1875. In a letter to his family written at the end of his life and later published as *The Mausoleum Book*, Stephen reflected on his theory of refining sorrow as outlined in "Wordsworth's Ethics": "you will find it the fullest comment I can give upon this 'transmutation.' Grief, I have said in substance, is of all things not to be wasted. I wrote the article under the impressions produced by my Minny's death. It expresses what I then felt, and what I now feel as strongly" (71). "Wordsworth's Ethics" is a critique of the poetry which is inseparable from its status as a record of mourning. Further, Stephen's enduring philosophy of

“transmuting sorrow” is relevant for what it discloses about how and why late Romantic and Victorian readers turned to Wordsworth, “the only poet” Stephen wrote, “who will bear reading in times of distress” (“Ethics” 223). Like many other Wordsworthians, Stephen’s returns to the poetry over the course of a lifetime amounted to a spiritual practice. In another place in *The Mausoleum Book*, Stephen makes plain the kinds of returns to the text I mean. In discussing “the little nameless unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love” in “Tintern Abbey,” he mentioned these returns almost as an aside: “Wordsworth (I somehow come back often to him, when I am in sorrow) speaks in the lines upon Tintern Abbey. . .” (82). Despite whatever benefits Stephen derived from the text, though, there are indications he had far to go to reach his ideal of “turning grief and disappointment into account” (“Ethics” 222). In a letter to his friend Charles Eliot Norton just over three months after his first wife’s death, Stephen saw as much himself: “The problem of making sorrow ennobling instead of deteriorating is a terribly hard one” (*Selected Letters* 170).⁵¹

Stephen takes his term “transmuting sorrow” from Book 4 of *The Excursion*, where the Wanderer seeks to pull the Solitary out of his slough of despond. The Wanderer’s retrieval method applies to Stephen’s endeavors to do likewise. The “scientific system of thought” which dignified the reader was not only based on a designed natural world, but also on a regular practice of reading that world as a language analogous to words on the page. Counteracting despondency requires “judicious training” (“Ethics” 224) of the mind so that the “primitive emotions” can be activated continually by the signs of nature. Stephen interpreted the Wanderer’s advice: “Admiration, hope, and love should be so constantly in our thoughts, that innumerable sights and sounds

which are meaningless to the world, should become to us a language incessantly suggestive of the deepest topics of thought” (220). This language created by the signs of nature is not to be confused with a pantheist position which the tough-minded Stephen faulted for being overly optimistic (216). Rather he needed a way of interpreting nature which was “more discriminative” (217). This was possible for Stephen through the well-trained mind which looks to nature and learns to “recognise its splendour” (216), in the same way the Wanderer hopes to redirect the sightline of the Solitary in *The Excursion*. Here Stephen relies on the associations which are made in earliest childhood between the “nobler affections” (217) and natural places and sounds such that the “voice of nature” (217) rightly heard awakens in the adult the store of sanctified memories, a familiar Wordsworthian dynamic detailed in Chapter 1.

Stephen returned to the forms of his own noble associations in nature, perhaps on some level to supplement his spiritual returns to Wordsworth’s poetry. An avid mountaineer, he pilgrimaged over the course of a lifetime to what was for him a “sacred place”—the Alps (Maitland 296).⁵²

If I were to invent a new idolatry (rather a needless task) I should prostrate myself, not before beast, or ocean, or sun, but before one of those gigantic masses to which, in spite of all reason, it is impossible not to attribute some shadowy personality. Their voice is mystic and has found discordant interpreters; but to me at least it speaks in tones at once more tender and more awe-inspiring than that of any mortal teacher. The loftiest and sweetest strains of Milton or Wordsworth may be more articulate, but do not lay so forcible a grasp upon my imagination. (“The Alps in Winter” 281)

We have more details to form an interpretation of Stephen’s Wordsworth than we had with Mill; when we connect the dots we can see how Stephen’s returns to the poetry and place cultivate “awe-inspiring” emotions like those refined feelings associated with “transmuting sorrow.” Here we also see how the poet’s “mortal” words are not enough to

lay hold of Stephen's imagination fully; the "tender" voice of the mountains must be confirmed by experiencing the "gigantic masses" in person. In the solemn moments recorded in Stephen's alpine adventures, we can comprehend Hudson's speculations as to why positivists like Stephen were drawn to Wordsworth's poetry: "[I]n the enthusiastic pursuit of contemplation of natural law, these men commune with the Poet's forms and inspirations of love and awe and beauty, their souls catch a glow of piety without knowing it, the spirit of worship steals into them, 'like music from unknown quarters,' and their hearts unconsciously stream forth incense to 'the unknown God'" (67-68). As evidenced in "The Alps in Winter," Stephen could be said to commune with the poet's forms off the page, a spiritual response resembling the elevated "tones" he sought in times of sorrow.

In his discussion of *The Excursion*, Stephen indicates how an habitual way of looking at the world through the lens of "admiration, hope and love" connects the natural world and science in a way that even Wordsworth could endorse. He quotes only a few lines from the following discourse of the wandering Sage, but shows a familiarity with the entire passage from the fourth book of *The Excursion*:

by contemplating these Forms [of nature]
 In the relations which they bear to man,
 He shall discern, how, through the various means
 Which silently they yield, are multiplied
 The spiritual presences of absent things.
 Trust me, that for the instructed time will come
 When they shall meet no object but may teach
 Some acceptable lesson to their minds
 Of human suffering, or of human joy.
 So shall they learn, while all things speak of man,
 Their duties from *all* forms

 The light of love
 Not failing, perseverance from their steps

Departing not, for them shall be confirmed
 The glorious habit by which sense is made
 Subservient still to moral purposes,
 Auxiliar to divine. That change shall clothe
 The naked spirit, ceasing to deplore
 The burthen of existence. *Science then*
Shall be a precious visitant; and then,
And only then, be worthy of her name
 (emphasis added; 4: 1230-40; 1244-53)⁵³

In a voice which seems at times to blend with that of the poet, Stephen notes the need for blending of the disciplines in general as a problem of modernity: “The tendency of modern times to specialism brings with it a characteristic danger. It requires to be supplemented by a correlative process of integration” (“Ethics” 221). Stephen’s Wordsworth seemed to provide the means for facing that “characteristic danger” of “specialism” by degrees, by recognizing the “intimate connection” (221) between science and morality and religion. On this view, seeing spiritually enables the integration of science and morality through service as one “learns” his “duties from *all* forms” (emphasis added). This process is initiated and sustained by the “glorious habit by which sense is made / Subservient still to moral purposes / Auxiliar to divine” (1243-4)—a habit of reading the world with “keen sympathy” (“Ethics” 226). The “change” can “clothe / The naked Spirit” (1245-6) because that naked spirit has seen itself in its human vulnerability, an act of self-forgiveness which alleviates the “burthen of existence.” This “change” (1249) is thus attuned to the point at which human gives way to divine in Wordsworth’s conception of things. Stephen countered the poet on a similar point, however: “The ‘blessed mood’ in which we get rid of the burden of the world is too easily confused with the mood in which we simply refuse to attend to it” (“Ethics” 215).

Stephen, who was born into an educated family in the Evangelical Clapham Sect, had been a priest before resigning his orders and becoming an agnostic. He seemed to succumb to Wordsworth's axiom of a "Divine order" (225) because it "justifie[d] itself by producing the noblest type of character" (225) which Stephen associated with the healthiest mind.⁵⁴ He grasped this framework as a means of ordering his thoughts, or *ordo* in Hugh of St. Victor's terms, so as to soldier through sorrow:

The mind in which the most valuable elements have been systematically strengthened by meditation, by association of deep thought with the most universal presences, by constant sympathy with the joys and sorrows of his fellows, will be prepared to convert sorrow into a medicine instead of a poison The man who has learnt habitually to think of himself as part of a greater whole, whose conduct has been habitually directed to noble ends, is purified and strengthened by the spiritual convulsion. His disappointment, or his loss of some beloved object, makes him more anxious to fix the bases of his happiness widely and deeply, and to be content with the consciousness of honest work, instead of looking for what is called success. ("Ethics" 224)

Stephen tells of a continual process of fortifying the mind to withstand sorrow in order to "convert sorrow into a medicine instead of a poison," recalling the language of Mill when he pronounced Wordsworth's poetry a "medicine for my state of mind" (CW 1: 151). This way of reading the natural world is one that reads with a grateful eye because it can infer the whole, a practice wherein man is at once a part of nature ("by association . . . with the most universal presences") and distinctly aware of his human nature ("by constant sympathy with the joys and sorrows of his fellows"). When sorrow dashes a life and mind so ordered, that sorrow can serve as a mechanism for "detach[ing] us from the lower motives, and giv[ing] sanctity to the higher" ("Ethics" 224), thus "purify[ing] and strengthen[ing] by the spiritual convulsion." That is, a mind accustomed to the "glorious habit" of seeing *all* forms in nature with "admiration, hope and love" is optimally placed when sorrow strikes. In a late lecture called "Forgotten Benefactors"

given in October 1895 while mourning the death of his second wife, Julia,⁵⁵ Stephen suggested that as a result of great loss, “the natural affections become blended, if with a certain melancholy, yet with that quick and delicate perception of the suffering of others which gives the only consolation worthy of the name—the sense of something soothing and softening and inspiring in the midst of the bitterest agony” (256). In his “scientific system of thought,” “sensitiveness to ideas” more precisely becomes sensitiveness to suffering.

Stephen valued a particular form of feeling in Wordsworth’s poetry which moved the reader closer to the “great aim of moral philosophy” (“Ethics” 211)—“to unite the disjoined elements, to end the divorce between reason and experience . . .” (211). Thinking of poems like the “Intimations Ode,” “Resolution and Independence” and “Character of the Happy Warrior,” Stephen concluded that life’s difficulty on the poet’s view was to “secure a continuity between” the time when man relies on “half-conscious instincts” and when he substitutes for “primitive impulses” the “reasoned convictions” of adulthood (213). Stephen thus esteemed the point at which youthful instincts become measurable as feeling and begin to count toward the “invaluable data of our spiritual experience” (214), those “vague and emotional” inklings which are a “feeling of harmony, not a perception of innate ideas” (224-25). These feelings imply a “real order” (225) which is detected at the threshold of a related continuity, where “auxiliar” gives way to “divine.” “Secur[ing]” these continuities relies on going back to the early “Fallings from us, vanishings” (146) and on accepting a cosmic view in which such coherence exists, at least temporarily: an ideal order that connects instinct to conviction, paralleling the task of transforming grief from a primal pain to an idealized memory.

Psychoanalytically, this clinging to an ideal amidst pain fits within an economy of forgiveness as theorized by Kristeva for whom “[f]orgiveness is aesthetic”: “Forgiveness at the outset constitutes a will, postulate, or scheme: *meaning exists*” (*Black Sun* 206).⁵⁶ For Kristeva, “*Forgiveness emerges first as the setting up of a form*. It has the effect of an acting out, a doing, a *poiesis*. Giving shape to relations between insulted and humiliated individuals—group harmony. Giving shape to signs—harmony of the work, without exegesis, without explanation, without understanding” (206-07). Within Stephen’s poetic examples, such as *The Excursion*, an ordered natural world in which “*meaning exists*” is the given which sets up the form—the “postulate, or scheme”—whose laws “shape” human interrelations. This natural world “give[s] shape to signs” without judgment; it upholds the poetry in a “scientific system” which allows for absolution.

Coexisting decisively with the poetic world of suffering is the “world of the text” (Ricoeur, *Figuring* 43) which I extend to the world imagined between reader and poet. In that vein, Stephen “confess[ed]” elsewhere that his “one main interest in reading [was] always the communion with the author” (“Shakespeare” 3), an unsurprising trait for a biographer. Nor is such an identification too far removed from the one that informs the act of forgiving. Kristeva describes the identification with the “very agency of the ideal” (*Black Sun* 207): By means of the “miraculous device of that identification, which is always unstable, unfinished, but constantly threefold (real, imaginary, and symbolic) . . . the suffering body of the forgiver (and the artist as well) undergoes a mutation—Joyce would say, a ‘transubstantiation.’” This ongoing work makes it possible “to live a second life, a life of forms and meaning,” which may seem “somewhat exalted or artificial” from the perspective of others, but which is necessary for the sufferer to move past the pain

(207-08). In theory, we can imagine how an habitually open disposition is fostered by identifying with the poet behind the poem, as well as with an idealized persona such as the Wanderer who reads the world often from afar but always with “constant sympathy” (“Ethics” 224). Such sympathy might encourage a “mutation” by doubling back on the reader as self-forgiveness and the courage to hope, a ‘mutation’ inscribed in a literary theory whose subtext is the writer’s own pain.

Despite the poet’s presumed reluctance to accept that “intimations of immortality” were evidence of the “past experience of the race” (“Ethics” 212), Stephen located in Wordsworth’s poetry a model of a sound mind⁵⁷ which knitted together science and morality and which he furthermore needed in his time of grief. The model made sense on his own terms, but he was sympathetic to Wordsworth’s. For an interdisciplinary thinker like Stephen, such “connection[s] [were] formed through the subtle progress by which, both in the natural and the moral world, qualities pass insensibly into their contraries, and things revolve upon each other” (EE1 135-38) as they do in Wordsworth’s “Essays Upon Epitaphs.” In an 1881 reply in the *Cornhill Magazine* to Arnold’s remarks, Stephen shed even more light on the “scientific system”: “I have asked how far a writer’s moral qualities affect the value of his work; but the effect depends as much upon the reader as upon the writer” (“Moral Element” 48). Stephen went further to distinguish his position from Arnold’s: “To study literature is not merely (as has been said) to know what has been said by the greatest men, but to learn to know those men themselves” (50). In seeking general laws from the particulars of the natural world, Wordsworth conveyed a model of interpretation which did not want to deny or change the fact of suffering, as Stephen concurred in another essay. Rather the poetry presented the conviction that

intense feeling, even if painful, could be “transmuted” into lofty aims which were mindful of the human race: “There is no fact to be announced which will alter the truth,” wrote Stephen in “Dreams and Realities.” “In that sense there is no consolation. But it is some encouragement to a brave man to feel in the midst of sorrow that it may bring him nearer to his kind, and fit him to play a worthier and manlier part through the space that is left to him” (112). Like Mill’s response to the persona of the “Intimations Ode,” the “sensitiveness to ideas” which frames Stephen’s notion of a “scientific system” is an epitaphic sensibility.

Notes

¹ *PW*, Vol 5. Unless noted otherwise, this chapter will use the de Selincourt and Darbishire edition of the *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* which uses the texts published in 1849-50, indicated by “*PW*.”

² “1811,” *PW*, 3: 140. Classed with the Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty. “From hope, the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays, / For its own honour, on man’s suffering heart” (5-6).

³ I take the term from Noel Annan’s *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian*.

⁴ Matthew Arnold cited the two lines in Note 2 above (“From hope. . .”) in an address to the Wordsworth Society, before saying: “We are drawn to him because we feel these things; and we believe that the number of those who feel them will continue to increase more and more, long after we are gone” (8). *Transactions of the Wordsworth Society*, 5, Report of Meeting 2 May 1883. In his essay on Emerson published in *Macmillan’s Magazine* (1884), Arnold also referenced Wordsworth’s “paramount *duty*” of hope as he discussed the merits of Franklin and Emerson (12-13).

⁵ *Prose Works*, 3: 1.4, p. 62.

⁶ See the Introduction for further discussion of the word “transmute.”

⁷ In his *Poetics* (1852), E.S. Dallas writes: “According to our modern or dramatic idea, the poet is the type and spokesman of his age, and by means of his art he represents every thing as present. In other words, the drama is a crystallization of the present, the epic of the past, and the lyric of the future” (95). For Dallas, the “art of romantic times is dramatic . . .” (95).

⁸ See Landow’s *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows* for a more nuanced appreciation of reading typologically than I have sketched out here.

⁹ As early as 1822, in a reverent review, one critic wrote that Wordsworth’s “poetry is to him religion; and we venture to say, that it has been felt to be so by thousands,” Rev. of Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1820) and *Memorials of a Tour* (1820), *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 12 (Aug. 1822): 175-191, rpt in Reiman 1: 108-124. The reviewer may be John Wilson (Reiman has a question mark beside Wilson’s name, 108).

¹⁰ Journal entries, letters, and criticism related to Wordsworth in the Victorian period consistently and palpably record readers’ gratitude for what the poet had done for them. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for example, in a letter to Mr. Westwood dated 31 December 1843, described her admiration for Wordsworth and whether she fell into the category of “blind admirers”: “He took the initiative in a great poetic movement, and is not only to be praised for what he has done, but for what he has helped his age to do . . .” “Yes,” she wrote, “I *will* be a blind admirer of Wordsworth’s. I *will* shut my eyes and be blind. Better so, than see too well for the thankfulness which is his due from me . . .” (160-61), *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*.

¹¹ John Morley’s Introduction to his volume of Wordsworth’s *Complete Poetical Works* (1888) refers to the “too zealous Wordsworthian” who advances a “mistaken view of literary history” in making Wordsworth’s lyrical style a dramatic departure from the “so-called poets of the eighteenth century [who] were simply men of letters” writing in “mere metrical diction” instead of real poetry. Morley writes that Wordsworth’s poetry instead took the same ideas “in a larger and more devoted spirit, with wider amplitude of illustration, and with the steadfastness and persistency of a religious teacher” (31-32; 34). Morley does not refer explicitly to any names I list here.

¹² Georges Poulet describes this process of merging with the author: “as soon as something is presented as *thought*, there has to be a thinking subject with whom, at least for the time being, I identify, forgetting myself, alienated from myself . . . Reading is just that: a way of giving way not only to a host of alien words, images, ideas, but also to the very alien principle which utters them and shelters them” (56-7).

¹³ The dramatist Sir Henry Taylor succinctly expressed similar ideas about the means for appreciating the poetry in an essay on Wordsworth’s sonnets: “[his poetry] is to be read *studiously*. Mr. Wordsworth never intended so to write that those who ran might read” (*Works* 5: 121). In an earlier essay, Taylor elaborated on the poetry’s “sanative influence” as permeating minds of “peculiar sensibility”: “The love” of the “poetry takes possession of such a mind like a virtuous passion, fortifying it against many selfish and many sentimental weaknesses” (*Works* 5: 32). The poetry then does its work by “coupling” the intense emotion with “serious study, and as much of intellectual exercise as the understanding may happen to have strength to bear” (32).

¹⁴ For further implications of Victorian catholicity of taste for reevaluating Wordsworth's poetic career as self-deconstructing, see in particular the Introduction and Chapter 1, "Wordsworth's Anti-Climax and the Critical Tradition" in William H. Galperin's *Revision and Authority in Wordsworth: The Interpretation of a Career*.

¹⁵ N.S. Bauer credits the article to Maurice. Likewise, his authorship is suggested by *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice Chiefly Told in His Own Letters*, ed. Frederick Maurice, Vol. 1, 78.

¹⁶ Appendix 3, 750.

¹⁷ For a full context of the language of religion and poetry in the nineteenth century, see Stephen Prickett's *Words and The Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation*, 37-94.

¹⁸ See St Clair, Appendix 2, 487, for more details on the timing of copyright legislation through 1842, when the long copyright was reinstated, which meant publications were protected for the longer of two periods: 1) the length of an author's life plus seven years, or 2) 42 years after publication.

¹⁹ St Clair's figures on Murray's *English Reader* are from Charles Monaghan's "Lindley Murray, American" in *Two Hundred Years of Lindley Murray*, ed. Ingrid Ticken-Boon van Ostade, 39.

²⁰ Richard Altick analyzes the number of Bibles, tracts and pamphlets distributed by three important religious organizations in force during the nineteenth century: The Religious Tract Society, founded in 1799, The British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) To put the abundance of religious literature in perspective, Altick notes for example, that between 1804-1854, 16 million English Bibles and Testaments were issued by The British and Foreign Bible Society, an agency co-sponsored by the Evangelical wing of the Anglican church and nonconformists. The figures for Bibles and Testaments are derived from Browne's *History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, Vol 2, 543. Other suggestive statistics: the S.P.C.K.'s annual output of tracts increased from 1,500,000 in 1827 to more than eight million in 1867. Cited in Altick, 101-102, figures are from Allen and McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, 198. See Altick's chapter on "Religion," 99-128.

²¹ Altick cites Charles Knight's *The Old Printer and the Modern Press*, 260-62.

²² Altick cites book publication figures from the *Publishers' Circular* in 1880, recorded in *Journal of the Statistical Society*, 44 (1881): 96.

²³ See Talal Asad's *The Formation of the Secular* and Colin Jager's *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era*.

²⁴ "I heard a Fly Buzz - when I died -" *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ll. 13-16; p. 265.

²⁵ See Stefan Collini's *Public Moralists* for discussion of this later period in particular, 121-69.

²⁶ The two essays, originally published in the *Monthly Repository* for January and October 1833, were later republished in Vol. 1 of Mill's *Dissertations and Discussions*, 2nd Ed. 1867 as "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties." See *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 1: 343-365.

²⁷ This is a fuller version of the passage: "for months before I had been in my old state of gloomy dejection, though as I have already mentioned not so intense as at first; this continued the greater part of the first day, but the walk by the side of the Thames from Reading to Pangbourne, in one of the loveliest of summer evenings with the western sky in its most splendid colouring before me, and the calm river, rich meadows and wooded hills encompassing me, insensibly changed my state, and except a short interval two days later I had no return of depression during that excursion nor for several months afterwards" (CW 1: 150n).

²⁸ Referring to the *Autobiography*, Shumaker writes: "Description of thought processes—description with expository intent—is abundantly present, but nowhere is there description which makes people and places visible, tangible, or audible for the sheer joy of imaginative re-creation" (143).

²⁹ "Ode. Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood" *PW*, 4: 279-285.

³⁰ In his "Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews" (1867), Mill spoke of how poetry can direct its reader toward duty: "It brings home to us all those aspects of life which take hold of our nature on its unselfish side, and lead us to identify our joy and grief with the good or ill of the system of which we form a part; and all those solemn or pensive feelings, which, without having any direct application to conduct, incline us to take life seriously, and predispose us to the reception of anything which comes before us in the shape of duty. Who does not feel a better man after a course of Dante, or of Wordsworth, or, I will add, of Lucretius or the *Georgics*, or after brooding over Gray's *Elegy*, or Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'?" (CW 21: 254)

³¹ One reviewer for example, writing for *Fraser's Magazine* in 1832, compared Robert Burns and Wordsworth: "Burns had more of the heart—Wordsworth has more of the head of a poet. Burns transmitted the impression immediately as he received it—Wordsworth lays it up in his representative treasury, to be

excogitated as his own thought on some future occasion. Thus Burns always speaks from present sensation—Wordsworth from knowledge” (618). Rev. of *Wordsworth's Poetical Works*.

³² The recollections are those of Hemans's friend, Rose Lawrence. They are quoted by Henry F. Chorley in Vol. 2 of his *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans*.

³³ Similarly, John Morley described this temperament as the “extraordinary strenuousness, sincerity, and insight with which [Wordsworth] first idealises and glorifies the vast universe around us” (48), *Studies in Literature*.

³⁴ Dowden's remarks are made in “The Prose Works of Wordsworth” where he indicates that Mill “yet remained outside the sphere of Wordsworth's essential power” (126) because of the way he perceived thought as distinct from feeling in the poetry: “In the poems of Wordsworth, which are the most distinctively Wordsworthian, there is an entire consentaneity of thought and feeling; no critical analysis can separate or distinguish the two, nor can we say with accuracy that either has preceded or initiated the movement of the other . . .” (127). Palgrave's comments are made in an unsigned article reviewing John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* in which he disagrees with Mill's assessment that Wordsworth's poems are the mere setting of the thought: “what the poet has done is, rarely to give the sentiment without giving also the thought to which it is more nearly allied. He adds the reason to the passion—an alliance which Mill presently sets forth as the ideal of passion” (Rev. of *Autobiography* 83).

³⁵ The term “Bath-kol,” which in the Jewish tradition means literally “daughter of the voice,” signifies a “call or echo When the term is applied to a divine manifestation, it implies that it was audible to the human hearing without a personal theophany” (Dalman 4). This “call or echo” is thus a derived form, not to be confused with the original. One theologian writing on the ode clarified the secondariness of this voice: “Bath-kol” became a term for “an approving conscience”: “the rabbins intimated thereby that while conscience holds a relation to God's voice, is indeed the reflection or echo of that voice, it is not to be identified with it. Man has a connection of life with God, even as his being has sprung from God. But the creature is not the Creator” (Strong 366).

³⁶ *PW*, 4: 83-86.

³⁷ *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 70-74.

³⁸ “It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free,” *PW*, 3: 17.

³⁹ Seneca's *Moral Epistles*, letter 120, Sec 10. The translation is the Loeb Classical Library's in the Wordsworth Cornell edition.

⁴⁰ See Lawrence Kramer for instance.

⁴¹ Referring to the fourth stanza in particular (“I, loving freedom, and untried . . .”), James K. Chandler in *Wordsworth's Second Nature* aligns the “Ode to Duty” with “Tintern Abbey” and *The Prelude* insofar as it “rededicates the poet to a life of disciplined mental conduct; far from renouncing what those poems stand for, the ‘Ode’ may thus be Wordsworth's most concise articulation of it” (249).

⁴² *Prose Works*, pp. 8-25.

⁴³ Stephen quoted the second to last stanza of the poem to close an article which meditated on how and why nature impresses its life on the observer, even in the midst of nature's decay. He conceded that the “philosophy of Wordsworth's ‘Ode to Duty’ has been disputed, but its poetical truth is irresistible” (“Stray Thoughts” 313). Stephen then agreed that social duties can indeed be inferred from nature, suggesting that the living landscape urges the individual to fulfill a mutual obligation: “The everlasting freshness of the universe, the perpetual triumph of life over decay, is the final meaning of the great spectacle of nature, and the most forcible stimulus to doing our part in the struggle” (313). In telling contrast to Wordsworth's view of this consolatory process of renovation and decay, for Stephen writing after Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), that mutuality may be no less beautiful, but is defined primarily by “struggle.”

⁴⁴ Agreeing with Matthew Arnold's assessment that Wordsworth's legacy depended on keeping the poetry and philosophy distinct, Swinburne wrote: “His earlier disciples or believers, from the highest to the lowest in point of intelligence—from a young man like Mr. Henry Taylor to a young man like Mr. Frederick Faber,—all were misled, as it seems to my humble understanding, by their more or less practical consent to accept Wordsworth's own point of view as the one and only proper or adequate outlook from which to contemplate his genius and the work, the aim and the accomplishment of Wordsworth. Not that he did wrong to think himself a great teacher: he was a teacher no less beneficent than great: but he was wrong in thinking himself a poet because he was a teacher, whereas in fact he was a teacher because he was a poet. This radical and incurable error vitiated more than half his theory of poetry and impaired more than half his practice” (124).

⁴⁵ See Chapter 2 for more on the “father of individual prehistory” in Kristeva’s theory as applied to Wordsworth’s animated universe.

⁴⁶ Stefan Collini has a substantial discussion of Stephen’s essay in his chapter “The Culture of Altruism,” 60-90.

⁴⁷ In his essay “Wordsworth and the Victorians,” Paul de Man makes a similar point: “Stephen’s tone, of course, is one of moral piety, so much so that now one has some difficulty, at more than one hundred years’ distance, in seeing why Arnold felt impelled to react so strongly against an ethical emphasis not all that different from his own” (85-6).

⁴⁸ Arnold and Stephen’s separate philosophies about poetry and philosophy intersected in more than one way. In his influential Preface, Arnold wrote: “that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life;—to the question: How to live” (“Wordsworth” 46). In an 1889 letter to John Morley, Stephen described philosophy and poetry from a similar perspective: “I think that a philosophy is really made more of poetry than of logic; and the real value both of poetry and philosophy is, not the pretended reasoning, but the exposition in one form or other of a certain view of life” (Maitland 396).

⁴⁹ *Arnold Poetical Works*, 299-306. Orig. publ. *Fraser’s Magazine*, April 1855.

⁵⁰ Dale sees Stephen as “first and foremost a sociologist of literature and the first significant one to write in English” (197). I am in agreement with Dale on this point, but believe that “Wordsworth’s Ethics” does present an aesthetic of reading which blends more than one discipline, including sociology, with his scientific approach. Referring to “Wordsworth’s Ethics,” Dale writes “For what is most distinctive about [Stephen’s] literary theory we must look elsewhere (196). Dale’s excellent study stresses instead Stephen’s sensibilities to literature as shaped by its historical moment (197).

⁵¹ Stephen’s letter is dated 5 March 1876. Stefan Collini’s study of *Public Moralists* points us to Quentin Bell’s biography of Virginia Woolf, which indicates that Stephen had a hard time living up to Wordsworth’s ideal in his later loss of Julia Duckworth Stephen. “Quentin Bell’s account of the effect of Stephen’s grief on the family after the death of his second wife suggests a larger than usual gap between aspiration and achievement here . . .” (77n).

⁵² Letter to Charles Eliot Norton 4 Feb. 1877: “I went for a visit to the winter Alps, partly for the sake of a holiday, which I can get nowhere else, partly because the Oberland is to me a sacred place. I longed to worship there again” (296).

⁵³ *Exc PW*, Vol. 5.

⁵⁴ Stephen elaborated: “[i]f a persistent reasoner should ask why . . . the higher type should be preferred to the lower, Wordsworth may ask, why is bodily health preferable to disease? If a man likes weak lungs and a bad digestion, reason cannot convince him of his error. The physician has done enough when he has pointed out the sanitary laws obedience to which generates strength, long life, and power of enjoyment. The moralist is in the same position when he has shown how certain habits conduce to the development of a type superior to its rivals in all the faculties which imply permanent peace of mind and power of resisting the shocks of the world without disintegration” (“Ethics” 225).

⁵⁵ In *The Mausoleum Book*, Stephen referred to this lecture: “the intention was to speak of Julia without mentioning her name” (98). Referenced in Gillian Fenwick’s *Leslie Stephen’s Life in Letters* (124). Fenwick notes that this was one of a series of such lectures given in the 1890s to the Ethical Societies of London (124).

⁵⁶ Kristeva points out that this forgiveness “is not necessarily a matter of a disavowal of meaning or a manic exaltation in opposition to despair (even if, in a number of instances, this motion may be dominant). Forgiveness, as a gesture of assertion and inscription of meaning, carries within itself, as a lining, erosion of meaning, melancholia, and abjection. By including them it displaces them; by absorbing them it transforms them and binds them for someone else” (*Black Sun* 206).

⁵⁷ In “The Moral Element in Literature,” Stephen was explicit: “we may adopt the old and profound conception, according to which morality may be regarded as being a kind of health; or, if you will, as being in the sphere of thought and feeling what health is in the material sphere” (42).

Powers there are
That touch each other to the quick—in modes
Which the gross world no sense hath to perceive
No soul to dream of.

—Prefaced to Canto 7 of
The White Doe of Rylstone in 1836 ¹

LOVE IS ENOUGH: *while ye deemed him a-sleeping,
There were signs of his coming and sounds of his feet;
His touch it was that would bring you to weeping,
When the summer was deepest and music most sweet . . .*
—“The Music,” *Love is Enough* (CW 9: 63) ²

Chapter Five

Beyond Gender: Touching Mother Earth in Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone* and Morris's *Love is Enough*

When twenty-first century critics think of William Morris in the context of his Romantic predecessors, the first poet who leaps to mind is rarely William Wordsworth. But Morris's finely realized word-pictures of the natural world have evoked comparisons to Wordsworth's more mystical landscapes. Walter Pater was one contemporary who found the “simplicity” of nature as depicted in Morris's poem *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) “at first hand” to be a “strange contrast to the sought-out simplicity” of the earlier poet: “Desire here is towards the body of nature for its own sake, not because a soul is divined through it. And yet,” wrote Pater, “it is one of the charming anachronisms of a poet, who, while he handles an ancient subject, never becomes an antiquarian, but vitalizes his subject by keeping it always close to himself, that between whiles we have a sense of English scenery as from an eye well practiced under Wordsworth's influence . . .” (*Critical Heritage* 85). Through his own style of getting close to the subject, suggested Pater, Morris sees into the life of even ancient things.

Wordsworthian principles evidently inform criticism of Morris after Pater, but extended treatments of the poets together are hard to find.³ Perhaps more recent scholarship has taken its cue from reports of Morris's "special aversions" to certain English bards who included the former poet laureate (219). Morris biographer J.W. Mackail explains: "Milton he always abused though he sometimes betrayed more knowledge of him than he would have been willing to admit; Wordsworth he disliked; he had little admiration for the later works of Browning . . . nor did he care much for anything of Tennyson's after 'Maud.' Keats he held the first of modern English poets" (219).

While an admiration for John Keats and John Ruskin comes through explicitly in the works and letters of Morris, I argue for an implicit affinity between the poetry of Wordsworth and Morris, if not between their personalities. Doing so means inspecting a connection present in Morris scholarship since Pater, but often subtly. At the same time, I register Morris's professed "dislike" and otherwise near-silence on Wordsworth in his writings as a possible undiagnosed case of the "anxiety of influence."⁴ When asked to list his 100 favorite books for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1886, for example, Morris included among "modern poets" who had "profoundly impressed" him: Shakespeare, Blake "(the part of him which a mortal can understand)", Scott, Shelley, Keats, Byron and Coleridge. Neither Milton nor Wordsworth made the list of 54 works submitted by Morris.⁵ Despite the oblique poetic lineage, however, Wordsworth and Morris literally share common ground: nature informs their philosophies of art and faith especially to the degree these notions are bound up in reverence for specific locales and their legends. The aesthetic

practices of both writers privilege the act of returning to spots of earth made sacred by the sorrows and joys inscribed there.

Bringing together Wordsworth's late lyrical ballad *The White Doe of Rylstone; or The Fate of the Nortons* (1815) set amid gothic ruins, and Morris's medieval morality *Love is Enough; or, the Freeing of Pharamond* (1872), gives us a glimpse of the ties that bind these poets through an age-old calling. So juxtaposed, we perceive an epitaphic sensibility born of different times and muses, but of similar soil. Earth largely defines this sensibility; it remains after all else as an inescapable reminder of known histories of human struggle, and of natural forms and forces which exceed what humans can know. If the epitaphic imaginations uniting the two poets are veiled for some readers, however, their relation more obviously memorializes the end of one literary era and the dawn of another. In 1834, the year Wordsworth grieved the deaths of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Charles Lamb in a wave of such losses, William Morris took his first breath.⁶ Through and despite endings, then, pairing Wordsworth and Morris shows up the literary continuities of the periods marked off as Romantic and Victorian.

Bringing the poets together also makes room for flexibility on the critic's part: we better see that Wordsworth celebrates the "body of nature for its own sake" as does the *Earthly Paradise* (1868-70) poet; and that Morris respects divine places in nature (even if a "soul" is not "divined through it"), a spiritual sense more closely aligned with his precursor. To the degree Morris is not shown here so much as reading Wordsworth, he appears as a negative example of Victorians who drew comfort from Wordsworth's verse. I shall nonetheless argue that the two works evince poetic styles which allegorize the turning outward of sorrow so as to situate individual loss within a larger context of

renewal and loss in nature, a transmutation of sorrow which becomes its own tale. In the variations of this aesthetic manifest in Wordsworth and Morris, the turning outward of sorrow entails a reaching out on the part of the protagonists, in a spiritual quest which is both willed and wandering, and finds relief in touching a person and a place. In choosing to hope, characters regain a kind of hope which is yet rimmed with the violent cause of their pain. In their distinct ways, both poems center on how to “suffer suffering” (Ricoeur, *Figuring* 227).

The epitaphic imagination and the wandering quests which poetically enact its excursive nature thus perform the “work of mourning” in these poems (“Mourning and Melancholia” 245). Earthly cycles underwrite the artistic approach of both poets, but relationships of people to each other and to the natural world ultimately make this aesthetic epitaphic. A similar aesthetic in Wordsworth’s poetry, enhanced by the saintly figure of the poet behind the poem, offered solace to nineteenth-century readers who sought it there.

Allowing Wordsworth and Morris their poetic signatures, the aesthetic they share inscribes minds as well as texts, privileging the former as an ideal. Wordsworth’s poetry idealizes the “authentic epitaph,” one which lives on in a community’s collective memory even when graves go unmarked (*Exc* 5: 653).⁷ Similarly, in *Love is Enough*, King Pharamond’s concern is less with leaving his folk a “graven image / On the grass of the hillside [which] shall brave the storms’ beating,” than it is with leaving a different form of memorial, in the “darkness where dreams lie and live on for ever,” a “song for the singing that yet in some battle / May grow to remembrance and rend through the ruin” (*CW* 9: 67). May Morris described the land and the people who inspired her father to

preserve Icelandic sagas through his poetry, referring in particular to his visits there in 1871 and 1873, before and after writing *Love is Enough*: “The whole land teems with the story of the past—mostly unmarked by sign or stone but written in men’s minds and hearts, the story of their forefathers who had wrested from the

Land of deep snows and scarce hidden fires

a grim livelihood of hardship and incessant struggle” (Introduction, *Journals CW* 8: xx-xxi).⁸ *Love is Enough* and its biographical context suggest that Morris, like Wordsworth, values the “authentic epitaph” as a guiding principle of his craft. Both poets, of course, esteem the written word for perpetuating the softer inscription when the poets and those who inspired their stories are no longer around to do so.

The sustaining capacity of memory and the ground made sacred by relationship converge in *The White Doe* and *Love is Enough* in characters who face unbearable loss. Such loss serves as a call to duty beyond the suffering self, in tension with the desire for the lost wholeness of the mother’s body and for earth as the place where all bodies are rejoined in death. The distinct pilgrimages undertaken in response to that sorrow, however, part ways when it comes to the inflection of faith being exercised and to gender. The hero of *Love is Enough* answers the call of sorrow from within a secularized form of faith, a perspective examined by Florence S. Boos in her study of the poem as a secular theodicy.⁹ The Catholic and Protestant divide in *The White Doe* is only one of its representations of faith. “[E]ven in this explicitly religious poem,” writes Kristine Dugas, Wordsworth secularizes the eucharist. This “secular sanctification” occurs by means of Emily Norton’s communion with her brother Francis before he leaves to intervene in the

Northern Insurrection of 1569, and her bond with the white doe in the war's aftermath (Dugas, Introduction 64).

Gender matters are somewhat clearer: we find the responses of Emily Norton and King Pharamond are necessarily influenced by gender, but their spiritual natures go beyond gender in scope. Both Love and Pharamond are undeniably masculine. In abstracting to the godlike figure, Morris's depiction of Love exceeds that which is male or particular to the poet himself, even if Love's many job descriptions—"image-maker," "maker of Pictured Cloths," "Pilgrim"—suggest a strong self-identification (CW 9: 22; 37; 52; 64). Restoring Pharamond's manly vigor just as importantly concerns how and to what ends he will direct his desire.

Although Emily Norton is at one point a wanderer like Pharamond, her suffering is of a confined and feminine sort by Wordsworth's design; the poet's professed objective concerns Emily's ability to excel spiritually. Her appropriation of sorrow realizes that objective within a poem which is encircled with saintliness. In the ballad's first canto the reader meets the "bright Creature" (WD 1: 76) who "glid[es]" (1: 58) into the poem "[s]oft and silent as a dream" (1: 59) as she makes her weekly pilgrimage to "Bolton's mouldering Priory" (1: 16). Like the "spots of time" in *The Prelude*, the "lovely Doe of whitest hue" (1: 169) invites interpretation—in this case, by the churchgoers who try to understand the legend behind the doe, and by the reader who seeks the relation between reading the doe's presence and surviving sorrow, a vital theme of the poem. At the close of the first canto, the "Spirit's hand" then touches the harp as a voice issues a "command / To chaunt, in streams of heavenly glory, / A tale of tears, a mortal story!" (1: 334-337) The feminine natures of Emily and the doe are subsumed within the "streams of heavenly

glory” which drown out the “tale of tears” to the degree that maid and doe come close to passing beyond the earthly realm altogether. We end with the “Calm Spectacle” (7: 1922) of the doe in her “holy place” (7: 1894), the sacred setting in which the poem began. Returning the poem to earth, however, is the work of the reader who must extract the “mortal story” carefully tucked within the poem.

The mortal stories of both poems are represented as allegories of mourning. The differently-gendered suffering is re-routed through an intensified spiritual quest which coexists with the protagonists’ physical wanderings and returns, and which parallels the digressive nature of the epitaphic mind. We see this quest in Emily Norton’s ambivalent desire to carry out the injunction of her like-minded pacifist and Protestant brother not to hope, but to “stand and wait” (4: 1070), as her father and eight brothers join the rebel cause of Catholicism. As Francis predicts, she alone is left standing after her family is lost to war, the homestead left to “despoil and desolation” (7: 1586). In the parting scene in which brother and sister mourn their imminent loss, Francis “consecrate[s]” Emily with a kiss, sealing the charge to “depend / Upon no help of outward friend; / Espouse thy doom at once, and cleave / To fortitude without reprieve” (2: 596; 548-549). The charge reminds the reader of Wordsworth’s similar words to Coleridge in *The Prelude*: “no Helper hast thou here; / Here keepest thou thy individual state: / No other can divide with thee this work . . . // The prime and vital principle is thine” (13: 189-91; 194). This scene of touching empowers Emily even as she resists her brother’s exact orders to refrain from prayer. Yet her ideal involves fulfilling her part of the prophecy, a duty she undertakes in her own way by revising it to a “milder doom” with the well-timed arrival of the ghostly white doe (*WD* 7: 1805).

A different sort of spiritual quest drives Emily's suffering counterpart in *Love is Enough*. King Pharamond travels with his "foster-father" Oliver to the Northland, to answer a call from his never-met beloved, Azalais, a call which comes in dreams so moving that visions of her sad face rule his thoughts and his kingly duties go lacking (CW 9: 19). The breaking point comes when this internal war between deeds at home and desire for the dream-lover overtakes Pharamond's waking life and he lingers in a deathlike-dreamlike state. Why does a legend in his own time forsake all power and succumb to mourning an object he has not yet loved in order to lose? The reader has more than a primal scene to ponder. Morris's myth fascinates in part because of the psychological and philosophical crossroads Pharamond embodies. The distinctions being made (or not) between dreaming and doing, desire and mourning, not to mention the blurring between past, present and future, bring on a kind of vertigo in the reader even as the relevance to *The White Doe*'s spiritual crisis becomes plain.

Both poems question how best to suffer: where does one draw the fine line between hope and delusion so as to survive not only large-scale loss, but everyday suffering? In *The White Doe*, Francis protectively warns Emily Norton not to hope, as he leaves "[u]narmed and naked" (2: 515) to intervene in the conflict without protection himself. Emily prays for her brother anyway, bringing order to her own thoughts as she does so, in keeping with Wordsworth's disciplined approach to adversity. In her brother's absence, Emily figures out how to protect herself; she adheres to the spirit, but not the letter of his law. For his part, Pharamond heeds his dream-visions as if they hold a less-gloomy prophecy. Though he mourns now, the promise of communion propels him to seek the unknown lover who also mourns, but importantly, desires him.

In both poems the path of mourning entails a physical return to a place so that trauma can be adjoined to a larger history of suffering. That journey results in a bittersweet recognition which may seem clear from afar but elude the one grieving: sorrow assumes a loving attachment or perceived wholeness in the first place. “Love,” the godlike personage of Morris’s morality, who characterizes himself as both “Ancient” and “Newborn,” asserts the hard-to-remember relationship: “I am the Life of all that dieth not; / Through me alone is sorrow unforgot” (*CW* 9: 22). If, as the epigraph added to *The White Doe* in 1836 proclaims—“Suffering is permanent obscure & dark, / And has the nature of infinity”¹⁰—then the reader coming to Wordsworth by way of Morris can fault Love for ensuring that is the case. Jacques Derrida’s idea of mourning as the “twilight space” in which love is constituted also points us back from the bitter to the sweetness whose deprivation founds suffering. In this account, mourning is plural because also prior to loss: “the mourning that follows death but also the mourning that is prepared and that we expect from the very beginning to follow upon the death of those we love. Love or friendship would be nothing other than the passion, the endurance, and the patience of this work” (“By Force of Mourning” 146). This theory is in keeping with the words of Wordsworth’s Mathew, the “grey-haired Man of glee”: “‘the wiser mind / Mourns less for what age takes away / Than what it leaves behind’” (20; 34-36).¹¹ For both Derrida and Mathew in “The Fountain” (1800), mourning is anticipatory; it is inextricably linked to present loves.

Psychoanalytic theorists led by Sigmund Freud, of course, point us back even further to the “good breast” (Klein, “Envy” 180) as the first lost object of desire and the loving source of all mourning.¹² The point of this travel for the protagonist is to feel

again something like the originary loving relation through an exchange which helps the sufferer to name his loss. This accepting “other” comes from nature in the form of a white doe for Emily Norton, and in a dream-lover made real for King Pharamond in *Love is Enough*. Recognition by this other presence makes possible the forgiveness of self and of a world that would inflict such misery. In this way, the affects are gradually freed for re-attachment.

Neither an awareness of the Derridean work of mourning through which loving attachments are made, nor the specific foreknowledge that a loved one is dying, necessarily softens the impact of the eventual injury, however. This seems especially the case when trauma is bound up in the loss. I use Juliet Mitchell’s Freudian formulation of trauma, understood as a bodily or psychic event which “create[s] a breach in a protective covering of such severity that it cannot be coped with by the usual mechanisms by which we deal with pain or loss” (121). In such cases, knowledge of an impending loss is “useless. In trauma we are untimely ripped” (121). Pertinent here are Mitchell’s observations on how traumatic response manifests itself in “something other than the breaching incident” (122). Specifically, she looks at how persons who have undergone trauma use language and respond to recognition or non-recognition by another person. Noting the many factors which make up this primary level of acknowledgement, Mitchell asserts that there “is some basic aspect of this recognition which is catastrophically eroded in trauma. In other words, the breaching instance is only the weapon that pierces to this human level of the need for recognition” (125).

Emily Norton and King Pharamond are characters who have foreknowledge and who are still “untimely ripped” by loss. They respond to being recognized by a person, or

a presence, such as the mysterious doe—events which call up early psychic scenes, and which also take place in a meaningful natural scene. In accordance with the Winnicottian notion of the “holding environment” wherein the infant is held safely, both physically and psychologically (“Parent-Infant” 47), Mitchell’s approach to trauma asks: “Do we feel secure in familiar places and insecure in strange ones not only because we are attached to known objects, but because we feel the known environment sees us where the unknown one does not?” (123) Sorrow for Emily Norton and King Pharamond turns on a kind of reciprocity which includes the person and the place—an “environment [which] sees” the sufferer at the same time he or she seeks that recognition on faith. Mourning may begin with the infant’s separation from the maternal body, but insofar as Wordsworth and Morris narrate consolatory returns to places, mourning seeks its end not only through other persons, but also through a seeing (or holding) mother earth.

Scenes consecrated by loved ones which retain memories of suffering and joy, and the natural setting more generally, work with memory to enable the protagonist to grieve by indirection, in ways suited to his or her psychic pain. Gradual relief comes in the character’s wandering and return, a process I examine through “feeling” defined in more than one sense: through affects stirred by the memory-laden landscape, and by the physical touch which facilitates healing through mutual recognition. The grieving protagonist who returns to a physical scene thick with memories of the absent object, touches earth even as he or she asserts a kind of control over mourning in that action. In like manner, the restorative touch of the artist’s hand behind the poem must be taken into consideration.

The word “touch” thus refers in multiple ways as well: I draw on Susan Stewart’s study of the senses in poetry which explores how touch connotes immediacy and passion, and importantly for both Emily Norton and Pharamond, reciprocity:

Of all the senses, touch is most linked to emotion and feeling. To be ‘touched’ or ‘moved’ by words or things implies the process of identification and separation by which we apprehend the world aesthetically The pressure involved in touch is a pressure on ourselves as well as on objects. Although the hand is paramount, no particular organ is exclusively associated with touch; rather, the entire surface of the body is touch’s instrument. The early mutuality of the mother’s nipple and the child’s mouth is the paradigm for the reciprocity found in all tactile experiences and for the triangulation between gaze, utterance, and touch. (162-3)

Within the triangulation which corresponds to the “early mutuality” of the maternal bond, touch and utterance (or lack of speech) receive the most emphasis in these works. To press against another body is to feel that body’s resistance, to exert a “pressure on ourselves,” thereby increasing our awareness that we are in fact present within a body. As mentioned in Chapter 3 on the sonnet form, Wordsworth’s comments on the “Intimations Ode” which were dictated to Isabella Fenwick, well-known to us now and frequently quoted by Victorian critics, describe his boyhood need to confirm the boundaries between his body and external objects in this way. In annotations which surely helped to sustain the myth of the man behind the poetry, Wordsworth blamed his early “sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me” for making it hard to imagine his own death. “I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence,” he records. In such moments, the external world was felt to be so thoroughly a part of his “own immaterial nature” that he had to right himself: “Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality” (*Fenwick Notes* 61). My point is how touch regrounds the psyche, serving a function like a wall or a fixed literary form to keep the finite ever in mind. For Wordsworth, the

regularity of the sonnet fulfilled this need in the later poetry. The resistance of the fixed form, like the touch of another body, affirms and makes real that which it encounters.

Touch signifies bodily pressure, but it also refers to forms of contact beyond the flesh which incite memory and fantasy—the very kinds of imaginative flights which call for anchoring in the body for Wordsworth. Because touch can convey at once the material and intellectual exchange which helps characters to name sorrow, it provides a flexible form for discussing the spirituality which attends moments of intense union. Spiritual contact is variously expressed in the poems as characters remember the dead or absent love object, or reach out to the living to create new memories in lofty encounters. While these moments of communion defy easy categorization, we can say that *The White Doe* and *Love is Enough* present a wondrous natural world as the vital setting in which these spiritual unions occur, an environment which also holds the protagonists and their sorrow. In *The White Doe*, this natural world is aligned with a divine power, and in *Love is Enough*, with the promise of love with a capital L, a personification whose monologues are addressed to the “Faithful,” and have all the admonishment of a Sunday sermon (CW 9: 64). Important for the discussion of how to “suffer suffering” is Stewart’s idea of touch as an aesthetic “process of identification and separation.” Separating out what does exist, from what could exist, enables clarity and perspective on misfortune, if not always the assignment of meaning.

In tandem with their spiritual quests, the capacity of touch and the natural world work to offset misery by keeping just enough hope alive for the joyous windfall to surprise the protagonists. Pharamond’s search for the dream-lover connects him to the beauty of her homeland and an idealized self-completion, a lover who is also like a “twin

sister” (CW 9: 29). It is hardly accidental that the dream-lover initially arose in Pharamond’s mind five years before as he awakened on the “field of that fight” where the young king first reigned as he mourned his father’s death (CW 9: 27). No official mother-figure appears in the poem, only this female force who beckons as arms clash around him. As Pharamond lay on the battlefield, the lover first emerged from his vision of a “fair place of flowers” in a “mountain-walled country” in the form of a voice coextensive with the natural setting: “mid the birds’ song a woman’s voice singing” (CW 9: 27). Boos observes that “Azalais may be a quasi-natural force,” comparing her to Eurydice and other heroines of *The Earthly Paradise* (61). So considered, Azalais joins her natural forces with those of the landscape to temper Pharamond’s pain. She “fared” with Pharamond in his mind as he moved through “the field of the dead” (CW 9: 35). After the journey north, Azalais will recount “the moment mine eyes met the field of his sorrow” upon first finding his body “sore blemished / By sorrow and sickness” in the real life of the poem (CW 9: 61; 60). Along with the touch of Azalais, the “fields” of Pharamond’s sorrow are poised against his painful dreamstate as a means of reality-testing and as a sign of sorrow’s passing. His union with Azalais pushes his longing to an unexpected extreme, suggesting if love makes sorrow legible, then too much sorrow makes joy illegible and alien when it finally happens: “O joy hard to bear, but for memory of sorrow” (CW 9: 62).

Emily Norton survives her catastrophe through stoic duty, but her suffering is stilled by nature’s unexpected touch in *The White Doe*. The consecrating kiss of Francis and his words urge Emily not to succumb to grief, but to use the “force of sorrows high” to work on her soul’s behalf, raising it “To the purest sky / Of undisturbed humanity!” (2:

590-592). Emily indeed “sustains her part!” (7: 1803) But she succeeds in fulfilling the prophecy precisely where “her Brothers words have failed” (7: 1804). Against her brother’s prediction to “depend / Upon no help of outward friend” (2: 546-7), she takes the hand extended by nature in the form of the white doe’s affections. Because only Francis speaks in the parting scene, while the heroine remains silent, the poem makes the reader feel the surprise return of her family’s adopted doe over the power of her brother’s words. The reader is frozen out of Emily’s mind when Francis takes his leave. We hear her brother’s words, but there is no way to register the response of his listener, a blankness not unlike the mind’s failure to register the import of horror in the moment of its unfolding. Insofar as the reader can penetrate her well-fortressed mind, the most “mortal” exchanges presented from Emily’s perspective ironically occur with the doe and the dead —when the abandoned Emily receives the comforting vision of her deceased mother in the fourth canto, and when she communes by her brother’s graveside in the final scenes of the poem.

I. “bright about a story never done”

As if to keep the idealistic reaching in range of flesh and blood, images of hands appear prominently in both poems, especially in *Love is Enough*: holding, touching, making, and implicitly, in writing which feeds the spirit of the poet, and ideally through him, his readers. Hands which make songs out of sorrow thus become both concrete and allegorical means of separating dreams from reality. Within the allegory, hands correspond to the multiple dimensions of touch which assist the sufferer in bridging the memory of the absent loved one and the sorrowful present. In the physical act of touching the poetic object, and particularly for Wordsworth in revising that poetic object,

hands bridge the abyss between the seductive powers of imagination and raw reality by reminding the poet that writing is an ongoing bodily event. Insofar as the poet's hand corresponds to a creation which is never complete, and which aims to meet an obligation to something other than the poet, it is analogous to the characters' questing responses to infinite suffering which find recognition in an other. The terms used to articulate this obligation to another person or presence may be elastic, but the duty beyond the suffering self is firm in both poems. It is an idea which reverberates in Morris's comments on religion recorded some 16 years after writing *Love is Enough*: "Religion to me means a habit of responsibility to something outside myself but that something does not always clothe the claim to my responsibility in the same form . . ." (*Collected Letters* 777).¹³ One could argue that in *Love is Enough*, the claim to responsibility is the poet's own suffering; the writing hand fulfills a duty which is self-started, and works at a remove afforded by the poem itself, turning the past suffering of the poet and others into stories for future readers.

Within the endless loop of sorrow and the incomplete nature of language paradoxically lies the poetic means of transmuting sorrow. Finding promise in the seasons is essential to the cure, but Morris suggests that the cure's success rate depends on the subject's self-determination, even in the presence of a controlling force like Love, who calls the shots and ostensibly suffers himself. After Pharamond and Azalais have touched in the briefest of unions, Love warns his "Faithful" to "feed the fire" lest they become too satisfied. The "happy ones" must "hold / Enough of memory and enough of fear" to keep the fire going. The "hapless"

yet should praise your part,
Wherein the morning and the evening sun

Are bright about a story never done
 That those for chastening, these for joy should cling
 About the marvels that my minstrels sing. (CW 9: 64-65)

Under Love's direction, the "story never done" ministers as needed, "chastening" or cheering by a story lived in and through its telling. If we understand the poet as another reader of his text, the above scenario described by Love can apply to poet, protagonist, and reader alike through the imaginative world which arises from the text as described by Paul Ricoeur (*Figuring* 43). This model gives priority to self-determination through the event of participatory reading. Ricoeur draws on Martin Heidegger for interpreting poetic language as a "proposed world, a world that I might inhabit and wherein I might project my ownmost possibilities" (43). As discussed in Chapter 4, such a world constitutes "a distancing of the real from itself" (43). The poem "intend[s] being, but not through the modality of givenness, but rather through the modality of possibility" (43). The risk of this approach, as Stephen Prickett has pointed out, is an interpretation that errs on the side of being overly subjective (*Origins* 32). Victorian readers give us a model for using Ricoeur's approach with a hint of skepticism, however. The world of the text may have made Wordsworth's readers "feel that we are greater than we know" (10),¹⁴ for example, but those same readers who sought what they most needed in the text knew that this was an applied poetics, one that took account of the text's creation. Victorian critics tried to imagine the poet's thought processes as they interpreted the gift being extended by the author of the poem. But those same critics also seemed aware that the idealized world of the text met the real world in a reading practice which went beyond the words on the page.

For Wordsworth, a similar kind of poetic self-determination provides another perspective on touching earth as a means of claiming one's share of pain. Such efforts are evidenced in his returns to painful memories contained within natural settings as well as those reached through revisions of the text. His journeys to the River Duddon and his textual returns to *The Prelude* serve as prime examples of these two modes of meeting sorrow on its own turf. Touching earth for Wordsworth becomes all the more charged insofar as he lays claim to the role of poet-prophet. As sketched out in the first chapter, this impossible vocation steals into Wordsworth's life and becomes a life-work, as if without permission: "I made no vows, but vows / Were then made for me; bond unknown to me / Was given" (*Prel* 4: 341-343). Yet I suggest that the endlessly-revised autobiographical poem portrays the measured response of a "summoned subject," as Paul Ricoeur conceives of the Christian self before the word of God, in which an autonomous conscience mediates the divine call by interpreting and answering the "bond unknown" in this case (*Figuring* 264). The call to serve God ignites continual conversation for Wordsworth, as the call is often perceived through suffering and answered in verse, a pattern enacted and thematized in *The Prelude* as well as in *The White Doe*. The presiding theme of responding to the "weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world" (40-41)¹⁵ in *The White Doe* thus bears the weight of Wordsworth's own restless response to a divine muse who bestows meaning on his prophetic verse as well as the felt burden of earning its attendant grandeur.

Morris's more secularized calling to sing of great deeds like the sagamen of Iceland informs a life-work composed of many vocations, from textile designing to advancing Socialism. When he traveled to experience first-hand the land of the myths

which so captivated him, Morris figured himself a “pilgrim to the holy places of Iceland” (*Journals CW* 8: 67).¹⁶ His *Journals* which record the trips in 1871 and 1873 rise up around the writing of *Love is Enough* like the “grey wall of mountains” and “shattered rocks” in the background of Pharamond’s northern journey (*CW* 9: 24; 25). In addition to his own journeys north, Morris’s translations and painstaking calligraphy of Icelandic sagas made real his connection to the place and to the tales.¹⁷ A desire to embrace the sorrow of Icelandic struggle comes through clearly in the poetry written around this time.

The narrator of “To the Muse of the North,” for example, written in an illuminated manuscript for his friend Georgiana Burne-Jones in 1870, asks to be embraced by a feminine force described as “Mother and Love and Sister all in one”: “Come thou, for am I not enough alone / That thou thine arms about my heart shouldst throw / And wrap me in the griefs of Long Ago?” (*A Book of Verse* 43) The form of the question implies the speaker may not feel deserving on his own merits, or good “enough alone” to be granted the muse’s power. He may also ask rhetorically, am I not well-versed enough in grief to tell this tale? In Morris’s slight revision of the ending for the poem’s inclusion in *Poems by the Way* (1891), the question becomes a more knowing invitation to the muse: “Come thou; for sure I am enough alone” (*CW* 9: 116). Between the two versions of “To the Muse of the North,” the original poetic uncertainty of “am I not enough alone” echoes on in *Love is Enough*, where King Pharamond and his dream-lover both doubt their words will be “enough” to share the story of their encounter. In this regard, Pharamond’s vision and its anxiety over poetic competence recall the dream presence who commands the reluctant Caedmon “you must sing to me” in *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History* (417). The calls to and from muses operate inside and outside of

Love is Enough, and concern secularized “summoned subjects.” Like the God who beckons to Wordsworth through the natural world, the muse of the North in the form of Azalais makes a kind of natural music. She is more than a muse in a different way than is Wordsworth’s muse, however: In Azalais we find an easier complement to Pharamond than the divine muse Wordsworth calls and answers. She is a second-self who fits the idealized figure of “Mother and Love and Sister all in one.”

II. The Gothic Spirit of Touch

In Wordsworth’s theory of epitaphs, the artist’s hand and earth are mutually implicated insofar as the physical work of engraving the memorial stone sets the standard for the right tone to be struck in a given form of elegiac remembrance: “The very form and substance of the monument which has received the inscription, and the appearance of the letters, testifying with what a slow and laborious hand they must have been engraved, might seem to reproach the author who had given way upon this occasion to transports of mind” or to those flights of emotion which properly belong to the elegy (EE1 423-27). The deliberateness and the intended permanence of putting words into stone would seem to afford time for self-correction and composure, the sanative ordering of thoughts valued in Wordsworth’s approach to mourning. The “laborious” engraving of letters performs at once the difficulty of finding the right words for memorializing the other and the “impossible mourning” (Derrida, “Mnemosyne” 6) those words will represent. As the artist’s hand touches earth through the texts of both Wordsworth and Morris, we can imagine this labor as the material work of mourning. Turning to Ruskin’s essay on the gothic, we can see how the artist’s touch is inseparable from its spiritual work as well.

In *The Stones of Venice II* (1853), John Ruskin's chapter on gothic architecture extends the notion of gothic beyond Venice to a "universal Gothic" (181). Almost 40 years before "The Nature of Gothic" appeared, Wordsworth famously compared his own body of poetry to a gothic church with its main body and "little Cells, Oratories, and sepulchral Recesses" in the Preface to *The Excursion* (ll. 38-39).¹⁸ Further, Wordsworth appended the first of his "Essays Upon Epitaphs" to this meditative dialogue on how nature fashions the rural practice of keeping the dead alive in daily discourse while reviving the spiritually dead amongst the living. The poem was much admired by Ruskin.¹⁹ To say the essay profoundly affected the young Morris is to understate its effect. When Morris encountered it at Oxford, writes Mackail, Ruskin's essay "set fire to his enthusiasm, and kindled the beliefs of his whole life" (2: 275).

Ruskin's relationship to Wordsworth is not as easy to ascertain. We know Ruskin's views of Wordsworth shifted, but references to the poet sprinkled across Ruskin's writings suggest the depth of the earlier writer's influence. William Michael Rossetti thought Ruskin played no small part in sharing that Wordsworthian influence with others. Assessing the extent of Wordsworth's impact on contemporary and later poets, Rossetti in 1870 suggested "perhaps it is a prose-writer, Ruskin, who, preaching Wordsworth with conviction and fervency, has most availed to reimpart, diffuse, and fertilize, his teachings" (xxi). Wordsworth's philosophical stance towards suffering seems to have left a more lasting impression on Ruskin than did his poetic execution, however. Ruskin notably returns to a passage from *The Excursion*, for example, invoking it as he does in *Fors Clavigera*: "I take . . . Wordsworth's single line, 'We live by admiration, hope, and love,' for my literal guide, in all education" (28: 255).²⁰ Elizabeth

K. Helsinger has plotted Ruskin's complex relation to Wordsworth through the notion of "excursive sight," a term denoting Ruskin's gradual mode of beholding the aesthetic object (69). Drawing on the "Mind's *excursive* Power" (*Exc* 4: 1259) as articulated in *The Excursion* (4: 197), Helsinger's phrase explains Ruskin's preference for the Wordsworth of the wandering sage in contrast to the poet of sublime vision and "pathetic fallacy" who comes under fire in *Modern Painters III* (1856) (92-93). Ruskin's "excursive sight" unfolds in a "progressive discovery" (Helsinger 5) which favors the ordinary spectator's experience of the aesthetic object over the view of the poet whose very presence would define the object. Elements of Ruskin's "excursive sight" can be discerned in "The Nature of Gothic." This essay helps to enhance Wordsworth's gothic church analogy and at the same time suggest the epitaphic bedrock between Wordsworth, Ruskin and Morris.

Ruskin's essay on the gothic illuminates the poetics shared by Wordsworth and Morris in two main ways: through the underlying notion of the forms of landscape as forming human character, evidenced chiefly by contrasting Northern and Southern climates and their structures; and by the "strange *disquietude*" at the heart of the "Gothic spirit" distinctive to the North, "that restlessness of the dreaming mind, that wanders hither and thither among the niches, and flickers feverishly around the pinnacles, and frets and fades in labyrinthine knots and shadows along wall and roof, and yet is not satisfied, nor shall be satisfied" (214). This restless tendency, which Ruskin called a "confession of the Desire of Change" (214), manifests itself in Wordsworth and Morris in an excursive mind that wanders out and back again to take stock of what it has seen in a "story never done." For Ruskin this excursive quality accompanied a "confession of

Imperfection” in which “our building must confess that we have not reached the perfection we can imagine, and cannot rest in the condition we have attained” (214).

Confessing imperfection does not suggest there will be rest for the weary. To the contrary, the imperfect product garners respect for its flaws, yet its creator cannot leave well enough alone.

Morris identified his own restlessness as one of “two dominating moods”—“the mood of energy and the mood of idleness: these two moods are now one, now the other, always crying out in me to be satisfied” (CW 23: 81).²¹ We are reminded of the meditative and yet continually seeking spirit which drives the epitaphic aesthetic. Blue Calhoun has analyzed the tension which manifests itself across the body of Morris’s work within the dialectical pastoral vision of *The Earthly Paradise* in particular. Such moods suffuse the dual vision of *The Earthly Paradise* as the heroic quests of the Wanderers and the tales in the more romantic mode are held in check by an impersonal narrator in the classical tradition of pastoral. With this narrator, Morris retains the form of the “soothsayer,” but does not “pretend to ease psychological or physical burdens, to strive toward solutions, or to slay dragons. Instead, this song can only regenerate memory, remind man of earthly beauty, and create dreams” (Calhoun 67). Dreaming, Calhoun explains, is an “idle activity” for Morris, but “is less escape than creation of a compensatory image, a kind of aesthetic activity with social significance” (4). The movement Calhoun points up between contemplation and action in Morris’s earlier masterwork is not unlike Wordsworth’s own aesthetic which grows out of the “Essays Upon Epitaphs.”

The gothic spirit gives a different shape to Wordsworth's poetic theory as set forth in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), however. In Ruskin's essay, the "rude and wild" aspect of gothic architecture corresponds to the temperament of men who "must break the rock for bread, and cleave the forest for fire, and show, even in what they did for their delight, some of the hard habits of the arm and heart that grew on them as they swung the axe or pressed the plough" ("Gothic" 185; 188). Whereas for Wordsworth, a rustic's primary access to the universal presences of nature results in a purified language, the gothic spirit results in a different kind of structure, imperfect, hardened in part by nature's harshness. But for Ruskin the God-given vegetation of the land from which the building springs also inheres in the gothic, as if to counter-balance God having "made the ground stubborn" (239). The importance of the natural detail of vines or leaves to the gothic structure testifies to this gift. "The proudest architecture that man can build has no higher honour than to bear the image and recall the memory of that grass of the field which is, at once, the type and the support of his existence" (239). Like the compensatory images generated by Morris's "idle singers," the "grass of the field" is a kind of compensatory image for the "hard habits" carried within the structure itself. The intellectual leap is not far from gothic building to a poetic object that preserves the memory of the earth which gives rise to its making, particularly when "building" also refers to a habitual process. Poetry is a "primal form of building" as Heidegger conceived of it: "Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building" (227; 215).

Ruskin's essay makes the move from gothic to poetic structure, but it argues that by comparison, architecture more fully embodies not only one man's nature, but "the work of the whole race" ("Gothic" 213). In the hands of Wordsworth and Morris,

however, the stern setting and corresponding character which yield gothic architecture, underwritten by the “restlessness of the dreaming mind” (214), could well yield poetic artifacts linked to traditions larger than the single poet singing. The “noble restlessness” (*Exc* 4: 165) flowing from *The Excursion* (and poems in a similar vein, like *The White Doe*) through “The Nature of Gothic” and then on to Morris may constitute one such linkage. In his preface to “The Nature of Gothic” which he reprinted at the Kelmscott Press, Morris predicted that “in future days [Ruskin’s essay] will be considered as one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century.” Morris affirmed the “hallowing of labour by art” as “the one aim for us at the present day” (460), especially relevant as scientific advances dramatically redefined man’s relationship to labor and to nature. Although this chapter focuses primarily on two works which occupy special places in the work of Wordsworth and Morris, Ruskin’s essay on the gothic spirit hovers in the background. Holding in mind the idea of a gothic structure which imperfectly embodies its maker and the memory of its earthly origin, as well as the callings which move these poets to answer in song, we can better appreciate how the ground common to both poets is not only ground hallowed by relationship, but also ground hallowed by handiwork.

III. Absorbing Sorrow

If the unbearable sorrows of Emily Norton and King Pharamond are divided between their spiritualized quests and a ministering natural world at the level of the allegory, then how does the form of the poem itself absorb sorrow for the reader? It has already been suggested that by *The White Doe*’s end the untouchable aspects of Emily Norton and the doe effectively insulate the reader from the troubling “mortal story.” In

The White Doe as in *Love is Enough*, the poets' use of framing devices and metrical structure establish indirection as the preferred approach to pain, both within the poem and without. Framing tales, like fortresses, enclose tender subjects for the poets writing and for their readers. Ironically, two poems which center on physical and emotional proximity through touch are designed to keep the reader at a certain remove from the emotional content—and not only through the framing tales.

The inscrutable figure of Love and the enigmatic white doe both resist the reader and enact the protagonists' confrontations with the limits of language for getting at loss and its faithful companion, Love. The difficulty of the reader's comprehension, acknowledged by reviewers of both poems, also requires the reader to reach out further in order to share in the sorrow and grapple with its meaning, even if the distancing effects built into the poems make the hurtful subjects more tolerable once understood. G.A. Simcox's review of *Love is Enough* in the *Academy* in 1872 noted the burden extended by the poem: "in his new work Mr. Morris demands more of the reader [than the *Earthly Paradise*]; instead of abandoning himself to a passive fascination, he has to be penetrated with a profound and earnest passion: we have to live in the poem, not to dream of it" (*Critical Heritage* 208). In the *Quarterly Review* for October 1815, William Rowe Lyall held that *The White Doe* "however peculiar, is far from being unpleasing" (Reiman 2: 837). Yet it also "possesses great blemishes" including the poet's unsuccessful efforts to employ unadorned language: "mere simplicity of language is no merit at all, if it be purchased at the expense of perspicuity; and this is a price which our author is continually paying for it" (2: 843).²² This "price" is part of the reader's "puzzl[e]" (Reiman 2: 837), just as it is for the villagers who endeavor to explain the doe's weekly

pilgrimage to Bolton Abbey in the first canto. The poem “demand[s]” of its reader such active interpretative work so as to fulfill its didactic purpose, according to Dugas (Introduction 11). By design, the poem incites imaginative responses in both its characters and readers through the “doe as living epitaph” and the “tale as enduring epitaph” (Dugas 11).

Within *Love is Enough* and *The White Doe*, characters respond to suffering by using words and natural signs to name that suffering and its transmutation for others. Unlike “Love” in the title of Morris’s poem, however, words alone are not enough to do the work of healing. Rather, the poets’ distinct efforts to define the losses endured by their protagonists suggest that words all too often fail to measure up. Before King Pharamond travels to find his dream-lover Azalais, his dreams evince anxiety over finding the means or words for their meeting as “bodiless” he “stretche[s] hands toward her beauty” and “voiceless” he “crie[s] out” to reach her (*CW* 9: 29). Words and signs initiate the process of restoration in these poems, but only the will to reach for something or someone other seems sufficient to turn mourning outward so as to renew loving attachments in the present.

Turning pain outward means matching up affects, as evidenced within speech and silence, to the language of nature. In *The White Doe*, Wordsworth images nature as a “hand of healing” (1: 120), implicating the artist, but also the unseen hand of God, in repairing the ruined homestead as well as the ruined psyche of the heroine Emily Norton (1: 120). In Morris’s *Love is Enough*, as in *The Earthly Paradise*, the waxing and waning of seasons proffers hope that if human pain waxes, so too, will it wane. Linking one’s pain to the language of nature rests on the recognition of promise in ancient earthly

cycles and of human limitations by noting where words fall short. Although it works uniquely in each poem, when the sufferer is ready, the close proximity of psychic and geographic scenes potentially relieves that suffering. Even as the landscape can renew painful memories, it can also hold some of that burden. This is possible because as Emily Norton and King Pharamond discover in their separate pilgrimages, the signs of nature have preceded them in testifying to their sorrow.

In order to “live in” the worlds of both poems one must move past the regular rhythms and intricate framing tales toward the pain at the center. In his 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth noted the “tendency of metre to divest language in a certain degree of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition” thereby softening painful subjects (*LB* 506n).²³ This tendency of meter is true of both *The White Doe*, which imitates the accentual meter of Coleridge’s *Christabel*, and *Love is Enough*, which displays a variety of hypnotic rhythms. For *The White Doe*, the insulating framework includes a prefatory sonnet, a prose excerpt from Francis Bacon’s *Of Atheism*, and a 64-line lyric, “In trellis’d shed,” which precedes the ballad proper and provides its autobiographical context in Wordsworth’s own narrative voice without detailing his personal losses. Rather the introductory lyric implies the ways imaginative literature helped to restore the poet’s faith following the deaths of his brother in 1805 and his two young children in 1812. It was a time when verse no longer appealed to the poet and his wife Mary Wordsworth: “For us the stream of fiction ceased to flow, / For us the voice of melody was mute” (25-26). At this juncture, “Heaven’s breathing influence” bestowed a “timely promise of unlooked-for-fruit,” a gift which arrived in the form of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (29-30). The

allegorical figure, “Mild Una” (37) and her “milk-white Lamb” (14), soothed the couple’s suffering through her example of “female patience winning firm repose” in tragedy (50).

The relation of Una and her lamb to Emily and the white doe is not far to seek.

Wandering with Una over hill and vale in their minds, Wordsworth and his wife were finally enabled to grieve at a distance, safely enclosed “in the bosom” of their “rustic Cell” (21). A similar notion of “unlooked-for-fruit” is essential to finding solace in the fortified structure of *Love is Enough*, a tale-within-a-tale in which blessings do not necessarily line up with sought-after-dreams, and faith is professed through the constant cultivation of deeds which will endure.

Like the Wordsworths in their homely shelter, *The White Doe* itself is safely enclosed within epigraphs and autobiographical lyric on one side, and another lyric, “The Force of Prayer,”²⁴ plus extensive notes on the main ballad on the other side. Unlike Wordsworth and his wife Mary, however, Emily learns to let go of her grief not by turning to nature through literature, but by going directly to the book of nature. There she surrenders to nature’s soothing influence, a force which does not betray in her distress. Returning home to Rylstone before she is ready, the wandering Emily unexpectedly encounters her companion from years before the Uprising, the white doe whose presence gradually emboldens her to “receiv[e]s the memory of old Loves” in her old environs (7: 1773) and to mourn her loss.

In her devastation, the protagonist of *The White Doe* returns to a place made sacred by relationships. This is the case in *Love is Enough* as well, even if that sacred place has only been dreamed of. Characters pour part of their excess sorrow into the idealized pursuit associated with the pilgrimage in a gothic restlessness. Another part of

the emotional overflow seems to sink into the earth itself. Both Wordsworth and Morris image the natural setting as diffusing or blending with the character's sorrow, not unlike Tennyson's love for Hallam at the end of *In Memoriam*: "But tho' I seem in star and flower / To feel thee some diffusive power, / I do not therefore love thee less" (130: 6-8). Situating sorrow in this way closely resembles the convention of the pastoral elegist who "places" sorrow in the landscape. Ellen Zetzel Lambert's study treats pastoral elegy as a forum that "proposes no one *solution* to the questions raised by death but rather a *setting* in which those questions may be posed, or better, 'placed'" (xiii). In *The White Doe* and *Love is Enough*, characters must recognize that their sorrow is already placed or present in a setting that recognizes them before they can themselves place or put that sorrow in order psychologically. The exact means of consolation varies with the poem, but answering the "questions raised by death" seems contingent on acknowledging boundaries, an act which makes possible another form of renewal in a tale of affliction endured. In the tradition of pastoral elegy, Lambert notes the use of landscape depends upon the poet and theme, but the form is unified in the way the setting "remains a concrete, palpable world, a world in which the elegist can place diffuse, intangible feelings of grief and thereby win his release from suffering" (xiii). As depicted by Wordsworth and Morris, the sufferer who turns his loss outward effectively pulls inward all loss, human and seasonal, displacing his specific pain within a wider context, and indirectly mourning his own death in the process.

Connecting suffering to the signs of the natural world translates in Kristevan terms to tying the depressed affect to a third term. Kristeva has described this term as an "Imaginary Father" based on Freud's idea of the "father of individual prehistory" who

possesses features of both genders and whose loving presence is necessary for the child's primary identifications which lead to using language (*Tales* 26). Kelly Oliver argues that for Kristeva, identifying with this "conglomerate mother-father" amounts to an "identification with a fantasy of one's own conception. It is a transference to the site of the *jouissance* of the primal scene" (79). Through identifying with the mother's pleasure in this way, the child "can replace itself back inside its mother. It can re-place itself in the mother's womb" (79). When this theory is extended to the adult who places her sorrow in the landscape, the sufferer could be said to identify with this loving environment where sorrow can be placed until such time as it can be re-claimed and mourned. Placing sorrow in this way touches mother earth.

Through its ritualistic invocation of the lost object, touching constitutes a kind of reality testing in which affects are linked to the signs of nature in Wordsworth's allegories of mourning. For Geoffrey Hartman, Wordsworth's "touching compulsion" reveals a form of reality testing which tries to "undo the spell" by animating the "'one dear Presence' in hiding" in the *Prelude*, the mother who is not dead but "invisibly contained in nature" ("Touching" 22).²⁵ In Hartman's view, language is the ultimate means of animating this (m)other; the poet succeeds insofar as he holds onto the lost object in symbols or "boundary term[s]" (29), a process which "does not make absence present in the manner of gothic, ghostly, or surrealist fantasies, or animated spectres. The absent one remains absent in his representations. What is depicted is . . . the legacy of this absence . . ." (29). My reading builds on Hartman's essay but seeks to understand the poet's characters as much as the poet's own experience in language. Instead of touching the lost mother through "ghostlier words" (29), and starting with absence, I start with the

presence of the signs of nature as depicted in the poetry. In the poet's allegories of mourning, signs of earth like the white doe assist the mourner in re-attaching bonds. Further, the way in which earth holds sorrow in the sense of a primal parental bond presents a setting which "sees" the character (Mitchell 123). In *The White Doe*, that parent might also be a heavenly parent, but the process of mourning is aided to the degree the earthly sign becomes linked to mourning the lost object. This is true in both Wordsworth and Morris as earthly signs become linked to mourning—in the "field of [Pharmond's] sorrow" (CW 9: 61) as experienced by Azalais, and in the "very Doe of other years" (7: 1679), "This lovely Chronicler of things / Long past, delights and sorrowings" (7: 1694-95) which eases Emily's suffering.

In *The White Doe*, Emily Norton's premature return to Rylstone and its "trouble-haunted ground" (7: 1720) supports Kristeva's notion that the timing must be right for the mourner's affects to re-establish. Emily does so slowly, re-attaching to the "sylvan Doe" (7:1689) who appears and rests its head upon her knee in a sign of nature's beauty and goodness: "will not she believe / The promise in that speaking face, / And take this gift of Heaven with grace?" asks the narrator (7: 1696-99). By accepting as a "Third Party" (*Tales* 34) the doe's presence within nature as a sign of grace, Emily takes the first steps toward returning to Rylstone and transmuting her sorrow: "When we have been able to go through our melancholia to the point of becoming interested in the life of signs," writes Kristeva, "beauty may also grab hold of us to bear witness for someone who grandly discovered the royal way through which humanity transcends the grief of being apart: the way of speech given to suffering, including screams, music, silence, and laughter" (*Black Sun* 99-100). In Emily Norton, Wordsworth devises a heroine who

“becom[es] interested in the life of signs” and for whom beauty bears witness. The doe as beautiful object is both one of her kind and domesticated beyond her kind, but surely depicted as a sign of her maker. Emily creates her own image of beauty as well by joining her relative silence to the doe’s silence. Emily’s silence is exceeded in the poem only by the muteness of the doe (the heroine speaks 31 lines of dialogue of the 1929 lines of the ballad, although she is of course the subject of many more). We might conclude that Emily transcends her suffering in part through that stoic silence, supported by the doe’s presence, and on behalf of her brother Francis, for whom she is braving the disaster, the person behind the epitaph for whom she bears witness.

After her return to Rylstone, we learn that Emily “loved to go” with the white doe to “Bolton’s sacred Pile” where she would think by the side of her brother’s grave (7: 1831; 30):

For that she came; there oft and long
 She sate in meditation strong:
 And, when she from the abyss returned
 Of thought, she neither shrunk nor mourned;
 Was happy that she lived to greet
 Her mute Companion as it lay
 In love and pity at her feet;
 How happy in her turn to meet
 That recognition! the mild glance
 Beamed from that gracious countenance
(WD 7: 1838-47)

With the doe at her side, Emily eventually re-finds in Rylstone an environment that “sees” her. As Wordsworth portrays her by the graveside, Emily welcomes the doe’s “recognition,” but perhaps there is a deeper recognition also underway as she maintains her “stately” (7: 1653) front. Derrida imagines the process of mourning as being seen by the dead: “The one who looks at us in us—and *for whom* we are—is no longer; he is

completely other, infinitely other, as he has always been, and death has more than ever entrusted him, given him over, distanced him, in this infinite alterity” (“By Force of Mourning” 161). “This gaze” as Derrida describes it, is the gaze of the deceased: “it will always remain his, infinitely; it comes from him singularly, from him alone, alone as always, more alone than ever, over there, outside, far away. Far away in us” (161). Derrida’s syntax enacts this sense of being connected to the “far away” dead with his long list of adjectives which create their own distance before making their way back to the plural speaker in whom the loved one still lives.

Wordsworth also enacts the “far away” feeling of his lone heroine, but with his half-rhyme and odd syntax: “And, when she from the abyss returned / Of thought, she neither shrunk nor mourned” (1840-41). The couplet appropriately pairs mourning with returning as it suggests the imperfect echo of someone “far away in us.” By separating “abyss” from its referent “Of thought” at the line ending, Wordsworth demonstrates the distance Emily has traveled toward that other in her meditations. We are also reminded of the earlier scene when Francis shares his thoughts with the mute Emily before he heads to war: “’Tis meet that thou with me divide / The thought while I am by thy side, / Acknowledging a grace in this, / A comfort in the dark abyss” (2: 538-41). Again, Wordsworth utilizes the line ending to show the division of a single thought, this time between two living humans (“If on one thought our minds have fed, / And we have in one meaning read” 2: 578-79). And although the narrator tells us in the churchyard scene that Emily “neither shrunk nor mourned,” we suspect this is because she has already joined her “holy / Though stern and rigorous, melancholy!” (7: 1615-16) to the signs of earth,

namely the white doe's "speaking face" (7: 1697). Emily's "speech [is] given to suffering," in Kristeva's phrase, through a silence which is shared.

The doe is not Emily's only identification with nature, however. In the fourth canto, while Emily is alone and her father and siblings at war, she is strengthened by the memory of the fragrance of woodbine and the sight of the shed where her deceased Mother once "strove / To teach her salutary fears / And mysteries above her years" (4: 1034-35). Here the poet suggests what cannot be narrated in the "spots of time" in *The Prelude*. The "thought-bewildered Emily" (4: 1015) seeks comfort in the "presence bright" (1037) of her mother, "that bless'd Saint" (4: 1038) with whom she communes for the sake of Francis. Dugas notes how this addition to the poem made between 1808 and 1815 "illustrates the potency of human memory when it is supported by receptivity to the suggestive influences in nature" (51). Further, Dugas indicates "the action of this passage may thus be said to reverse the movement of the spots of time in *The Prelude*, where the boy feels he is stealing from nature: here it is nature that steals its way into the young woman's feelings. Where he was disturbed, she is 'soothed'" (Dugas 51-52). These observations support the idea that Emily turns her fears and sorrows outward toward nature in ways which are coextensive with her acceptance of the white doe.

Over a "revers[al] of the "spots of time," though, I would stress this scene's inclusion of the prayerful silence which is only implied in the earlier "spots." Here, Emily Norton envisions her mother who taught her to "worship in simplicity / The invisible God, and take for guide / The faith reformed and purified" (4: 1042-44). The restorative effects get narrated in a privileged moment in which the natural scene triggers a comforting memory unfelt in the original "spots of time" in *The Prelude*. Thus the

scene with Emily treats the trauma differently. The reader receives instead a rare insight into the young boy in *The Prelude* through the imaginative power which sustains this Lucy-like character “whom chance of birth / Hath separated from its kind, / To live and die in a shady bower, / Single on the gladsome earth” (*WD* 7: 1654-1657).

Like the writing of autobiography in Paul de Man’s estimation, however, Wordsworth’s text of *The White Doe* “deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores” (“Autobiography” 81). In a version of the fourth canto which was never sent to the printer (Dugas 50), we are offered another peek behind Emily’s cool mask as she wanders this time with “feverish cheek”: “Is Emily called forth to seek / The place she cannot find within / By restlessness or blank despair / Impelled she wanders here and there.”²⁶ Dugas notes in these lines the gothic “suggestion of madness or distraction in a lone virginal female” (49) which is toned down in revision “in favor of a ministrant nature and a particularized condition of the soul” (50). Although the gothic is differently inflected through the artist’s labor in Ruskin’s essay, we do perceive the restlessness of that spirit here in the poet’s conception of Emily. We also perceive the “blank despair” which does not make it into Emily’s “spot of time,” and which links her to the “visionary dreariness” (*Prel* 11: 311) experienced by the young poet in *The Prelude*.²⁷

By contrast, in Emily’s “spot of time,” the vision of her mother who taught her to pray, the poetry indirectly affirms what is only subtly suggested in the official “spots of time” discussed in Chapter 1—a spiritual experience which calls on the “invisible God.” In Emily’s “spot of time” the poem protects the reader from the “blank despair” of the official “spots” as the heroine’s emotions are sublimated beyond the reader’s reach. This remoteness which lessens the emotional impact of Emily’s tragedy may substantiate the

refinement of sorrow Wordsworth sought to portray in his heroine. By the end of the poem, we have evidence of Emily's removal from regular society ("her sanction inwardly she bore, / And stood apart from human cares" 7: 1877-78), and her remade society with the "inferior Creature" (7: 1850), but little means for feeling her plight. The sorrows of "exalted Emily" (7: 1885) must finally reach the reader intellectually, "far away" from the heroine, but close enough to imagine the damage.

Frustrated that *The White Doe* feels too smoothed over, the reader may understand why Wordsworth was still dissatisfied almost 30 years after he conceived the poem, citing a "feebleness of character"²⁸ in the style which subsequent revisions failed to emend.²⁹ Yet the poet was still said to regard the poem "in conception, the highest work he had ever produced" (*Memoirs* 313). Perhaps the "feebleness" attests to a mismatching of the fragile psychology of grief and the impersonality of the ballad form as Wordsworth employs it. In the 1802 Preface, he describes the process by which the poet "bring[s] his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs . . ." (*LB* 319-22). This intimacy may correspond to the "lyrical" in Wordsworth's lyrical ballad experiment just as intimacy in the sonnet corresponds to the elegy in the poet's experimentation with that form. Through the loftiness of Wordsworth's "conception" of *The White Doe*, the reader may be denied enough of those "short spaces of time" to establish a closeness to the main character. On the other hand, the poem may most succeed in the distance of death it establishes in a heroine "faintly, faintly tied / To earth" (7: 1883-84).

For Emily Norton is “faintly tied” to earth by the white doe, the third term in accordance with Kristeva’s theory, the presence that steps out of the forest at the right moment bearing an “Endless history that lies / In her silent Follower’s eyes” (7: 1735-36). For Pharamond, the third term is Azalais, a “more than muse” who is like the doe to the degree both are aligned with the forces of nature. The sensuous elements of the setting in this way combine with the memory of the lost object, so that the more powerfully-imagined natural world of which the lost object is now a part potentially comforts in a way which is at once psychoanalytic and aesthetic, or as Hartman has phrased it, “*psychoesthetic*” (“Touching” 19). That is, the “‘beyond’” (*Black Sun* 99) which is produced in order to take up a position outside the sorrowing self is produced in association with the natural setting. For Emily, that “beyond” appears to be “far away” in her imagination even as it is also attached to a living part of nature. Instead of fully detaching the lost object—Emily’s family or Pharamond’s dream-lover—bonds to that object are reformed so as to include the natural setting and to spur a new commitment on behalf of this lost object. Whether the blended notion of nature and lost object is called a “Third Party” or a spiritualized landscape, this linkage of signs (sorrowing affects tied to signs of earth) significantly jump-starts the ongoing work of mourning.

IV. Revising Dreams in *Love is Enough*

Like Wordsworth’s framing of *The White Doe*, Morris’s play-within-a-play sets the characters’ sorrowing at a safe remove. The intricacy of the layers-deep work also suggests a great deal is at stake for the poet: the experimental form in alliterative verse presents four different “planes of action,” each of which consists of a different metrical “texture.”³⁰ Through the layers, the reader is afforded a glance at Morris’s psyche

according to his daughter May Morris in her often-quoted insight on the poem: “No glimpse of the inner life of Morris was ever vouchsafed even to his closest friends—*secretum meum mihi*. It was a subject on which he never spoke except in *Love is Enough* (WM: *Artist, Writer, Socialist* 1: 441). Morris’s intimate friend Sir Edward Burne-Jones also confirms something profound was underway during its writing: “I don’t suppose he was ever so excited as with *Love is Enough*, except with *Sigurd*” [*the Volsung* (1876)] (168). Morris’s real life of course bleeds into the play; the pain of estrangement from his wife Jane Burden and her ongoing affair with Dante Gabriel Rossetti during the period are well-known to Morris scholars and perceptible in his writings at this time. Consequently, *Love is Enough* “marks a crisis” in poetic development, as Frederick Kirchhoff convincingly argues. The poem emerges in direct “response to Morris’s formative confrontation with the North” (“A Crisis” 298). The Icelandic sagas Morris translated with Eiríkr Magnússon so fired his imagination, that Morris made two pilgrimages to the land of these myths, composing his elegiac masque in between trips. The Icelandic jaunts to the sites of heroic struggles thus serve as yet another frame, as if to pool the sorrow from all sides of the multi-layered poem.

In journeys which are analogous to Pharamond’s need to touch the beloved at the scene of her suffering, Morris brought himself closer to the sagamen memorialized in the Icelandic landscape. He characterized his desire to make the Icelandic journey in a letter to Edith Marion Story: “there is no art there at all,” wrote Morris, “and there is nothing to interest most people there but its strangeness and wildness; yet I have felt for long that I must go there and see the background of the stories for wh: I have so much sympathy & which must have had something to do with producing & fostering their strange

imagination” (*CL* 1:132). An appreciation for the land and the stories it yields is clear. For Kirchhoff, Morris’s need to visit Iceland reflects a self-test of sorts: “To place his body physically in the Icelandic landscape, where, despite the sagas, ‘there is no art’ to obscure the fundamental realities of geology and muscle, is to test for the presence of his own ‘strange imagination’” (*WM* 218-219). But while Kirchhoff emphasizes the “separation” that Morris “confronts” between himself and northern bards (*WM* 223), I sense a closing of this distance based on the *Journals* and in keeping with the gothic spirit of his artistry. Morris’s gritty Icelandic encounters seem to “vitalize” as Pater might say, by touching what remains of these poets—the landscape of their heroic deeds, their burial mounds, and their tales.

Morris makes two significant moves in his final revisions of *Love is Enough* which bear on this touching. He makes explicit Pharamond’s questioning of the boundaries between dream and reality. And he emphasizes how “The Music” functions to blend in the reader’s mind its rhythms with the previously-spoken words of both Pharamond and Azalais. “The Music” appears in italicized interludes throughout the poem and serves as a reminder of natural cycles as well as a running commentary on the two lovers. Because “The Music” has its own distinctive meter, rhymed dactyls, it works like a score or a soundtrack which arises at the end of each scene, summoning up associations with its lilting melodies. For this reason, we can consider “The Music” as a kind of memory for the poem as its swaying rhythms replay fragments from Pharamond’s dreams like an unconscious and seem to possess a wisdom in excess of what the characters know.

In the play's outermost tier, two peasants, Giles and Joan, watch a masque, "Of Pharamond the Freed," as it is performed for the newly wedded Emperor and Empress. "The Music" and the "hauntingly melancholy figure" of "Love" (Boos, "*Love is Enough*" 53) appear both inside and outside this drama which is the main action, and which tells of the dreaming King Pharamond and his northern quest for his dream-lover, Azalais. The figure Love seems at once a god and a poet, weaving a story while serving as a distant double for Pharamond. As Love's attire shifts with his various roles, Pharamond undergoes his near-death dreaming episodes and arrives with Master Oliver in the northland after great hardship. Having sufficiently punished Pharamond, Love then appears with a cup of bitter drink and bloody hands—the same hands which will be identified with the salvific work of the artist near the conclusion ("believe / That from these hands reward ye shall receive" *CW* 9: 77). Love thus implies bloody hands have the potential to produce loving work as well as its darker corollary: loving work has the potential to harm.

Key revisions bear on the status of fantasy in the poem before that fantasy touches earth in Pharamond's kiss with Azalais, who is closely linked with earthly signs. The first of these changes occurs when King Pharamond describes to his steadfast friend Oliver the all-consuming dreams which have impaired his ability to rule:

Yea, thou deemest me mad: a dream thou mayst call it,
 But not such a dream as thou know'st of: nay, hearken!
 For what manner of dream then is this that remembers
 The words that she sang on that morning of glory;—
O love, set a word in my mouth for our meeting;
Cast thy sweet arms about me to stay my heart's beating!
 Ah, thy silence, thy silence! nought shines on the darkness!
 —O close-serried throng of the days that I see not!
 (poet's emphasis, *CW* 9: 28)

To a carefully worked-over section, Morris adds two lines which do not appear in one of the final manuscripts of *Love is Enough* but do appear in the version printed in the *Collected Works*:³¹ “For what manner of dream then is this that remembers— / The words that she sang on that morning of glory;— ” (CW 9: 28). This addition clarifies that the italicized lines which immediately follow represent Pharamond’s memory of Azalais singing. But the revision also brings into question the nature of the dream which is being recounted. This italicized couplet corresponds to another italicized pair of lines which soon appear in the conversation with Oliver. Pharamond speaks “very low”—presumably remembering his portion of the dream-dialogue spoken in response to the words just sung by Azalais. As befitting a dream state, however, one cannot clearly discern who is speaking to whom: “*Hold silence, love, speak not of the sweet day departed; / Cling close to me, love, lest I waken sad-hearted!*” (CW 9: 28) Both italicized couplets will be sung again just before Azalais and Pharamond meet, this time by “The Music,” creating an echoing effect and a fusion of the words spoken by the lovers through the rhythms and rhymes of this common figure.

In repeating this dream-dialogue in the central scene, “The Music” will also preview the last words the lovers will speak to each other, another set of italicized lines which are also anxious about the words which will preserve the lovers’ story. Pharamond will plead: “*Let us speak, love, together some words of our story, / That our lips as they part may remember the glory!*” (62) And Azalais will answer: “*O Love, kiss me into silence, lest no word avail me, / Stay my head with thy bosom lest breath and life fail me!*” (62) As the poem worries over whether Pharamond and Azalais will have the words to speak of their sorrow and joy, it leads toward the touch at the poem’s center as

the means of supplementing those words. And it sets up this touch to confirm Pharamond's reality after he has resigned himself to die rather than to continue in a state of suspension.

In addition to worrying if the lovers will find words for the moment of their meeting, Pharamond's awareness of his state of mind, and his desire to define it suggest that he is not as delusional as he first appears. Rather, when Pharamond and Oliver find themselves in a forest in the homeland of Azalais, Pharamond tries to distinguish between doing and dreaming as he draws the reader's attention to the pain of his love: "O me, which are dreams / Which are deeds of my life mid the things I remember?" (CW 9: 39) Pharamond insists on correcting his foster-father when he suggests that the king's dreams of journeying to Azalais were "sweet" as "thy dreams were aforetime" (CW 9: 41), before his visions temporarily ceased. Pharamond protests saying that he had more than one kind of dream: "dear dreams and deceitful, / When the soul slept a little from all but its search, / And lied to the body of bliss beyond telling" (41). Although "dear," certain of these dreams were self-deceiving. But Pharamond notes that his dreams during his kingship were more substantial when his "soul was not sleeping" (CW 9:41). The poet then adds for the final draft two lines which are not in the Buffalo manuscript and which develop the distinction between touching spiritually and in the flesh: "[my soul] knew that she touched not this body that trembled / At the thought of her body sore trembling to see me" (CW 9: 41). Further Pharamond's soul "lied of no bliss as desire swept it onward, / Who knows through what sundering space of its prison; / It saw, and it heard, and it hoped, and was lonely, / Had no doubt and no joy, but the hope that endureth" (41-42). Pharamond's trials have been sustained by hope which knows desire but not the

touch of his beloved. He is still caught “In a land ‘twixt two worlds” (CW 9: 54) in which to dream is to court spiritual death.

While he lies suspended between worlds, the earth offers a means of reality-testing in a way which is similar to Wordsworth’s “touching compulsion” (Hartman, “Touching” 22). In a passage marked through in the Buffalo manuscript, just after the part of the poem in which Pharamond describes his dreams to Oliver, we see the hero making an explicit connection between the stories which have drawn him northward, his nurse, and his dreams. Pharamond’s tie to earth seems to be the common thread uniting them. After arriving in the northland, Pharamond recalls the day his ship approached the “new land”:

For surely, I thought, nothing new I behold now
 But a land that the lips of my nurse told me tales of
 A land that was lying at every dreams [sic] end
 In my boyhood and youth ere my love had beginning:
 And happy I felt as if rested for ever
 As the ship neared the land; but all this faded from view [?]
 When we came to the city; and all things thenceforward
 Are but dreams of sick slumber—is this earth that I lie on
(Buffalo MS)³²

Azalais is the closest thing to a mother-figure in *Love is Enough*; as implied by the poem “To the Muse of the North,” Azalais serves as “Mother and Love and Sister all in one.” In this passage which is reworked for the final version in the *Collected Works*, we are afforded a brief look at the profound relation between the sacred northern country and Pharamond’s childhood dreams—his first muse: “A land that the lips of my nurse told me tales of / A land that was lying at every dreams end.” The final version, which does not include Pharamond’s memory of his nurse, highlights the “joy and fear blended” (CW 9:45), as well as his deathly dreams as the ship nears land: “the cold cloud of death

rolleth onward to hide me” (CW 9: 45).³³ What is lost in the revision is the implied bond between Pharamond’s longing for the land of his dreams and the earth itself. As Susan Stewart has observed, Aristotle “wrote that touch corresponded to earth. In its hardest form, as stony flint, earth is the touchstone used for fire; in its softest form as mud, it is mutable as water and at the same time, in its formlessness, ready to be shaped by our hands . . . earth is shaped and shapes us and takes our form into itself after death” (165). In this scene which does not appear in the poem’s final form, Pharamond (or the poet) seems to intuit that connection between touch and the land as he nears it. Through the muses that beckon and the earth that he “lie[s] on,” Pharamond could be said to make his birth and death touch in the edited out scene.

Pharamond does allow the earth to shape and renew him once his dreams and reality have become indistinguishable and he knows it. His faith is revived not only by the physical act of reaching out for his ideal communion via his treacherous journey, but also through his willing self-correction when he recognizes he has lost control of his own fiction. He thus recognizes the limits of his own power and succumbs to that fact. Despairing of ever finding his ideal love, Pharamond seeks Death and believes he has found it when Love walks onto the stage and into the action of the masque. It is only when Pharamond acknowledges he has been loving “a dream and a lie—and my death” (CW 9: 55) and is ready to accept it—that he is in effect freed from death by Love. In the tricky logic of the poem, Pharamond’s willingness to sacrifice his own gain somehow makes room for Love’s bestowal of “unlooked-for-fruit” (“In trellis’d shed” 30) in the form of the long-sought beloved, Azalais. Faith, then, seems to consist of a continual striving and sowing of good deeds without regard for reward but for having done the

deed. For reasons which do not add up, Love makes the case for Pharamond to leave Azalais and return to his people, which he does. Florence Boos observes that “Pharamond has longed and suffered for his love, and known it for only one epiphanic day, but the *memory* of this achievement later sustains him” (“*Love is Enough*” 69), a deeply Wordsworthian notion.

The kiss with the “muse of the north” which lies at the heart of the poem at once separates fantasy from fiction by grounding Pharamond through a natural muse who asks the air and fields to bear witness to her love:

—O bear witness, thou day that hast brought my love hither!
Thou sun that burst out through the mist o’er the mountains,
In that moment mine eyes met the field of his sorrow—
Bear witness, ye fields that have fed me and clothed me,
And air I have breathed, and earth that hast borne me—
Though I find you but shadows, and wrought but for fading,
Though all ye and God fail me,—my love shall not fail! (CW 9: 61)

Azalais addresses earth as the witness of her love for Pharamond because it bears witness to her own life. When she finds Pharamond, she finds his sorrow too, as if spread across the “earth that hast borne me.” Later, after Pharamond has returned home without Azalais, he will ask the “sweet wind of the summer-tide” to “Bear me witness to Love, and the world he has fashioned!” (CW 9: 75) revealing a mutual motion in which both characters appeal to nature to uphold them as they grieve the object they seem to lose before they truly possess it.

The aspect of “bearing witness” which seems crucial to Kristeva’s healing formulation applies to Wordsworth’s epitaphic aesthetic in which the epitaph writer’s sincerity shapes his words for the survivors. In Wordsworth’s theory, the “life of signs” which “grab[s] hold” of poet and reader apply alike to natural beauty and to well-chosen

words on the deceased. Where words fail to go, the signs of the natural world can “transmute” or carry across that silence by demonstrating that grief can be transcended in stages, like the cycles of decay and restoration. If Azalais should find these cycles are “but shadows, and wrought but for fading,” recalling Pharamond’s concern with dreams and delusions, Azalais can be certain of her feeling: her love “shall not fail!” Here we are reminded of Wordsworth’s dictum in the “Essays Upon Epitaphs” that the “affections are their own justification” (EE1 292). In conjunction with the signs of earth, Azalais and Pharamond imply that the affections themselves can be used to verify reality.

In Morris’s poem, Love urges his audience to seek him out in times of blank despair: when “lacking words to name the things ye see / Turn back with yearning speechless mouths to me” (CW 9: 77). He then asks his “Beloved” to believe in the “reward” which shall come from his hands:

—Reward of what?—Life springing fresh again.—
 Life of delight?—I say it not—Of pain?
 It may be—Pain eternal?—Who may tell?
 Yet pain of Heaven, beloved, and not of Hell.
 —What sign, what sign, ye cry, that so it is?
 The sign of Earth, its sorrow and its bliss,
 Waxing and waning, steadfastness and change;
 Too full of life that I should think it strange
 Though death hang over it; too sure to die
 But I must deem its resurrection nigh. (CW 9: 77)

The earth bears witness for the sufferer to have faith in Love’s “reward,” suggesting natural renovation as a model or form for making the “royal way” through mourning (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 100). Emily Norton and King Pharamond exemplify subjects who identify with the “sign of Earth, its sorrow and its bliss” as a third term, but they do so in such a way as to retain part of the lost object. The natural world and the lost object seem

to blend so as to become this third party which enables the sufferer to surmount grief, by going “‘beyond’” the self (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 99).

Both Wordsworth and Morris go beyond gender to get at a human perseverance which paradoxically can only be attained to the degree that human vulnerability is embraced on a continuum with nature. In *Love is Enough*, that continuum is realized within the larger cycles of artistic material production. Such an interpretation is in keeping with the observations of May Morris, who said of her father’s masque: “If love is enough, it is not the world’s love and contentment, but that final absorption in eternal good, that something-beyond-all for which the speech of man can find no defining words and towards which the thoughts of men travel down every path of belief” (*WM: Artist, Writer, Socialist* 441-442). Thus male-and female-gendered figures of healing in Morris and Wordsworth point beyond themselves to a “final absorption” within earthly cycles wherein all human cycles of love and loss ultimately turn.

Within the poems and intertwined with the poets’ lives, we see in Wordsworth and Morris how loving acts bind sorrow to memory through words and places linked to the love object, whose absence or loss then reinvests the memory so powerfully that Love can indeed proclaim: “through me alone is sorrow unforget.” Returning to the words and scenes associated with the passion enables love objects to be touched, if temporarily, and thereby animated in the present. The sufferer’s return to scenes thus charged with meaning touches earth even as it answers a call to action and initiates the bitter-to-sweet “movement of mourning” described by Derrida (“Althusser’s Funeral” 115). Touching earth transmutes sorrow by diffusing and generalizing it in a communal history of suffering, but also by joining individual signs of sorrow to signs of earth whose presence

implies an immeasurable reciprocity. Like the Wordsworthians whose returns to the text constitute a spiritual practice, this act of reaching out in person or back in memory to a consoling presence in Wordsworth and Morris becomes an act of faith and of engagement with poetry which itself consoles, a restless process which both poems self-consciously struggle to narrate. The separate struggles reveal much: in grasping for an elusive ideal within the poems, the poets metaphorically reach past death, and touch what death cannot: a history of affections and artistic striving. Thus while both poems point beyond, the wisdom of such poetry which attracted nineteenth-century readers seems to reside within history, in a sympathetic mode of interaction which does the continual work of transmuting sorrow.

Notes

¹ The epigraph prefaced to the last Canto of *The White Doe* in 1836 is from MS 1832/36. The lines are from Wordsworth's "Address to Kilchurn Castle, Upon Loch Awe." *The White Doe of Rylstone, or, the Fate of the Nortons*, ed. Kristine Dugas, 135n. All references are to this edition, "WD" followed by Canto and line number, unless otherwise noted. "Address to Kilchurn Castle" was begun in 1803 and not published until 1827. For the complete poem, see *PW* 3: 78-79. The epigraph, lines 6-9 of the poem, is immediately preceded by a telling description of castle ruins which are silent "Save when the wind sweeps by and sounds are caught / Ambiguous, neither wholly thine nor theirs. / Oh! There is life that breathes not" (4-6).

² Poet's emphasis, 1-89. *Love is Enough. Collected Works of William Morris*. Vol. 9. Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Love is Enough* will be noted by "CW 9" followed by the page number in this edition (there are no line numbers).

³ Jeffrey Skoblow's work *Paradise Dislocated: Morris, Politics, Art* engages the most sustained conversation I have found between Morris and Wordsworth in the context of Morris's *Earthly Paradise* and romantic poets like Shelley and Coleridge. Skoblow finds materialist continuities between Wordsworth and Morris. Blue Calhoun's study *The Pastoral Vision of William Morris: The Earthly Paradise* argues for Morris's "double vision of the pastoral" which combines the romantic quester's imaginative ability to "see into the life of things" with a more distant classical perspective (8). Phillippa Bennett's "Rediscovering the Topography of Wonder: Morris, Iceland and the Last Romances" observes that the "moments of 'infinite wonder'" experienced by Morris on his 1871 trip to Iceland "are a direct echo of those 'spots of time', identified by Wordsworth, 'Which with distinct pre-eminence retain / A vivifying virtue.'" These moments "were all the more memorable for Morris because they were uncontrived and unsolicited, all the more rewarding because they were liberated from seeking or intention" (36-37). Florence S. Boos's criticism has helped me to appreciate the link between the two poets. In particular, both the Introduction to her edition of *The Earthly Paradise By William Morris*, Vol. 1, 1-51, and "*Love is Enough* as a Secular Theodicy" evoke ties between Morris and Wordsworth.

⁴ George Bernard Shaw in "Morris as I Knew Him" noted that Morris "hated Wordsworth as far as any poet could hate the author of *Intimations of Immortality*; but this must be heavily discounted to allow for the overwhelming reaction against Fundamentalist Evangelicalism which made it impossible for the vanguard to be just to any poet who was under the smallest suspicion of piety" (xxxiii). *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, ed. May Morris, Vol. 2.

⁵ Morris excludes living poets from his list of "modern poets." The letter to the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* is quoted in the Introduction by May Morris (xii, xv), *The Collected Works of William Morris*, Vol. 22. Hereafter the *Collected Works* will be noted by "CW" and volume number.

⁶ William Sharp notes the poet's birth in conjunction with the deaths of Coleridge and Lamb in a retrospective piece in 1896, the year Morris died (770), "William Morris: The Man and His Work." Wordsworth marked the 1830s as ending a literary era in "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg" which mourns the passing of the "Ettrick Shepherd" as well as S.T. Coleridge, Charles Lamb, Walter Scott, George Crabbe, and Felicia Hemans, *Last Poems, 1821-1850 by William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis, 305-307. For more on the "periodizing consciousness" of the nineteenth century, see Susan J. Wolfson's "Our Puny Boundaries: Why the Craving for Carving Up the Nineteenth Century?" (1434).

⁷ See also Bks. 6 and 7 of *The Excursion*, "The Church-yard Among the Mountains." Wordsworth's interest in unmarked graves is evident across his poetry: for example, the Priest in "The Brothers, A Pastoral Poem," *Lyrical Ballads* (1800): "We have no need of names and epitaphs, / We talk about the dead by our fire-sides / And then for our immortal part, we want / No symbols, Sir, to tell us that plain tale" *LB* II.176-179, pp. 141-59. Similarly, there is the "blank earth" of the graveyard in "No record tells of lance opposed to lance," Sonnet 28 of *The River Duddon* sonnets, *SS*, 72.

⁸ A line similar to the one May Morris quotes appears in "Iceland First Seen" in *Poems by the Way* (1891) which refers to the "length and breadth of a land, / Dreadful with grinding of ice, and record of scarce hidden fire," Introduction, *CW* 9: 125.

⁹ See Florence S. Boos, "*Love is Enough* as a Secular Theodicy," *PLL* for a thorough elucidation of the poem as a theodicy in the context of Morris's oeuvre.

¹⁰ The epigraph is a 13-line extract from Wordsworth's poem *The Borderers*. In 1836 and subsequent editions, it preceded the prose epigraph by Bacon.

¹¹ *LB*, 215-17.

¹² See also: Melanie Klein, "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940) *Love, Guilt and Reparation, and Other Works, 1921-1945, The Writings of Melanie Klein*, 1: 344-369; Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), *SE* 7: 125-245; and "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), *SE* 14: 239-258; Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez.

¹³ Letter No. 1491 from Morris to George Bainton, 6 May 1888.

¹⁴ Sonnet 33 "Conclusion," *The River Duddon. A Series of Sonnets*, *SS*, 75.

¹⁵ "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," *LB*, 116-120.

¹⁶ Morris also refers to Iceland as "a Holy Land" in "The Early Literature of the North—Iceland." *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, ed. Eugene D. Lemire, 181.

¹⁷ Morris visited Iceland a third time near the end of his life, a journey taken for health reasons. For more on Morris's translations, see William Whitla's "'Sympathetic Translation' and the 'Scribe's Capacity': Morris's Calligraphy and the Icelandic Sagas."

¹⁸ *Exc*, p.38.

¹⁹ Letter 5 *Fors Clavigera*, May 1871. *Works of John Ruskin*, 27: 90n.

²⁰ Letter 50, February 1875. The line quoted is *Exc* 4: 760.

²¹ "The Aims of Art" (1886).

²² *Quarterly Review*, 14 (Oct. 1815) 201-225 rpt *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. with intro. Donald H. Reiman, Vol. 2. This particular review goes into more depth about the reader's difficulty: "As a mere narrative, it does not possess much interest; the story is told, as it were, in scraps; a few prominent scenes are selected, and the circumstances connect them left pretty much to the reader's imagination; and after all, instead of a denouement, we have merely the explanation of a certain strange phenomenon which had puzzled rather than interested our curiosity" (Reiman 837).

²³ Appendix 3, 755.

²⁴ "The Force of Prayer" was removed from the poem after 1820 but the notes to *The White Doe* which included topographical detail of the scene near Bolton Priory from Whitaker's *Antiquities and History of Craven* as well as notes on the ballad "The Rising of the North" remained as an appendix.

²⁵ Hartman quotes from the "blest the Babe" passage from *The Prelude*, 1850 version, 2: 238.

²⁶ Dugas points to this scene in her Introduction. These particular lines of MS 62, p. 43a which did not make it to the printer appear in the Cornell *White Doe* "Transcriptions" on p. 329.

²⁷ In *The White Doe*, Emily's father Old Norton is the one who experiences these feelings in the 1815 version as he looks at the banner and suddenly thinks of his daughter: "Despondency unfelt before: a shock of intimations vain, / Blank fear, and superstitious pain" (3: 869-871). "Blank fear" is revised to "dismay" in the 1850 version, canto 3: 867, *PW*, Vol. 3.

²⁸ Reminiscences of Justice John Taylor Coleridge, October 1836, cited in Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, 2: 313.

²⁹ Wordsworth was amply informed of the poem's faults by critics who included Coleridge and Charles Lamb and whose comments he apparently took to heart in revision. See Dugas's Introduction to *The White Doe* for the full context of his revisions.

³⁰ J.W. Mackail makes evident the poem's intricacy with his detailed description of the "texture" of meter leading up to the entrance of the beloved, Azalais. The meters used are "the short octosyllabic couplet, the heroic decasyllable, the alliterative unrhymed verse of the body of the play, and, for the 'Music,' an exquisite invention of rhymed dactyls" (283).

³¹ The manuscript of *Love is Enough* which I reference is held by Special Collections / Rare Books at the State University of New York at Buffalo. It is a manuscript in Morris's hand, bound in red leather, marked throughout with the poet's revisions, also in his hand. These appear to be some of the final revisions made to the poem before being printed in the *Collected Works*. The provenance as best I can trace it begins with Laurence W. Hodson near Wolverhampton whose book plate is pasted in the volume. In 1906, Hodson's library was purchased by Charles Fairfax Murray according to David B. Elliott in *Charles Fairfax Murray, the Unknown Pre-Raphaelite*: "Fairfax Murray was at last able to possess the greater part of the original manuscripts of William Morris's works. It was a further step towards achieving his private goal of accumulating the manuscripts, drawings, and personal papers of the three colossi of his early years, Morris, Burne-Jones, and Rossetti" (167). Morris's daughter May Morris notes in her 1936 volume *William*

Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist that the drafts of *Love is Enough* “are no longer in my hands, being among the manuscripts formerly owned by Fairfax Murray and now unhappily dispersed; so I can no more at this point than refer to my former notes” (1: 443). The volume is now part of the Thomas B. Lockwood Collection. Lockwood’s library was donated to the University of Buffalo in 1935 (1). *Special Collections of the University Libraries State University of New York at Buffalo*, ed. William McPherson and Manuel D. Lopez.

³² Where I have indicated a bracketed question mark [?], I am unable to make out the exact word with certainty. The marked-through passage appears to be an earlier version of Pharamond’s speech at the top of p. 45 in *CW*: 9.

³³ The most we learn about the early maternal bond in the final version occurs after Pharamond has returned home without Azalais, as he stands before his palace recollecting how he was born to rule: “Yea, I was king once; the songs sung o’er my cradle / Were ballads of battle and deeds of my fathers” (*CW* 9: 69).

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