WORDSOWRTH'S POETRY OF ALLUSION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis shows that allusion is not a superficial ornament in Wordsworth's poetry (the 'great period'), but a fundamental poetic principle. It reassesses the critical definition of literary 'allusion', and considers its place in theories of literary relations, using it to interrogate those theories. Chapter one finds that 'allusion' has been too narrowly defined, and suggests ways of broadening the understanding of how allusion works. Chapters two and three show that Wordsworth uses allusion to explore two key issues in which allusion is itself implicated: the limitations of language, and poetic authority. A typological tradition of allusion challenges Harold Bloom's theory of the 'anxiety of influence'. Chapters four to six show that Wordsworth's relations to Shakespeare and to Milton cannot be considered in isolation from one another, but are in dialogue. Milton is more suggestive of influence, Shakespeare of intertextuality. In 'Nutting', submerged allusions to As You Like It balance the more common reading of this poem in its Miltonic mode. In Ruth, Shakespearean allusion enacts a move towards the shared, generic language of pastoral, the anonymous voices of the ballad realm. In Chapter seven, a reading of the Intimations Ode in the light of its many (claimed) sources tests both the distinction between traditionally-considered 'allusion' and generic convention, and also the validity of source-criticism. In considering two groups of poems, the last two chapters complicate the definition of 'allusion' in several ways. It is suggested that the most self-conscious kind of allusion frequently includes itself within the sphere of its own reference, but also that allusion may be made with unconscious intention, and that accidental linguistic duplication can have allusive effects. Wordsworth's motivations in using the whole range of allusion anticipate modern literary-relations theories. The thesis ends by demonstrating the way in which the allusive code highlights the poems' personal, moral, and political concerns, effecting a move away from Bloom's influence (which denies a world of reference beyond poetry), towards intertextuality's historicist understanding.
**ABBREVIATIONS**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ELH</td>
<td><em>English Literary History</em></td>
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NOTE ON EDITIONS

My choice of texts is pragmatic, balancing availability with accuracy and clarity of the editors' procedures. References to The Prelude are to the 1805 version, in The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850, ed by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams & Stephen Gill (New York & London: Norton, 1979). My text for The Excursion (and the 'Prospectus') is John O. Hayden's, in volume II of his William Wordsworth: The Poems (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1981). References to the Reading Texts and transcriptions of the Cornell editions of Wordsworth's poetry, which are frequent, are in each instance indicated. Otherwise, where no reference is given (as in the case of poems not yet edited by Cornell, or for convenience when no textual significance is involved), the text is that of PW.

References to the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads are to the 1802 text, as it is the earliest version of the expanded piece, in Michael Mason's Lyrical Ballads (London & New York: Longman, 1992). References to Wordsworth's other prose works are to W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser's three volume edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

References to Dorothy Wordsworth's Grasmere Journals are to Pamela Woots edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); those to the other journals are to Ernest de Selincourt's two volume edition (London: Macmillan, 1941).


NOTE ON STYLE

I have followed the guidelines of the MHRA Style Book: Notes for Authors, Editors, and Writers of Theses, 5th edn (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1996). First references to books and articles appear in footnotes with full bibliographical details. Subsequent references take the shortest intelligible form and are included, whenever possible, within the main text. All texts cited also appear in the bibliography, along with other works which are relevant to, or have had influence upon, the thesis.
PART I: MATERIALS AND APPROACHES
PREFACE

At three moments in *The Excursion*, Wordsworth praises the 'sweet influence' of nature. In Book I, it holds first place in the Wanderer's heart, despite his devotion to books — Milton's poetry in particular (I 244-79). But the 'sweet influence' that is greater than Milton, is itself borrowed from Milton, who had described the stars as 'shedding sweet influence' (*Paradise Lost* VII 375). Ironically Wordsworth prioritizes natural above literary influence, but in the words of another poet. In the second instance, he too describes the stars, as Nature's 'beautiful array of forms / Shedding sweet influence from above'. It is hoped that this natural influence will alleviate a (very literary) lover's pain, whilst he constructs a 'calendar of flowers' — a kind of literal 'anthology' (VI 118-88). Finally, Nature's 'sweet influence' becomes inspirational, in the shadowy figure of 'the rural Muse' under whose influence the 'Poet speaks' (IX 518-21).

In each case, whilst 'sweet influence' is claimed as Nature's, not literature's, power, literature is at the heart of that claim. In alluding to Milton's image of astral 'influence', Wordsworth necessarily alludes to Milton's poetic influence, even though it is Nature's that he explicitly celebrates. It has long been recognized that Wordsworth was very well read, and made great use of his reading in his poetry. As this trio of allusive 'influences' show, his dependence on literature is inextricable from the other sources of his creativity. Allusion is not a superficial ornament in Wordsworth's poetry, but a foundational principle. It is often self-reflexive, exploring the literary relations of which it is an expression, and the poetic processes of which those relations are an integral part.

Wordsworth's early and intense love of books, described in Book V of *The Prelude* — where Ann Wordsworth, and her death, are remembered — is a displacement of the infant's attachment to his mother. The feeding babe of Book II becomes a child who 'read, devouring as I read, ... desperate', feeding his 'dumb yearnings, hidden appetites [which]... must have their food', 'cravings for the marvellous' (V 511-12, 530-31, 564). Such a 'desperate' feeding, like the baby's, is also erotic. Books have the power to 'bewitch', to 'entrance', to 'move us with conscious pleasure' in 'raptures' (II. 179, 573, 568, 569). Poetry is 'a passion', the child is 'stirred to ecstasy' (II. 579, 614) and, though this stage and the literary tastes attendant on it are, like the infantile stages of sexuality, outgrown (II. 568-75), a trace remains, to surface in the dream of the Arab-Quixote, in which the dreamer too is 'crazed / By love' and anxiousness', 'half-possessed' in 'such deep entrancement' (II. 144-45, 160, 162).
There are also hints that books were an escape from despotic grandparents. Wordworth was unhappy at Penrith – in the two anecdotes from this period recorded in the Autobiographical Memoranda, young William storms up to the attic, where he considers killing himself, and slashes a family portrait with his spinning-top whip.¹ In Book V of The Prelude, Wordworth defends ‘the wishing-cap / Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat / Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood, / And Sabra in the forest with St George’ (ll. 364-67). It is a defence of escapism: ‘The child whose love is here, at least doth reap / One precious gain – that he forgets himself’ (ll. 368-69); Fortunatus’s hat – a magical transporting device, and Jack’s disappearing-coat, represent the escape that is afforded by reading. If the drowned man of Esthwaite is not only a real dead body, but also a memory of the recently deceased mother, rising up from the lake of memory, then the ‘sights ... among the shining streams / Of fairyland, the forests of romance’ (ll. 476-77) protect the child not only from sensory horror, but from emotional trauma.²

Wordworth’s passion for books rivals his passion for nature, so that the two worlds are often paired, or described in terms of one another. At Cambridge, Wordworth continues ‘a wild, unworldly-minded youth, given up / To Nature and to books’ (IV 281-82), where trivial pleasures are ‘a poor exchange / For books and Nature’ (ll. 306-07). Earlier, the verses that Wordworth and his friend Fleming recited were powerful enough to usurp the place of the landscape, so that the boys are said to walk

² A sympathetic account of the value that Wordworth found in fairy tales and romances is David Wiener’s ‘Wordsworth, Books, and the Growth of a Poet’s Mind’, JEGP 74 (1975), 209-20. Romances afford an escape from human society until the child is capable of participation, and stimulate the creative appreciation of nature. Their supernatural element stirs the imagination with its first ideas of the infinite. For an entirely different, historicist, perspective see Alan Richardson, ‘Wordsworth, Fairy Tales, and the Politics of Children’s Reading’, in Romanticism and Children’s Literature in Nineteenth-Century England, ed by James Holt McGavran, Jr (Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 34-53 (also, Richardson’s Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism, 8 (Cambridge: CUP, 1994)). Richardson explores the politicized defence of fairy tales which are seen as ‘a harmless, pacifying alternative to radical intellectualism’. Wordworth’s advocating of them is thus a feature of his Burkean conservatism. (Richardson deals with the ideological motives underlying Wordworth’s recommendations of such literature to others, not with his own childhood experience of it.)
In that delicious world of poesy,
... a never-ending show,
With music, incense, festival, and flowers!

(V 605-07)

Wordsworth recalls himself and Coleridge 'wandering', not through the landscape, but

Through heights and hollows and bye-spots of tales
Rich with indigenous produce, open ground
Of fancy, happy pastures ranged at will

(V 234-37)

and whilst 'on Quantock's grassy hills', the two 'wandered in wild poesy' (XIII 393, 414). Not only does the mind become its own place in Wordsworth's poetry, but its creations, too, are another landscape. 'Dreams, books are each a world' ('Personal Talk' I. 33) 'and books, we know, / Are a substantial world' (ll. 33-34), a second nature, the mental landscape amid which composition takes place.

Amongst the population of this landscape, certain figures always loomed largest. In the 1815 Preface, Milton, and Spenser (and the Bible, of which more below) are the prime examples of one kind of imagination, and Shakespeare of another. To these poets Wordsworth remained loyal all his life, and said of himself that

When I began to give myself up to the profession of a poet for life, I was impressed with a conviction, that there were four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples - Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton. These I must study, and equal if I could; and I need not think of the rest.  

Throughout the poetry of the great decade, these are the poets to whom he most reverently and most consistently refers. To an aspiring poet he wrote, in 1824:

I am ... disposed strenuously to recommend to your habitual perusal the great poets of our own country, who have stood the test of ages. Shakespeare I need not name, nor Milton; but Chaucer and Spenser are apt to be overlooked. It is almost painful to think how far these surpass all others.  

J. J. Tayler recorded, two years later, that 'Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton are his favourites among the English poets'. They had been his favourites at least since his time in Cambridge – 'the books which then I loved the most / Are dearest to me now' (Prelude VI

3 Reminiscences, pp. 459-60.
4 Letter to Alaric Watts, 16 November 1824, L Y I, 284.
117-18) – and not only was his attachment enduring, but it predated (or at least his familiarity did), the school-boy preferences recorded in Book V of the *Prelude* and in the Memoranda, for Christopher Wordsworth famously records that ‘the Poet’s father set him very early to learn portions of the works of the best English poets by heart, so that at an early age he could repeat large portions of Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser’.\(^6\) In 1822 Wordsworth told Landor that, back in 1802, he had known all of Milton’s sonnets by heart.\(^7\) ‘He knew a great deal of English poetry by heart’, writes his nephew (*Memoirs*, I, 43). Stephen Gill calls Wordsworth’s recall ‘amazing’: ‘there is abundant evidence that the poet … never forgot poetry, however slight, which had moved him’, and Lady Richardson records an instance of the poet reciting, appropriately to the moment.\(^8\) It was of course less unusual to memorize poetry, or to read it so often that it became unintentionally memorized, in the eighteenth century than it is in the late twentieth. Anna Seward read Milton when she was three, and knew the whole of *Lycidas* by heart.\(^9\) Wordsworth was certainly not much older when he began to read Milton, whose lines were a great deal of that ‘great deal’ of memorized poetry.

To this list of works from which Wordsworth memorized passages when a child must be added one more: the Bible. In 1776 and 1777 he attended Anne Birkett’s infant school at Penrith, where he was apparently made to learn extracts from the Bible by heart.\(^10\) When he was a child, Wordsworth ‘used to brood over the stories of Enoch & Elijah’, which are found in Genesis 5. 22 and I & II Kings (Fenwick note to the *Intimations Ode* – Wordsworth is here referring to Elijah’s departure in a chariot of fire, II Kings 2. 11). He alludes to the latter in *The Borderers*,\(^11\) and had adapted its most famous phrase, ‘a still small voice’ in his

\(^7\) Letter to Walter Savage Landor, 20 April 1822, *LY I*, 125.

> the same which God spake in the twentieth chapter of Exodus, saying,
> I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Wordsworth alludes to these lines, which he must have repeated so many times, in the opening of the *Prelude* (I 6-7).
translation of ‘Orpheus and Eurydice’ (Virgil’s Georgics iii 75-94), in 1788. Allusions in the early work attest to Wordsworth’s thorough knowledge of various parts of the Bible: Wu points out that in his very early poem, ‘The Death of the Starling’, inspired by Catullus’s ‘Carmen III’, Wordsworth alludes to lines from Matthew 10. 29. It is interesting that in both these poems the allusions occur in the final line, as if Wordsworth is using the Bible to revise, or correct, his classical sources, as Milton does, on a grand scale, in Paradise Lost. In a prose fragment from the same period (1786-7) he alludes to Matthew again, 5. 45 – the Sermon on the Mount (Prose, I, 7). In Descriptive Sketches (1791-92) he alludes to Psalm 42, Genesis, and Ecclesiastes.

Wordsworth groups ‘the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures’ with Milton and Spenser as the highest example of the ‘poetical Imagination’ (1815 Preface ll. 310-14). He saw no difficulty in considering the Bible as literature, encouraged in this approach, if he needed encouragement, by Robert Lowth’s Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews. On the contrary, poetry was the appropriate form for the expression of the sacred, because there is an

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13 Wordsworth’s Reading 1770-1799, p. 15.
affinity between religion and poetry; between religion – making up the deficiencies of reason by faith; and poetry – passionate for the instruction of reason; between religion – whose element is infinitude, and whose ultimate trust is the supreme of things, submitting herself to circumscription, and reconciled to substitutions; and poetry – ethereal and transcendent, yet incapable to sustain her existence without sensuous incarnation.

(Essay, Supplementary to the Preface of 1815, ll. 137-43)

It is this recognition which invests poetry that is not overtly sacred with an aura of transcendence.\(^\text{16}\)

Wordsworth not only refers to the Bible as a model for a wide variety of stylistic points, but adopts from this source, too, a theory of allusion and authority, which is the subject of Chapter 3. He justified his grouping of Milton’s poetry and the ‘prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures’ by tending to see Milton as the genuine heir to a poetic line, not classical, but Biblical: ‘however imbued the surface might be with classical literature, he was a Hebrew in soul; and all things tended in him towards the sublime’ (1815 Preface ll. 321-23). The heights of the ‘enthusiastic and meditative Imagination’ were precluded from the classical writers, ‘because the anthropomorphitism of the Pagan religion subjected the minds of the greatest poets in those countries too much to the bondage of definite form’. This is one of the reasons why Wordsworth exalts the Bible, Milton and Spenser ‘in preference to those [writers] of ancient Greece and Rome’ (ll. 314-18). Yet Wordsworth was admiring of several of the classical writers: ‘Horace is my great favourite: I love him dearly’; Virgil’s Eclogues ‘have always delighted me much’, though ‘before I read Virgil I was so strongly attached to Ovid, whose Metamorphoses I read at School, that I was quite in a passion whenever I found him, in books of criticism, placed below Virgil.’\(^\text{17}\) Between 1814 and 1816 Wordsworth translated the first three books of the Aeneid, but he had misgivings about translating the classics.\(^\text{18}\) He explained that ‘the attention of the poets of the Augustan age was principally confined to the happy selection of the most appropriate words and elaborate phrases; and hence arises the

\(^{16}\) The difficulty of ascertaining the relationship between Wordsworth’s appreciation of the Bible as literature and his religious position is discussed in Chapter 3.

\(^{17}\) Reminiscences, p. 459; letter to Francis Wrangham, 19 February 1819, MY II, 523; Fenwick note to ‘Ode to Lycoris’ (p. 42). For the extent of Wordsworth’s reading in the classics, at school, at university, and in the years that followed, see Ben Ross Schneider, Jr, Wordsworth’s Cambridge Education (Cambridge: CUP, 1957), appendix, p. 263 and passim, and Jane Worthington, Wordsworth’s Reading of Roman Prose (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: OUP, 1946).

\(^{18}\) See the Juvenilia in PWI for surviving translations of selections from Horace, Virgil’s Georgics and Catullus.
difficulty of translating them’. Of the admired Eclogues he regretted that ‘there is frequently in them an elegance and a happiness which no translation can hope to equal’, and, with reference this time to the Georgics and the Aeneid, (and without mentioning his efforts of the previous decade) he wrote that ‘I should have attempted Virgil in blank verse; had I not been persuaded, that no antient Author can be with advantage so rendered’.  

Wordsworth’s admiration for the classics ought not to be underestimated, yet it remains secondary. Wordsworth spoke highly to Ellis Yarnall of classical study, but Shakespeare and the Bible remained paramount. In a late repetition of the 1815 Preface’s exemplars of the two types of the imagination, Homer is brought into the equation: ‘Homer and Shakespeare’ are paired as having ‘universal minds … able to reach every variety of thought and feeling without bringing their own individuality before the reader’. But Homer, Wordsworth says elsewhere, is ‘second to Shakespeare’, and, despite the opinion expressed in Knight’s Taste, ‘the writings of Shakespear and Milton infinitely transcend those of the Greeks and for reasons which might easily be given’. Late in life, Wordsworth repeated his ascription of a ‘Hebrew soul’ to Milton:  

‘Comus’ is rich in beautiful and sweet flowers, and in exuberant leaves of genius; but the ripe and mellow fruit is in ‘Samson Agonistes’. When he wrote that, his mind was Hebraized. Indeed, his genius fed on the writings of the Hebrew prophets.  

(Reminiscences, p. 461)  

The works on which Wordsworth ‘fed’, those which formed his ‘soul’ or ‘mind’, remained his models and touchstones ever after. The OED states that the origin of the word ‘rote’ is unknown, but a conjectural explanation is noted in Brewer: to ‘learn by rote’ is to ‘learn by means of repetition, i.e. going over the same track again and again’, so that ‘rote has
been associated with route'. The ‘track’ is the line of poetry, or written text, that is read or repeated again and again, so as to be remembered. But, transferred from the page to the memory, it becomes a track in the mind, a well-worn path which wandering thoughts may follow unconsciously. Much of Wordsworth’s poetry reveals a near-obsessive concern with continuity, the preservation of the links between the past and the present, infancy and childhood, the dead and those who are still alive. The butterfly which is, in the published version of ‘Stay near me’ the ‘historian of my infancy’ is, in a manuscript version, a ‘Bible of my infancy’. The Bible, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton were not just an element of Wordsworth’s childhood experience, but were part of his mental make-up. He not only remembered reading them, but had had their words in his memory, since the formative years of early childhood, prior to the deaths of his parents. They played a part in forming the mind which would later return so frequently to them.

Critical attention to Wordsworth’s literary relations has always been dominated by Milton, Wordsworth’s most obviously important precursor. When Harold Bloom cast Milton in the role of father in his family romance, The Anxiety of Influence, he chose Wordsworth as the archetypal son. The Intimations Ode is the first poem to be mentioned in the text (p. 9), its author ‘the exemplary Modern Poet, the Poet proper’ (p. 21). Bloom begins by seeing the ‘anxiety of influence’ as a Romantic phenomenon, but his later works extend its boundaries (in The Western Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, 15th edn rev. by Adrian Room (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 622. In 1801 Wordsworth modernized Chaucer’s Prioress’ Tale, in which a little boy learns the first verse of the Alma Redemptoris ‘all by rote’ (l. 71), without understanding the meaning of the Latin words.


25 Perhaps Wordsworth had in mind the common practice of writing the dates of important family events in the front of the Bible. In 1805, William recovered his father’s Bible from his cousin Richard, who had kept it since John senior’s death. This actual ‘Bible of [Wordsworth’s] infancy’ was, Mary Wordsworth recorded, ‘taken care of when the House at Cockermouth was broken up’ (see Wu, Wordsworth’s Reading 1770-1799, p. 15). The ‘house at Cockermouth’ was the house of ‘my father’s family’ (‘Stay near me’, l. 9). Its ‘break-up’ was brought about by the mother’s death, but that early family is identified as ‘my father’s’ because it was to his mother’s family – her own parents, at Penrith – that William was subsequently sent. The recovery of that Bible, like the mental recall of its poetry (and the butterfly’s return), is another act of emotional preservation.

26 The earliest lengthy study, Havens’s Influence of Milton on English Poetry, includes an appendix with parallels of phrasing and diction. Abbie Findlay Potts’s Wordsworth’s Prelude: A Study of its Literary Form (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953) was the first to draw attention to the wide range of Wordsworth’s literary relationships, and to Spenser in particular.


Canon that Shakespeare is admitted equal power with Milton: indeed, he becomes Milton’s precursor (Chapter 7 ‘Milton’s Satan and Shakespeare’). In Wordsworth studies, Shakespeare’s significance had already been explored by Jonathan Bate, for whom Shakespeare’s example is of a benign, not a Bloomian, influence. Bate complements his study of Romantic allusions to Shakespeare with a wider examination of Shakespeare’s reputation in the period. Lucy Newlyn has a similar double concern, in which Milton’s impact on politics and other disciplines is married to a study of textual relations. One of the aims of this thesis is to ask how Wordsworth’s allusive relations to these two most important forebears interact. At times, they are poles between which Wordsworth mediates, using each to criticize the other, as a strategy of self-definition. But at others they are made to agree, modifying one another, losing the distinctness of their individuality, and merging with other sources in a society of poetic voices.

Though, throughout his life, Wordsworth named Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, and sometimes Chaucer, as the poets who were most important to him, he had many other significant allegiances, some of which will be discussed in the following chapters. Wordsworth’s eighteenth-century precursors will occasionally be mentioned in this thesis, but will not be considered at length, though they influenced Wordsworth’s thinking more than might be suggested by his often slighting critical treatment of them. In the Memoranda he recalls that, during the Hawkshead years, ‘I read all Fielding’s works, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and any part of Swift that I liked; Gulliver’s Travels, and the Tale of the Tub, being both much to my taste’ (Prose III, 372). He discovered poetry, too, and walked with his friend John Fleming ‘Repeating favorite verses with one voice, / Or conning more’ (Prelude V 588-89) – ‘the verses of Goldsmith and of Gray’, according to Thomas De Quincey. He was encouraged by two of his headmasters: William Taylor, whose grave, inscribed with a line from Gray’s ‘Elegy’ Wordsworth visits in Book X of The Prelude (ll. 489-506), and Thomas Bowman, who succeeded Taylor in 1786. T. W. Thompson cites the latter’s son, who recalled that ‘my father used to say that he believed that he did more for William Wordsworth by lending him

30 Jonathan Bate, Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). Unless otherwise indicated, further references to Bate are to this work.
31 Lucy Newlyn, Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Unless otherwise indicated, further references to Newlyn are to this work.
books than by his teaching’. Bowman lent Wordsworth Cowper’s *Task* and Burns’s *Poems*, and remembered his pupil as ‘one of the very few boys, who used to read the old books in the School Library, George Sandys’ “Travels in the East”, and his Ovid’s “Metamorphosis”, Fox’s [sic] “Book of Martyrs”, and Evelyn’s “Forest Trees”. Wordsworth himself told Bowman junior that his father had also introduced him to Langhorne’s poems, Beattie’s *Minstrel*, Percy’s *Reliques*, Crabbe, Charlotte Smith and the Wartons.  

Summaries of Wordsworth’s use of Young, Pope, Collins, Dyer, Beattie, Cowper, Burns, Goldsmith, Gray and Akenside have been made by Edwin Stein, who distinguishes Wordsworth’s allusions to these authors from his allusions to Shakespeare, Milton and Spenser in two ways. Firstly, these poets are part of ‘a large group … from whom [Wordsworth] feels no need to differentiate himself, because he knows he has transcended them in power and vision’ (p. 109). Wordsworth need not strive ‘to equal’ these poets: their stature is not great enough to instil anxiety, whether conscious or Bloomian. Secondly, and consequently, Wordsworth’s allusions to these poets are rarely of the rich, combative variety that Stein names ‘heuristic’, ‘dialectical’, or ‘comparative’. Rather, they are ‘assimilative’ – a species of allusion that is Stein’s especial concern. Assimilative allusion is atmospheric, guided by mood rather than intellect (Stein, pp. 116 & 120), and pertains rather to the realm of ‘echo’ (which, despite his title, is Stein’s favoured term), than to that of what is commonly thought of as ‘allusion’. In his elegy ‘Remembrance of Collins’, Stein concludes, ‘Wordsworth’s
echoing of Collins is not radical allusion in the manner of Milton echoing the classics' (p. 30). Wordsworth aims, 'building on Collins's own insight, to assert a continuity of poetic voices' (p. 29).

Wordsworth's sympathetic tone is itself borrowed from Collins's elegy on Thomson, to which Wordsworth's elegy refers, and is indicative of the relative confidence with which Wordsworth faced his eighteenth-century precursors. The elegy has long been recognized as a site of ambivalence, where the living poet criticizes as he commemorates, presenting himself as both worthy and unworthy legatee. Lawrence Lipking discusses Ben Jonson's Elegy on Shakespeare as 'a classic tombeau'. Of Collins's elegy he says, by contrast, that 'few tombeaux have ever been so reverent, so genuinely considerate of the spirit to be honored' (p. 146). Thomson's vision is distanced, it is true, and the dead poet himself 'strangely fades away' (p. 150), but there is none of the self-divided challenge of Jonson, the witty ambivalence that is related to that of the comparative allusion. Collins does not debase himself before Thomson, or his memory, as he does before the mighty Milton in 'Ode on the Poetical Character'; Wordsworth does not compete with Collins as he does with Milton in the 'Prospectus'.

Stein suggests that Thomson, of all Wordsworth's eighteenth-century precursors, exerts the most power, but finds it difficult to define the nature of his influence. Though he suggests that 'not only Milton, but Spenser, Shakespeare, Thomson, and Coleridge also initiated self-differentiating references in Wordsworth's texts' (p. 109), he later subdivides this group, suggesting that 'Spenser and Thomson', like 'Gray, Collins, Burns, and Cowper were colleagues to emulate rather than adversaries to overcome' (p. 218). On the one hand he argues that 'various uses of *The Seasons* and *The Castle of Indolence* suggest that to some extent Wordsworth approached Thomson in a spirit of confrontation' (p. 243), but, on the other, he groups Thomson amongst those 'often subsumed in the glancingly reminiscent, collegial, yet self-distancing and evolutionary relationship that Wordsworth had with the eighteenth-century' (p. 14).

When Wordsworth chooses to 'meditate / Upon the book of Nature' (Autumn l. 669), he often borrows language from Thomson. In *Summer*, for example, a young man stands by a pool

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Gazing the inverted landscape, half afraid  
To meditate the blue profound below  

(II. 1247-48)

This anticipates Wordsworth in several aspects: the strange significance of the reflection's upside-downness; the superimposition of the reflecting surface over the depths; the hint at a move from outward vision to introspection, with the suggestion that the depths are of the mind; the suspension of 'half afraid' at the end of a line, so that, for a moment, the boy is not merely afraid of the water, but more mysteriously, abstractly, 'afraid'. 38 Wordsworth praised Thomson, in the 1815 Essay, Supplementary to the Preface, for his original observations of nature, so that it is no surprise to find him borrowing images – the shepherd magnified by the mist (Autumn ll. 724-26, Prelude VIII 400-02); the 'startling' sound of a falling leaf (in Wordsworth an acorn) breaking the silence (Autumn ll. 989-92, Prelude I 91-94). Likewise, Wordsworth borrowed the occasional striking phrase, despite considering Thomson's language to have been contaminated by the false taste of his Augustan associates, so that much of his language – his periphrases and abstractions – did not appeal. 39 Descending from the Simplon Pass, Wordsworth sees 'torrents shooting from the clear blue sky' (Prelude VI 561); Thomson's torrents 'shoot' in Summer (II. 592-93) and also in Winter (I. 995). Yet Wordsworth does not use Thomson's phrases with precise, pointed, and transformative meaning, meaning that depends upon the comparison of the new context with the old. The influence of Wordsworth's eighteenth-century precursors frequently remains indistinct. Thomson's voice, for example, merges with other landscape-philosophers, or is overshadowed by his own models' voices, models for whom he often acts, in Wordsworth's poetic process, as a conduit. 40

Other poets, no more intimidating to Wordsworth than his eighteenth-century predecessors, nevertheless have a more central place in this thesis, particularly in its consideration of 'intertextual allusion'. Allusion is most interesting when it involves a

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38 Wordsworth uses the phrase 'blue profound' twice: 'In the Woods of Rydal' (I. 12) and 'Tradition' (I. 7). In the latter it signifies a lake, as in Thomson; in the former, outer space, through which God 'rolls the planets' – a very Thomsonian image. But the earlier use of 'blue profound' is far from exclusive to Thomson. Other users include Mark Akenside, Anna Seward, and James Hurdis.

39 'He writes a vicious style; and his false ornaments are exactly of that kind which would be most likely to strike the undiscerning' (Essay, Supplementary, ll. 465-67). The Castle of Indolence has 'diction more pure' than The Seasons (I. 483).

40 The Castle of Indolence (in imitation of which Wordsworth wrote his own 'Stanzas') has a shadowy presence in several of Wordsworth's poems, but a presence that is scarcely distinguishable from that of certain passages of Spenser's upon which it is modelled.
special degree of self-consciousness, interrogating in some way its own implications. In 'comparative allusion' – considered under the banner of influence study – this entails a summoning, by the allusion, of the wider relationship between the two texts, or two poets. But in 'intertextual allusion' the consciousness is not of a precursor's shadowy presence, but of literariness itself, or of the allusion's own relation to its sources. This is not the same as 'generic allusion', where a tradition, or line of thought, is silently drawn upon, but is not itself necessarily brought into the realm of the new text. An intertextual allusion not only depends upon, but discusses, or illustrates, its own allusiveness. The allusion itself is an image of poetry. The genres to which such allusions most often pertain are lyric and, particularly, pastoral. The central poets are those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including 'the bright Elizabethan constellation', 'the works of the old English dramatists ... the gardens of our language'. In 1800 Wordsworth acquired an edition of Robert Anderson's Works of the British Poets (he had previously had access to Coleridge's copy, at Alfoxden), with the help of which he developed his interest in these poets (evidenced in the lyrics of 1802 to 1804 particularly). Their poems celebrating flowers are themselves flowers, that Wordsworth collects (like the Excursion's love-sick anthologist) and alludes to, as he celebrates the 'genial influence' of the returning flowers.

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41 Essay, Supplementary, 1. 648; Reminiscences, p. 461.
43 'To the Daisy' ('In youth from rock to rock I went') 1. 70.
CHAPTER 1: DEFINING ALLUSION

It is difficult to define ‘allusion’ because there are several conflicting principles by which one might do so, and the introduction into the equation of the related term ‘echo’ tends to create further contradictions. This is because each term has been used independently of the other, to develop connotations of its own to which the other term has no clear relation. In short, certain principles of definition are more useful when considering ‘allusion’ than ‘echo’, and vice versa. In some contexts ‘allusion’ and ‘echo’ are in opposition to one another, whilst in others they bear a near resemblance. Critics define these terms differently for their own use, depending on the principle of definition that they deem most vital. Yet the choice of principle is itself dictated by the way in which the critic intends to consider the allusions or echoes at hand. In other words, we use the terms, in that we recognize allusions and/or echoes as we read, before we define them, and then tend to define them according to how we have already begun to consider them. Finally, this messiness is only amplified by the addition of the adjectival forms, ‘echoic’ and ‘allusive’, which, it will be seen, results in such awkward possibilities as the ‘nonallusive allusion’. So, not only do ‘allusion’ and ‘echo’ bear a confusing relation to one another, but even the single terms themselves labour under contradictory definitions. These contradictions reveal a limitation in our understanding of, especially, allusion. What, then, are the various defining principles that have been used to distinguish echo from allusion, as well as other terms? I shall try to single out some schemes that have been employed, whether explicitly or implicitly, to show that these schemes tend to shade into one another, or to be used, sometimes confusingly, in conjunction. That the definitions do break down suggests that allusion might usefully be reconsidered. I shall use the term ‘reference’ as a kind of control, to designate a device that has not yet been identified as ‘allusion’ or ‘echo’.

Defining Allusion by Marker and by Poetic Effect

One way to differentiate is by measuring the degree to which a text is summoned by a reference. John Hollander proposes a ‘rhetorical hierarchy for the relationship of allusive modes’. At the top is quotation, which entails the ‘literal presence of a body of text’, whilst in allusion that text may be ‘fragmentary or periphrastic’ (p. 64), and in echo it may not be

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'present' at all. Between the latter two, Hollander suggests, the 'distinction seems to be drawn with respect to the degree, and kind, of incorporation of the vocal source in the response, and to the subtlety and profundity of the mode of response itself' (p. 63). This consideration itself points out the complications involved in this first method of definition. For the criterion described as the 'degree to which a text is summoned' is ambiguous. On the one hand, it could indicate the physical extent to which the source is reproduced; the obviousness of the reference in terms of the clarity of its marker, which determines the ease with which the reference is recognized (or, at least, recognized as a reference, even if the referent is unfamiliar). It is this sense of 'degree' that puts quotation at the top of Hollander's hierarchy, for which the poles (at this moment, though they seem to be redefined) are overt and tacit reference. 'Quotation' is defined by its presentation: the marking out of it from the text by punctuation marks, the (preferably) faithful exactitude of wording, often, even, the accompaniment of its own identification. But the 'fragmentary or periphrastic' nature of allusion's (and echo's) incorporation of a text does not consist simply of a less physically complete quotation. From the 'literal presence' of quotation's referent, we move not only to a literal, but inexact, presence, but also to a figurative presence. As Hollander expresses it, 'the kind of incorporation' is important too. This is the other interpretation of the phrase 'the degree to which a text is summoned', with which I began. It is concerned with the extent to which the reference is put to work, the significance that it might have in contributing to the poem's meaning. Quotation brings its source into play most obviously, and so, in one sense, to the greatest degree. But allusion and echo may draw more meaningful significance from the source that they less overtly summon, summoning it with 'greater subtlety and profundity of response', and so 'to the greatest degree' in another sense. In the first sense it is the marking device that is considered, in the second it is the device's effects. But is it allusion or echo that is most 'subtle and profound'? The top of Hollander's hierarchy has now become the bottom (quotation is least subtle), and if its order – quotation, allusion, echo – is to hold, then presumably allusion must be more 'subtle and profound' than quotation, and echo the subtlest and most profound of all. But is this necessarily so? Hollander seems to suggest, rather, that allusion is more 'subtle and profound' than echo, abandoning his 'rhetorical hierarchy'. Again,

2 In her influential essay, 'On Alluding', Poetics, vol. 7 (1978), 289-307, Carmela Perri notes that 'we have three options in characterizing the kinds of allusion: we can type the marker, the marked, or the relation between them' (p. 303). The confusion with which I am concerned here is between the first and the third of these.
there is the complication of considering two kinds of ‘degree of presence’ at once: the obviousness of the reference on the one hand, and, on the other, the nature of its effect. For one reference could be unmissable, and profound in effect, and another more subtly performed, but with shallower consequence.3

Edwin Stein recognizes this problem, and that it is limiting to consider only the way in which the source text is indicated, when he explains that ‘though the nature of the marker is the differentiation of the kind of device termed in the strict sense “an allusion”’, the ‘key to allusiveness is not the nature of the marker ... but the fact that something in a text which we immediately or later recognize to have been shaped by a prior text invites construing by intertextual comparison’ (p. 223, n. 3). Jonathan Bate acknowledges this difference too, though he approaches it from a different angle:

an allusion may summon up the context and connotations of an earlier writer’s words, but sometimes it will serve simply to give authority to the later writer’s utterance, not to establish any broader [or ‘subtle and profound’] intertextual relationship. (p. 32)

This is a vital distinction to make, but it is not without its own complications. For if an ‘allusion’ is a kind of marker (that ‘fragmentary or periphrastic’ (literal) incorporation of a text), whilst ‘allusiveness’ is an effect or quality, then we are faced with the embarrassment of the nonallusive allusion. Stein ostensibly escapes this by preferring the term ‘echo’, avowedly ‘because it is broader, more flexible, and, in view of Wordsworth’s own attitudes towards poeisis and poetics, more apt than “allusion” or “parallel”’ (p. 3). His phrase, ‘nonalluding echoes’ (p. 223), is less awkward than ‘nonalluding allusion’, but that the contradiction has not really been escaped becomes apparent later in his book, when he is forced to admit of one instance of relatedness that it ‘does not work as a genuine allusion’, and of others that ‘many are allusively inert echoes’, not used ‘in a revisionary, allusive way’ (pp. 155, 159, 165), even though he has grouped them all under the chapter heading ‘assimilative allusion’. By this last term Stein is seeking to identify a mode of allusion that does not operate by the ironic, ‘comparative’ wit with which we have come to associate ‘allusion’. Yet Stein himself cannot relinquish these qualities in relation to ‘allusiveness’ (as seen by his definition of it, quoted above). Between these two nouns, ‘allusion’ and ‘allusiveness’, the adjective is caught, and the

3 Likewise, Hollander seems to treat ‘profound’ and ‘subtle’ as complements, since he links them with ‘and’, but, in a consideration of the effects of an allusion or echo, surely they could as easily contrast.
contradiction is made clearer still if we consider the verb. 'To allude' is, presumably, to make an allusion. But can it be done nonallusively?

The only way to heal the breach between an 'allusion' and 'allusiveness' would be to delimit the former further, to abandon, that is, the definition of it according to the nature of the marker (as made by Stein), and to define it by its effects – in short, by its allusiveness. Thus, if what we have tended to call an 'allusion' does not work allusively, to 'entrain a manifest enrichment of connotation in the alluding text' (Stein, p. 223, n. 3) – an enrichment that involves some sense of irony, of difference, between the allusion's old and new contexts – we shall no longer call it an 'allusion'. So what term might take its place? Stein, we have seen, uses 'echo', but only to avoid the appearance of nonsensicality, and because 'echo' is his favoured term generally. But it is insufficient to relegate this term to become merely designatory of nonallusive references. Whilst those that do enrich, if not quite allusively, by creating an atmosphere, endowing a sense of tradition perhaps, or 'thickening ... a mood' (Stein, p. 116) might acceptably be called 'echoes', those that do not must be left, simply, as 'borrowings' – not as reprehensible as 'plagiarisms' unless they are pretending to originality, but basically uninteresting.4

The defining principles considered so far – firstly, the obviousness of the marker, and secondly, the effect of the device as a whole – have been dictated by a consideration of what was loosely, problematically thought of as 'allusion'. 'Echo', in this scheme, was an afterthought, unsatisfactorily employed to fill the gap vacated by the undesirable 'nonallusive allusion'. If 'borrowings' replaces 'echoes' in this context, then the term 'echo' is free to be more satisfactorily defined in other ways. Bate, for example, shifts the focus away from the reproduction of words themselves to consider other verbal effects, suggesting that 'aural and rhythmic correspondences are best defined as echoes' (p. 32), and another quality that is unique to 'echo' is its technical employment as fragmented repetition. In his third chapter, 'Echo Schematic', Hollander discusses this use of echo – a recreation of the effects of natural echo, endowed with the associations of the two main myths of Echo – as a voice that ironically

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4 W. J. B. Owen gives, with evidence from Wordsworth's and Coleridge's own comment, an interesting reason for Wordsworth's uninteresting borrowings: Wordsworth sometimes used 'inapt' allusions (borrowings) because of a habit learned from the public school exercise of composing in Latin, which involved a lot of patchworking from Latin authorities. ('Literary Echoes in The Prelude', WC 3 (1972), 3-16). See PW IV, 396-97 for a "poem", published in 1835 with a note describing it as 'a fine stanza of Akenside, connected with a still finer from Beattie, by a couplet of Thomson.'
interprets or satirizes, augments or reduces, its source. These effects of sound, rhythm, and wordplay are all assuredly well named as echo.

For the moment, some clear distinctions seem to have been drawn. Quotation is a clearly marked reference. It may be richly resonant (allusive), or else employed for less poetic and more practical reasons, as in the citing of a precedent. In other words, it is sometimes profound in effect, though its physical incorporation is unsubtle. Allusion goes unmarked but is always rich. The nonallusive allusion has been abolished: it is not an allusion, but only a borrowing (though, in practice, the pretensions of a borrowing to the status of an allusion are always to be argued over). There are several kinds of echo: Hollander’s specialized vehicle of wordplay, and Bate’s more generalized effect of rhythm or sound; unmarked, like allusion and borrowing, but, unlike them, not defined by its semantic richness. This kind of echo conjures mood, creates atmosphere, and engineers tone leaving pointed wit and comment to allusion. (Again, in practice, the status of an individual echo/allusion will be debatable).

ii

Intentionality and Consciousness

‘That allusions are intentional is an axiom shared by most theorists of the subject’, Bate points out (p. 35), and quotes Hollander: ‘an inadvertent allusion is a kind of solecism’ (p. 64 – also quoted by Stein, p. 223), and James K. Chandler: ‘an allusion is an intentional echo of an earlier text: it not only reminds us; it means to remind us’. Echoes, it has been considered, are often unintentional. But though the notion of intentionality can theoretically be extracted as the determining factor, it is in practice usually secondary to the interpretation of the reference’s effects. For when an ‘echo’ has little effect, a critic may venture that it was unconsciously made; that it is, indeed, an ‘echo’. But if a witty ironic point can be construed, then it is likely to have been consciously constructed, and the echo is promoted to ‘allusion’.

Allusiveness of the most pointed, exact kind tends to preclude the possibility of its having been achieved unconsciously. For example, Wordsworth’s reworking of Milton’s ‘The world was all before them’ (Paradise Lost XII 646) at the opening of The Prelude is so precisely appropriate – the beginning of the epic of a fallen man picking up where Milton’s tale of unfallen Adam ended, Wordsworth’s voyage of discovery analogous to that on which Adam

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5 James K. Chandler, ‘Romantic Allusiveness’, Critical Inquiry, 8 (1981-82), 461-87 (p. 463). It is interesting to note that Hollander’s pronouncement is more qualified than is suggested by its quotation out of context, and that in his preface he declines too close engagement with ‘theories of consciousness, intention’ and so forth (p. ix).
and Eve embark – that the likelihood of its being a felicitous accident seems minuscule. Furthermore, other points of the passage are picked up: the choice of a 'place of rest' (Paradise Lost XII 647) – 'What dwelling shall receive me' (Prelude 111) – the 'guide' that in Milton is 'providence', guiding the couple's 'wandering steps' (ll. 647-48), and in Wordsworth is itself 'wandering' (ll. 17-18). Added to this is the epic convention of facing and challenging previous epics – Wordsworth considers 'Milton' specifically at line 180 – and, were any doubt to remain, Newlyn quashes it with her observation that Wordsworth's allusion is artfully conflated with another (pp. 85-86). His claim, 'I cannot miss my way' (l. 19) (which ends the sentence begun by 'The earth is all before me') recalls Sin's address to Death:

Nor can I miss the way, so strongly drawn
By this new felt attraction and instinct.
(X 262-63)

This second allusion glosses the complex mingling of the immediate joyous excitement with another, quieter tone of doubt with which Wordsworth's enterprise begins. Like Adam and Eve, he is just setting out, and Milton's end is his beginning. Yet his chance comes only in a wake, for his epic adventure (all epic adventure) is the fallout of a lost perfection. Without that loss, there would be no experience or discovery, yet experience is not only exciting, but sinful, and Milton's Sin has provided the prototype for both Adam's and Wordsworth's setting out. So intricate and effective a set of correspondences could be no accident. ^

But what of those allusions that, though rich, are lower down the scale of sophistication, occupying a more problematic, middle ground? Defending against the concept of unintentional allusion, Chandler notes that what are sometimes presented as unconscious remembrances in Romantic poetry are, since they are 'presented', actually just as consciously intended as are those which are presented as such. What he identifies is a different style of allusion, one which strives to bring allusion closer to echo by 'admit[ting] of a greater degree

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^ The melancholic belatedness that this allusion conveys could stand as an emblem of allusion itself, for the difference between source and alluding text is very often the difference of loss. In texts of a pastoral hue, especially, allusion is often nostalgic. The source text represents a perfection that is flawed in the later text's recreation of it. This is one reason for Paradise Lost's status as a source. Not only is it a monument of poetic achievement, but it tells of a golden age that has invariably lost its shine by the time of later poetry. Of course, this is only one of the incarnations of Paradise Lost. It too alludes to other golden age-sources, though its own nostalgia is tempered by the insistence that its own Paradise is not flawed, but more perfect than its models. This power is rarely equalled by the poetry that follows in its own wake.

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of muffling' (p. 485). Having revealed this trick of 'the intentional representation of unconscious influence' (p. 476), Chandler concludes that since 'the criterion of recognizability' (p. 485) is still crucial, unintentional allusion remains an 'oxymoronic notion' (p. 476). I would contend, however, that whilst Chandler fruitfully points out the way in which poets' use of allusion may change along with other techniques - that allusion is malleable - his concentration on this issue of the style of supposedly-unconscious allusion does not address the question of truly unconscious allusion at all. That Romantic poets liked artfully to create the impression of the mind's unconscious workings does not discredit the existence of the unconscious itself.

On the other hand, reacting against Chandler's skepticism, Bate places a faith in the Romantics' presentation of their own powers that is difficult to share. Quoting from Walter Whiter's Specimen of a Commentary on Shakspeare, in which 'remembrance[s] of ... familiar phraseology' are seen as 'indirect and involuntary allusions', Bate agrees that 'the kind of allusion about which Whiter writes is a process in the imagination, even an emblem of the power of the imagination, not a consciously contrived artistic effect' (pp. 35-36). If such 'unconscious allusions', the product of a 'process in the imagination', had a strongly pointed effect, then the unconscious would be unsettlingly canny - a kind of super-conscious unconscious. But if, as is more often the case, such 'remembrance[s] of ... familiar phraseology' do not operate to strong or pointed effect, as when 'allusion serves the rhetorical function of auctoritas, the appeal to a sanctioning - and sanctified - authority' (Bate, p. 36), then we have returned to the nonallusive allusion which has, in this argument, been disallowed (renamed as 'borrowing').

Are we to concede, then, that the notion itself is 'oxymoronic'? On the one hand, it is inconceivable that the most sophisticated allusions could be achieved unintentionally, and on the other, the mere 'appeal ... to authority' tends not to have the sharply or subtly ironic effect of the true allusion. But critics who range between these poles, considering those tracts of middle ground such as the 'generic allusion', are probing for the point at which one idea of allusion fades into the other. For the two are not entirely distinct, but meet somewhere. This

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7 Stein similarly considers that echo can 'constitut[e] a gestalt of feeling that we grasp by an intuitive process'. It is more 'mood-guided' than the 'intellectually-guided' allusion, yet still requires 'cognitive construal'. He agrees with Chandler in finding this 'a conscious attempt to use an intuitional mode of intertextual relationship' (pp. 120-21), though this suggests, not just a trick of presentation, but to some extent a genuine shift towards, or use of, a different process of the mind.
hazy middle ground is full of rich and surprising connections, but the investigation of it has been hindered by an overemphasis of the author's controlling intention, as in Stein's study. One of the reasons for this has been that initial common-sensical recognition that the most clearly striking, complex effects are not brought about unconsciously. Another factor is the respect for the author's intentions that, for a long time, accompanied many approaches to literary interpretation, far beyond the small question of allusion. One such approach has been the wider arena of 'influence' itself.

'Influence' stands, amidst the network of connections joining text to text, as a term that links author to author in some direct, temporal way. 'Influence' theory studies one poet's use, imitative, reactive, or inspirational, of another, rather than two poets' circumstantial sharing of a form or genre. Influence may be developed in a variety of ways. Any feature of the source-work may be emulated, so that we might connect Adonais to Lycidas because each are elegies for fellow poets (and share some sentiments and motifs), and Wordsworth’s sonnets to Milton’s because we know that Wordsworth 'took fire', as he expressed it himself, after hearing Milton’s sonnets, 'and produced three Sonnets the same afternoon, the first [he] ever wrote except an irregular one at school'.

A very common method of linking poets to their predecessors has been to locate allusions or echoes in their work. That is, textual resemblance was once at the heart of 'influence'. In the absence of a comment like that of Wordsworth just quoted, a borrowed phrase presents itself as a more certain connection than one of form or genre. And certainty — evidence that the poet was under another's influence, that a perceived connection is not coincidental — has often been judged to be important. The borrowed phrase, so long as it is significantly unusual as to have been no accidental recreation, has been sound evidence. Why have critics wanted to be sure that the connections that they find are 'real' ones — that is, apparent to the poet as well as to themselves? One reason has been a respect for the poet's intentions as to his own work. An imagined connection might engender an interpretation that the poet would consider mistaken, or irrelevant. Authorial intention has come to be disregarded more and more, in various ways. 'Final intentions', that principle that prioritized

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8 Note to 'Miscellaneous Sonnets', 1843, in PW III, 417.
9 Jonathan Culler notes that Bloom approaches this hazard when he 'implies that the relationship between text and pretext is one perceived by the interpreter', because sometimes the ephebe's poem is a misreading of a poem "he has never read" [Anxiety of Influence, p. 70], ('Presupposition and Intertextuality', MLN 91 (1976), 1380-96 (p. 1387)). Further references to Culler in this chapter are to this article.
the poet's choice amongst his own versions of a work, which would usually be his last rewriting, have been overthrown, for example, in our preference for the 1805 Prelude and, by the Cornell editors at least, for early versions of many of Wordsworth's other poems. Freudian interpretation reads between the lines, to discover unconscious meaning, and feminist and Marxist criticism subverts in other ways, uncovering forces of history and prejudice that threaten the poet's personal authority over language that, after all, he does not own. In the tracing of influence itself, however, the 'definiteness' of the relation remains of prime concern. It must be so, of course, if the identified connection is really to be an instance of 'influence'. But in the case of the discussion of allusion and echo, this criterion of verification - if the allusion is not striking enough then external evidence is desirable - has sometimes been prioritized seemingly for its own sake. It is as if the fact that the poet was influenced by another is of more interest than the poetry itself, and this is what has led to the often-mocked practice of source-hunting.

'Influence' was revolutionized by Harold Bloom's anxiety theory, not only because it challenges the traditional idea of influence as benignly inspirational, but also because it replaces the practice of source-hunting with other methods of interpretation. Because Bloom's 'influence' is deeply psychological, and therefore tends to operate unconsciously, it is not to be sought on the textual surface in borrowed phrases, but on a more profound level. Hence, though Tintern Abbey has been found to draw on 'Frost at Midnight', 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison', William Lisle Bowles's Sonnet XXX, Young's Night Thoughts, Akenside's Pleasures of the Imagination, Macbeth, Hamlet, The Aeneid, and Psalm 23, Bloom, as if singling out the echo of Milton's 'evil tongues', discovers that the poem's two great precursor-texts are 'the invocations to Books III and VII of Paradise Lost'. The Hermit of Tintern Abbey is Milton, he adds (p. 82), and brings in Il Penseroso, too, though it is Samson Agonistes that provides the poem's other Miltonic echo.

As Newlyn notes, Bloom's concern is with "the hidden roads that go from poem to poem" (p. 15). Such influence 'happens behind the screen of verbal borrowings easily discernible to the reader', leaving seekers after allusion to deal in the 'empirical proof of literary influence'. That 'screen' of resemblances, the textual surface, has been left as the residue of a transmuted influence theory. But empirical evidence need not govern the

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phenomenon of verbal resemblance. I have suggested that allusion and echo should be defined by their effects, not by the obviousness of their markers. Likewise, now that authors’ intentions are not so strictly respected, it ought to be the interest of resemblances that decides for us whether or not they are worth studying, rather than the fact of conscious intention. The unconscious relations in Bloom’s influence are those of author to author, ephebe to precursor, since his image of the poet is that of the aggressive quester-son, seeking power by Oedipal usurpation. But what of a poet’s relation to his material? Is not this too in part unconscious?

Stein agrees with Hollander (and most other commentators) that ‘an inadvertent allusion is a kind of solecism’ (Stein, p. 223):

I believe [Wordsworth] was a highly self-conscious maker of poems, aware of the vast majority of literary echoes in his poems at some stage in their passage from birth to final form.
(p. 4)\(^{11}\)

These words should alert us to a problem with the notion of intentionality: its relation to consciousness. In claiming allusion as necessarily intended, critics tend to elide two separate questions. The first is whether the poet intended to make the allusion, and the second is whether he intended the effects of the allusion. Though it is the former that is implied — the ‘*  Echoes, too, have become conscious. Stein’s argument takes some unexpected turns, becoming extremely complicated, as he constructs a kind of rhetorical labyrinth. Echoes, for him, are not always nonallusive, but ‘may have a fit and noteworthy allusive force’ (p. 3), resulting in an ‘allusion-like intertextuality’ (p. 228). Now, since Stein believes Wordsworth to have been conscious of ‘the vast majority of [his] literary echoes’, we might expect those with ‘allusive force’, especially, to have been intentionally made. Surprisingly, however, Stein is discussing at this point those ‘echoed terms ... which are clearly “the common property of the age” and are used with apparent unconsciousness’ (p. 3). Is Stein then arguing that the unconscious allusion is possible, that it is not an ‘oxymoronic notion’ after all? Actually, he is not. What he says is that an allusion cannot be unconscious, but an allusive echo can, a contradiction which can be resolved, rhetorically, by means of Stein’s definitions. The key to the confusion is again in the uneasy shifts of definition that occur when Stein moves between the parts of speech ‘allusion’, ‘allusive’, ‘allusiveness’. An allusion is (usually) a marker, whilst allusiveness is a quality. ‘Allusive’ unhappily describes both and, as a mediating term, facing two ways, it acquires a contradictory nature. The rhetorical trick performed in this instance is that the echo described is not actually ‘allusive’ in either sense. It is not an allusion, because an allusion is a marker, which cannot be unconsciously used. Logically then, it should refer to allusiveness, and Stein silently lets it do so, for it is not allusiveness that he does not allow to be unconscious, but the marked allusion. But surely, if Stein addressed the question directly, he would not allow the former either, for it is he who has stressed the pointed nature of allusiveness, and has argued for a high level of consciousness in Wordsworth’s art. In this case, he would have to admit that the ‘allusive force’ of these ‘echoed terms ... used with apparent unconsciousness’ is allusive in a way that describes neither ‘allusion’ nor ‘allusiveness’. This must be the ‘allusive force’ of his ‘assimilative allusion’, which ‘does not work as a genuine allusion’, but is rather an ‘allusively inert echo’ (see above p. 22). ‘Assimilative allusion’, we saw, was nonallusive allusion. The unconsciously made echo with ‘allusive force’, neither an allusion, nor possessed of allusiveness, is a nonallusive nonallusion. Despite their etymological intimacy, these three words have been rendered semantically incompatible.

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\(^{11}\) Echoes, too, have become conscious. Stein’s argument takes some unexpected turns, becoming extremely complicated, as he constructs a kind of rhetorical labyrinth. Echoes, for him, are not always nonallusive, but ‘may have a fit and noteworthy allusive force’ (p. 3), resulting in an ‘allusion-like intertextuality’ (p. 228). Now, since Stein believes Wordsworth to have been conscious of ‘the vast majority of [his] literary echoes’, we might expect those with ‘allusive force’, especially, to have been intentionally made. Surprisingly, however, Stein is discussing at this point those ‘echoed terms ... which are clearly “the common property of the age” and are used with apparent unconsciousness’ (p. 3). Is Stein then arguing that the unconscious allusion is possible, that it is not an ‘oxymoronic notion’ after all? Actually, he is not. What he says is that an allusion cannot be unconscious, but an allusive echo can, a contradiction which can be resolved, rhetorically, by means of Stein’s definitions. The key to the confusion is again in the uneasy shifts of definition that occur when Stein moves between the parts of speech ‘allusion’, ‘allusive’, ‘allusiveness’. An allusion is (usually) a marker, whilst allusiveness is a quality. ‘Allusive’ unhappily describes both and, as a mediating term, facing two ways, it acquires a contradictory nature. The rhetorical trick performed in this instance is that the echo described is not actually ‘allusive’ in either sense. It is not an allusion, because an allusion is a marker, which cannot be unconsciously used. Logically then, it should refer to allusiveness, and Stein silently lets it do so, for it is not allusiveness that he does not allow to be unconscious, but the marked allusion. But surely, if Stein addressed the question directly, he would not allow the former either, for it is he who has stressed the pointed nature of allusiveness, and has argued for a high level of consciousness in Wordsworth’s art. In this case, he would have to admit that the ‘allusive force’ of these ‘echoed terms ... used with apparent unconsciousness’ is allusive in a way that describes neither ‘allusion’ nor ‘allusiveness’. This must be the ‘allusive force’ of his ‘assimilative allusion’, which ‘does not work as a genuine allusion’, but is rather an ‘allusively inert echo’ (see above p. 22). ‘Assimilative allusion’, we saw, was nonallusive allusion. The unconsciously made echo with ‘allusive force’, neither an allusion, nor possessed of allusiveness, is a nonallusive nonallusion. Despite their etymological intimacy, these three words have been rendered semantically incompatible.
poet meant to allude – allusions are only identified in the first place by the richness of their effects. If these effects are proof of the author’s conscious intention, then it should follow, logically, that he was conscious of them. But few would attribute omniscience of a poem to its author. As Bate puts it, ‘no poet consciously intends all the effects that readers and critics find in his poems. As long as we can show that a writer is familiar with an earlier text, there is no reason to suppose that the text has not worked its way from his memory into his composition’ (p. 35). One particular curiosity is the allusion that is far from obviously signposted yet which, upon construal, seems so pointed as to strongly suggest consciousness on the writer’s part. I find this idiosyncrasy in Wordsworth, as in the example of Ruth, discussed in Chapter 7. Are we to believe that the poet wilfully concealed a powerful allusive link once he had forged it? Christopher Ricks has argued, against the common consensus, that poets do not always insist that their allusions be recognizable.12 Perhaps they are reserving a private corner in a work turned over to the public, or perhaps the poet’s unconscious (or the chances of language) are more ingenious than we imagine. Newlyn argues similarly that one cannot ‘establish whether Milton was finally “in control” of the effects produced by his textual ambiguities, nor whether they could be said to amount to an authorial strategy or intention’ (p. 68). She recognises that intentionality is not so certainly a prerequisite for allusion as is often presumed and Ricks has defended ‘unconscious allusion’ by reference to Wittgenstein and Freud.13 Whilst we cannot conceive that the most witty effects are created unconsciously, we must return to Bate’s faith in ‘the power of the imagination’.

Stein sees Wordsworth as ‘highly self-conscious’, but then describes him as being ‘aware of the vast majority of literary echoes in his poems at some stage in their passage from birth to final form’ (my italics), which suggests that he was not ‘highly self-conscious’ all the time. It is arguably Wordsworth’s highly self-conscious revisions that frequently erase the intuitive, only half-consciously created effects of his earlier drafts and published versions.

Wittgenstein puts pressure on the nature of ‘intention’ in Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology. He seeks its location in the stages of thought and action – the ‘stages’ that are Stein’s concern too – and finds that it is difficult to determine. Unsatisfied with William James’s argument that ‘the thought is already complete at the beginning of the sentence’, Wittgenstein proposes that though we have the intention of saying something before we start to

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13 Ibid.
speak, we might not know what we mean - 'intend', in another sense. He finds, therefore, that there is such a thing as 'unconscious intention' (I, 225). Though we tend to think of intention as preceding action, it is in practice a paradoxically retrospective event. Intention is not experienced, it is not a feeling, or a state of consciousness (I, 188, 689; II, 45, 176, 178, 179). It is inferred a posteriori from expression and action, just as critics attribute the 'author's intention' to effects that seem powerfully meant. Wittgenstein does find the absence of intention worrying:

Not all that I do, do I do with some intention. (I whistle as I go along etc. etc.) But if I were now to stand up and go out of the house, and then come back inside, and to the question "Why did you do that?" I answered: "For no particular reason" or "I just did" this would be found queer, and someone who often did this with nothing particular in mind would deviate very much from the norm. Would he have to be what is called "feeble minded"? (I, 224)

I do not at all want to call Wordsworth "feeble minded", but the composition of poetry - Wordsworth's method of composition particularly - is an activity that might itself be said to 'deviate from the norm'. Wordsworth's poetry has a great deal of unconscious meaning, which is why it has repaid psychoanalytical criticism so richly. In Book V of The Prelude, the dead body that rises from the lake enacts its own meaning: the rising of imagery (here, the image of death), from the unconscious mind. If this process is memory, it is also composition: the dead man's sister is Venus, the poetic image which rises with equal suddenness, from the sea, in Book IV (II. 103-05).

Images emerge fully-formed, and so do phrases. Wordsworth memorized poetry when a child, phrases which must have recurred to his mind involuntarily (or with unconscious intention) just as, though more crudely, over-familiar phrases often seem to speak themselves through our mouths. Such phrases carry their own meanings, as well as those intended by the unconscious mind that grasps at them. If the unconscious does not create the sharply witty effect of a paradox, it frequently achieves the lower forms of word-play: puns, innuendoes, the 'Freudian slip'. Allusion is characterized by all these effects. It can be dazzlingly sophisticated, combining more than one source, alluding to its own allusiveness even whilst twisting its referent to perverse or exquisite effect. Or it can be more subtly transformative, connoting shades of meaning, playing (if it is playing) on its own half-discernible presence. Just as

'consciousness' and 'unconsciousness' are necessary simplifications – 'what about the continuous coming to be and passing away in the domain of our consciousness' (Wittgenstein, I, 294) – whose workings are indistinctly separable, so allusions are not to be consigned to one or the other state with certainty.

When he is conscious of what he wishes to say, a poet will use the forms and language of other poetry to express himself ('because the forms of literature can only be derived from other literary forms'). He will do this, too, when he is unconscious of what he is expressing, grasping at poetic language and images with which he is familiar, without knowing why. Robin Jarvis notes that 'in Freud allusion is seen ... as a conscious though not (consciously) intentional reference to something repressed and hence by definition inaccessible to the subject'. Discussing the sexual element in Wordsworth's poetry, Jean Hagstrum discovers a 'finding out of direction by indirection': the imagery, he finds, connotes the sexual, though Wordsworth does not openly explore that connotation. That imagery is often borrowed from clearly ascertainable sources (in Home at Grasmere, for example, Wordsworth borrows the pair of swans from Spenser's Prothalamion, discussed in Chapter 8 below). Sex is a topic that we might expect to be confined to the unconscious, suppressed, or even repressed. But there are shadowier areas of the unconscious, or semiconscious, and these, too, are expressed by indirection. If Wordsworth borrows without knowing why, the reasons for his borrowing can be discovered by turning to those perhaps unconsciously used sources. In them, the associations might be clear, where in Wordsworth they are clouded. Such references are likely to be less recognizable, since unknowingly, or half-knowingly made, than are conscious allusions. But once unearthed, the relations between borrowed and borrower may have the same-but-different quality of significant allusion. It is arguable that certain themes and emotions with which Wordsworth was preoccupied – loss, guilt, fear, the mother and infant, the abandoned woman – were central to the poet because of his childhood experience, especially the trauma of his parents' deaths, and the subsequent separation of the siblings. Though Wordsworth knew what themes he was writing about, he may not have known why he

18 G. Kim Blank argues this persuasively in Wordsworth and Feeling, seeing Wordsworth's repetition of these themes as a kind of writing-therapy, unconsciously self-imposed.
so compulsively returned to them. Can a poet know exactly why an idea interests him, or what all his feelings about it may be? When he finds a word or image that strikes him as appropriate will he know why it is so? If that word or image is taken from other poetry, then that source poetry might reveal a clearer expression of the associated concerns than does our poet’s own use. Wittgenstein demonstrates the foolishness of unequivocally prioritizing the writer’s conscious intentions over his unconscious:

what makes this portrait into his portrait? The intention of the painter? And does that mean: his state of mind?... And suppose a painter had the intention of drawing N from memory, but, guided by forces in his unconscious, draws an excellent picture of M. – Would we now call it a bad picture of N?

(I, 262)

This kind of unconscious allusion can be played out as a relationship between two poets in isolation: an unconscious strategy like Bloom’s, though the relationship of the poets themselves is here subordinated to that between the alluding poet and his material. One poet with whom I think that Wordsworth had this kind of relationship is Marvell. In a letter of 1805, Wordsworth makes a comment that would deter the conventional source-hunter: ‘Andrew Marvels poems ... I have not seen these many years’. Yet despite this comment, critics have found a consideration of Marvell’s influence on Wordsworth to be valuable. One of my interests is to shift the focus of allusion-study away from intentionality, towards the less-than-conscious. Where the psychological fails, or becomes impossibly complicated, then recourse to other ideas, of textuality, rather than of influence, but again beyond the consciously controlled, may help. For allusion straddles, or combines, influence

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19 Wordsworth to Walter Scott, 7 November 1805, EY, p. 642. Interestingly, it is in this same letter that Wordsworth discusses editorial procedures, and condemns the source-hunter: ‘A correct text is the first object of an editor: then such notes as explain difficult or unintelligible passages or throw light upon them; and lastly, which is of much less importance, notes pointing out passages or authors to which the Poet has been indebted, not in the piddling way of [a] phrase here and phrase there (which is detestable as a general practice) but where the Poet has really had essential obligations either as to matter or manner’ (p. 642). It is tempting to detect a defensiveness in Wordsworth’s scorn. At the very least one can disagree as to the ways in which an editor’s notes can, as Wordsworth admits, ‘explain difficult or unintelligible passages or throw light upon them’.

20 As a poet troubled by war, Marvell has been found to have shared concerns with, and had influence on, Wordsworth, as discussed by Frederick Burwick in ‘What the Mower Does to the Meadow: Action and Reflection in Wordsworth and Marvell’, in Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism, ed by Lisa Low & Anthony John Harding (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 172-84. Other areas of allusive potential, especially the sexual and its place in pastoral, are discussed later in this thesis.
(deeply psychological) and textuality (the linguistic surface). Whilst, unlike Bloom, I shall be concerned with linguistic connections, whether we call them allusions or otherwise, I propose to balance the concern with empirical proof of conscious influence, by straying some way into the other routes of linguistic connection that are recognized by intertextuality: coincidental, contingent, and unconscious.

iii

Language

'Allusiveness' is a mode of irony. The special quality of irony is unlikeness, or incongruity, but such that will only find its significance in combination with its opposite: likeness. A simple ironic statement is 'true', but not in the sense that is pretended: it both is, and is not, what it says it is. In allusion, the likeness and unlikeness is between the two texts, source and response. Perhaps a sentiment will be like, but the situation unlike, or the situation like, but its context different. A vivid and well-known example comes in Paradise Lost, Book I, when Satan exclaims to Beelzebub,

If thou beest he; but O how fallen! how changed
From him, who in the happy realms of light
Clothed with transcendent brightness didst outshine
Myriads though bright... (I 84-87)

His words recall those of the dead in Isaiah 14. 12, 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer'. The subtle difference is that here we have the direct speech of one devil to another, rather than the prophet's prediction of such speech, and this brings the reader into closer contact with Satan and his predicament. Such contact breeds sympathy, and in this exceptional instance the existence of another analogue counteracts the Bible to contrarily encourage this sympathy. For, as Alastair Fowler points out, 'Satan's exclamation echoes Aeneas' at the

21 At the point in the exploration of psychological literary relations where one-to-one relationships (like Bloom's) show their limitations, archetypal theory may be helpful. In this area we find unconscious relations to innumerable and unnameable earlier poets. In the case of certain key images, another poet's use may justifiably elucidate Wordsworth's, even if there is no direct influence at work, because these images are shared by a common unconsciousness.

22 I. A. Richards, complaining of allusion as elitist, suggests that 'there are some to whom a familiarity with literature occasions a sense of superiority over others which is trivial and mean' ('The Allusiveness of Modern Poetry', in Principles of Literary Criticism (London: Routledge, 1924), p. 170). Seen in this way, allusion is analogous to dramatic irony, since the pleasurable knowing of the initiated depends on the ignorance of the uninitiated.

23 Owen amends T. S. Eliot to explain how allusion works: 'it might be said that in [allusive] instances the borrowing is made into "something different" [Eliot, 'Philip Massinger'], but this is not wholly true. It is only because the borrowing remains the same while it is made into "something different" that it functions as it is designed to function' ('Literary Echoes', p. 3).
appearance of Hector's ghost during the fall of Troy: *ei mihi, qualis erat! quantum mutatus ab illo / Hectorem* (Aen. ii 274). Satan has a certain heroic code; he is to some the hero of Milton's epic, as Aeneas is of Virgil's.

Here, the ironic (allusive) likeness and unlikeness is achieved by what we would confidently, technically call 'an allusion'. Newlyn describes the allusion's double effect in terms of the figure of the 'duck-rabbit', an image of gestalt, which must be seen in two ways (impossible to do at one instant) to be seen entire. She concludes that 'the conjunction of likeness and difference gives us ambiguity, which is the allusion's meaning' (p. 66). Critics, Newlyn argues, tend to emphasize the 'revisionary' aspect of allusion: the point of difference, that which has been changed, neglecting the accompanying agreement, the continuity, which makes for the ambiguous doubleness. The dissimilarity of Satan to Isaiah's hero would be far less meaningful were not Satan – as the accompanying comparison of him to Aeneas shows – also like that hero. And what Newlyn says of allusion is true too of irony, irony that is found beyond the instances of such definite allusion.

Wherever texts have a relation, irony will accrue, and relationships are far more manifold than in cases of technical allusion. I mentioned above the epic commonplace of facing and challenging previous epics. Epic is an especially self-referential form. The large number of conventional features and, especially, the claim to poetic greatness and historical and ideological priority, demand that each epic poet confront his predecessors, in a whole range of encounters, from the highly specific to the broadly associated. Something similar occurs in each genre, though less acutely: 'a very important type of allusion-marker echoes conventions of literature in order to evoke the attributes associated with them throughout literary history' (Perri, p. 305). It is this phenomenon that has led Stein, for example, to consider what he calls 'generic allusion'. Wordsworth, in this mode, will bring his awareness that he has been influenced by the loco-descriptive poetry of other poets into the sphere of his own work, 'alluding' to the tradition as a whole. Is the difference, then, between using an inherited genre and alluding to it in one's use of it, only a matter of self-awareness? If so, then if a poet admits (acknowledges) in the work itself that his form is inherited, and admits (lets in) his sources, then he is alluding; if not, he is merely using. This is an interesting idea, but there must be more to it than this, for so simple a proposition again sits awkwardly with Stein's

sense of the rich effects of strong 'allusiveness'. For to admit, in both senses, one's sources, is not necessarily to make striking use of them. A writer cannot safeguard himself from seeming weakly derivative merely by confessing his unoriginality. Only if poetry has the power to proceed significantly from its forbears, to transform its inherited material, will it achieve the unlikeness that, with the likeness, is allusive. I am speaking in terms of poetry's power, rather than the poet's power, because this unlikeness will not necessarily depend only on the poet himself being, in Bloom's terms, a 'strong' one. On the one hand, a poet's own masterful use of a genre might bring about genuinely allusive 'generic allusion'. But might not the unlikeness stem also from a change in circumstances, in context, that is above or beyond the poet's skill? We saw above that the question of intentionality has often overlapped with the question of the effects, when critics have sought to define allusion. An author does not have unlimited, intended control over his poetry's effects. One of the other factors which shapes them might be the gap of years, with its cultural changes, between a source text and responding text.

Allusion marries the poetry of the period - Romantic or any other - to earlier poetry, earlier periods, and the differences between these periods will have a bearing on our definitions too. Reference - conscious or unconscious - to last year's poetry, or poetry of the last generation, is likely to have a different effect than will reference to poetry from a more ancient age. That the latter, when successful, will be more interestingly effective, was suggested by Eliot: 'a good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest'.

The relations between texts are not even confined to the case of continued genres, and the poet does not always have the independence to choose when and how to engage with these conventions or with the literary tradition as a whole. Earl Wasserman diagnoses Alexander Pope's relationship to influential literature: 'classical literature and its manners, together with Scripture and its exegetical tradition, are not merely Pope's acquired learning; they shaped the

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25 T. S. Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', in Selected Essays, 3rd edn (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), pp. 205-20 (p. 206). Walter Jackson Bate paid attention to the differing time-gaps between source and alluding texts in the work that inspired Bloom's Anxiety series: The Burden of the Past and the English Poet (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971). His point was the "leapfrog" invocation of a more distant source, 'the leap over the parental - the principal immediate predecessors - to what Northrop Frye calls the "modal grandfather"' could provide psychological comfort, an escape from closer, more looming predecessors. By leapfrogging, Jackson Bate argues, 'the English Romantics ... invoked the Elizabethans and Jacobean' (p. 22). Bloom tends to elide these generation gaps.
character and processes of his thought’. The act of writing is a necessarily allusive one. A great many critics have stressed that a poem’s relations to other poetry are central to its own being. For Lawrence Lipking, ‘poetry itself is the source of poetry, poems beget poems’ (p. 15), and Geoffrey Hartman suggests that ‘perhaps every poem [develops in the shadow of a quotation] in the sense that the effaced or absorbed memory of other great poems motivates its own career’. That Harold Bloom’s Anxiety of Influence is subtitled A Theory of Poetry (not ‘a theory of poetic relations’) testifies to the fact that his study is not of influence as an element of poetry, but as its prime mover. In his discussion of the ways in which literature imitates nature and imitates other literature, Northrop Frye concludes that ‘the terms nature, life, reality, experience, are all interchangeable in the primitive language of criticism: they are all synonyms for content’ (‘Nature and Homer’, p. 42). When it comes to form, ‘the impulse to give a literary shape to something can only come from previous contact with literature.’ ‘Because works of literature form a verbal society, and because the forms of literature can only be derived from other literary forms, literature is allusive, not externally or incidentally allusive, but substantially and integrally so’ (p. 46). Frye has arrived at intertextuality, within which ‘by degrees, a text can come into contact with any other system’, or at least at its doorstep.

Intertextuality can be posited as an alternative to influence, since it considers, as does influence, the relationship between texts. Intertextuality, as a notably French discovery, has its

28 Different reading practices reflect or neglect this emphasis on relations, and such practices may have altered with the ages. Culler asserts that ‘to read is to place a work in a discursive space, relating it to other texts and to the codes of that space’ (p. 1382). On one level this is inevitable: it is how reading works. But in the case of (other) literary texts and codes, readers can avoid drawing connections. Bate suggests that not only our relative unfamiliarity with literature, but also ‘our way of reading texts in themselves rather than in the context of a received body of commonly possessed earlier texts’ may be ‘why modern readers often overlook significant allusions and echoes’ (p. 74).
29 Roland Barthes, S/Z, trans. by Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 211. To step over the threshold is to concede that the relations between texts are not only innumerable, and untraceable (and not just permeating, but constituting literature), but that this ‘intertextual nature of any verbal construct’ provides ‘the conditions of possibility’ of texts (Culler, pp. 1381 & 1383). Intertextuality, strictly, describes not the texture of a work of literature once it is created, but the ‘discursive space’ (Culler, p. 1382) that pre-exists it. In other words, texts do not create intertextuality, but are created in it. It is important to recognise these ultimate theoretical conclusions in order to realise how little intertextuality has to do with the tracing of sources, how much to do with the fact that language is conventional and shared.
roots in structuralism and poststructuralism since it evolved from the problem of what is and what is not a text. In other words, it did not grow out of influence theories, which traditionally hold the literary text to be different from, or other than, external ‘realities’. That is, in looking at the relations between literary texts in a way that is different from that of influence theory, intertextuality goes far beyond influence, breaking the barriers between those literary texts and what is commonly considered to be outside those texts, referred to by those texts. Nevertheless, since the breaking of those barriers is always problematic, achieved in stages, a limited intertextuality can be usefully employed as a way of approaching literary relations. M. H. Abrams explains that ‘to a thoroughgoing structuralist critic ... the “real world” is itself held to be ... a text’, but leading up to this conclusion there is a series of moves. 30 ‘One literary text echoes, or is inseparably linked to, other texts’, first ‘by open or covert citations and allusions’, next by ‘the assimilation of the formal substantive features of an earlier text’, and thirdly ‘by participation in a common stock of literary and linguistic procedures and conventions’. Since there are not just literary conventions, but all kinds of social conventions, or codes, it is here that all human interaction comes to be seen as textual, that the “real world” is itself held to be ... a text’, but if we limit ourselves to these three initial stages what we have is a formula for what could be termed ‘literary intertextuality’, which recognizes that the relations between literary texts are thoroughgoing and beyond the authority of single writers, that is, beyond ‘influence’. Just as, for Barthes, any utterance is originless, so certain literary utterances have no single ultimate literary origin. Radical intertextuality would question the degree to which the world of literature, or the network of literary texts, can be kept separate from the intertext of the social world. Nevertheless, it would admit that the divide, or barrier, even if it is itself a convention that has been created and can be dissolved, has, nevertheless, been created, or assumed, and can be worked with, rather than annihilated. John Frow shows that Derrida grappled with a simultaneous ‘double movement’: on the one hand the ‘textualization of the real’, which breaks the barriers between textual and non-textual, and, on the other, the ‘recognition of the limits of textuality’, which realizes them again. ‘It is the incompatibility or undecidability between these two moments that is governed by the problematic of the edge, the

margin, the limit'. Whilst theorists concern themselves with these margins, their acknowledgment of them - they are problematized, not simply swept away - allows the practitioner, who cannot spend too long deciding where to draw her boundaries lest she never get on to the work of looking at what is inside, to decide at which boundary she will halt. Bate, Stein, Newlyn and others all use the term to indicate patterns of resemblance, and it is especially useful in describing those that are beyond definite influence: commonplaces of genre, period, coincidence, accident. These are enough to wrest allusion away from intentionality, towards the necessary 'special referentiality of literary works' (Culler, p. 1383), and to consider further possibilities of 'unconscious allusion'. I will consider, therefore, the field of literary texts alone, using intertextuality, or more properly literary intertextuality, as an alternative to influence. Its concern with texts results, ironically, in its being in one sense more limited, closed off from the social world, than is influence. On the one hand, it extends the links between texts beyond influence theory's specific ones of named writer to named writer. On the other hand, it shuts off the move beyond the text that influence-theory, in its consideration of personalities, or writers beyond their texts, opens up. For influence-theory, especially under Harold Bloom, has become psychologically-oriented, considering not only the relations, say, of Milton's poetic texts to Wordsworth's, but of 'what Milton meant to Wordsworth' in a wider sense: what Wordsworth's image of Milton the creating man means to Wordsworth's mind. Literary intertextuality concerns itself rather with the texts, the linguistic constructs created within the 'common stock' of conventions of form, genre, and fields of language, owned by no person, originating in no one's mind, but cut loose from authority, shared and anonymous. Second, the limits of language and of literature, the especial over-use of particular elements, and the changes of context and connotation that accompany the passing of time create the likeness-in-difference that results in allusive effect.

Carmela Perri identifies the power of allusion in its use of connotation. Overthrowing the traditional definition of allusion as 'tacit reference', she argues that the reference itself can be overt, it is the connotations of the referent to be included that are referred to only tacitly

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32 Culler notes that even theorists of radical intertextuality such as Kristeva have found it very difficult to describe the intertextual space, and tend in practice to narrow their discussions to identifiable sources (p. 1384). A similar criticism may be made of Bloom. He pretends to eschew resemblances of phraseology, in his pursuit of pre-linguistic relationships, but in practice often uses allusion in his illustrations.
This is the expansive potential of allusion. ‘Intra-textual patterns’ extend the relations of the alluding text beyond the marked (alluded-to) text out to further texts. Specific allusions trigger wider relations. Allusion extends its effects from the pointed, specific, clearly conscious device outwards, as through an arrangement of concentric circles, through the field of literary conventions. At what point will the rich allusiveness of the primary reference lose its pointedness, to become banal? I argued that often ‘generic allusion’ is not strictly allusive. But sometimes it may be, and, since the diffusion of reference (from single, marked text, to all the author’s associated efforts, to other works of the genre) happens automatically, irresistibly, and beyond the author’s control, we are approaching the non-intentional allusion.

True, this process began with an intended allusion, which spread, so to speak, through connotation. But one can envisage this happening unintentionally, because of the sheer exhaustibility of language, of rhythm, and of other formal features, which is only magnified within a single genre with its still further limited range of conventionally appropriate register and imagery. Certain words, phrases, and images are so often used that a new use has a greater chance of achieving an allusive effect.

Imagine someone saying: any familiar word already has an aura, a ‘corona’ of faintly indicated uses surrounding it. Much as if the principal figures in a painting were surrounded with faint, misty pictures of proceedings in which these figures play a part. – Now, let’s just take this assumption seriously! – Then it comes out that it’s inadequate to explain intention.

(Wittgenstein I, 293)

The allusive practice to which I. A. Richards objected was ‘the use of responses not available without special experience, which more than anything else narrows the range of the artist’s communication and creates the gulf between expert and popular taste’ (p. 168). A similar objection is implicit in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, where Wordsworth expresses a desire for communication, and defends ordinary language. In the Essays upon Epitaphs, furthermore, Wordsworth praises ‘commonplaces’, as communicating with naturally felt sincerity. The language of his allusions, as of his poetry generally, is a much-used language. Poetry that uses the most universal images – a flower, a tree, the sea – and simple language, common to very many forms of literature, popular and sophisticated, will connote a great many more other instances of the same imagery and language than will the poetry of bizarre conceits.

Stein admits as much when discussing The Prelude’s Snowdon episode in the light of Young’s Night Thoughts, concluding that ‘there is nothing specific enough to establish a direct allusion to Young in Wordsworth’s passage. The allusion is generic’ (p. 136).
and specialized language. Wordsworth’s poetry is of the former kind, and the poetry with which it shares these features includes some of that of the English ‘ancients’, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (this poetry playing a very large part in the formation of Wordsworth’s own). In the gap of centuries between this poetry and Wordsworth’s those shared words and images have not lain dormant but, used and reused, have accrued meaning, intended meaning in each instance, which becomes connotation thereafter. To use this common stock is to tap into its history, and a new use will ring the changes on previous uses, whether the poet likes it or not. Hollander describes as ‘metaleptic’ a kind of allusion that is especially self-conscious, so that ‘its allusiveness has been brought into the range of its subject’ (p. 121-22). In this instance the use of particularly over-precedented images (his example is the fallen leaves topos) admits that its sources are too manifold to be recorded. Here again, the precise study of allusion seems to lead towards Barthes’s picture of literature’s, even language’s ‘lost origins’.

Allusions that seem to me to be less conscious, unconscious, or accidental, though still rich, are discussed particularly in Chapter 8, where ‘intertextual allusion’ is seen to be anticipated by Wordsworth’s considerations of fancy and of imagination, and his discussions of epitaphs, in particular. Jay Clayton has pointed out a critical prejudice in favour of lines of influence over a sense of shared convention. He finds motifs to have

> a double determination ... one traditional and anonymous, part of every author’s storehouse of images, the other traceable to specific literary sources. How do we weigh one determination in relation to the other? Does the case for a literary source, once established, override a motif’s traditional roots, causing us to ignore its conventionality from that point onward? Such has been the bias of most influence studies: finding a canonical origin for a motif seems to carry more prestige than locating a nexus of traditional associations. One wonders why.\(^\text{34}\)

One reason is that a reader can more easily trace patterns between two writers, discovering a satisfying twist by the later poet of the earlier’s use, discovering, that is, the quality of an allusion. But the participation in that ‘nexus of traditional associations’ becomes equally rich if it is found to be a metaleptic participation, a repetition that makes a turn on its repetitiousness,

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as, for Ricks, allusions of all kinds so often seem to do. Intertextual but also metaleptic allusions are another concern of Chapter 8.

As Hollander points out, allusion is a kind of punning 'play': 'the Latin rhetorical term for such word play is 'allusio' (p. 63).\(^\text{35}\) The fact that poststructuralists have employed that same etymological cluster (from 'alludere') hints that allusion might usefully be considered in the light of that theory: it is as if allusion is the actual word-game that the idea of reading as a game is modeled on. Allusion might in this way be a mediator between traditional influence-theory and intertextuality. But allusion has also been seen as a game for playing people.

**The Reader**

Tilottama Rajan argues that, as a postformalist phenomenon, deconstructionism was limited by its neglect of 'the outside of the text': its encounter with the reader, who is seen not as a passive recipient but as an active agent 'who must complete the text'.\(^\text{36}\) She finds that in Romantic poetry (and theory) the function of this creative reader becomes inscribed within the text, as 'the author renounces his authority over the reader' (p. 2), particularly in 'scenes of reading' (p. 11), in which the troubled process of communication is itself dramatized. The reader is recognized 'as coproducer of the text' (p. 19) in a shift from 'hermeneutic' reading (actively interpretative, but author-honouring, as if decoding an already-completed message) to 'heuristic' reading (a more creative, self-discovering process).\(^\text{37}\) In this heuristic discourse, 'reading can no longer be conceived as the reconstruction of an original meaning, but must be seen as the production of new meaning' (p. 33).

This gesture towards an encouragement of the reader's creative participation is illustrated in miniature by allusion, a device that has to be activated by the reader. A particular effort of interpretation is momentarily required if the allusion is to take effect, as has been acknowledged by all theorists of the topic. For those to whom allusion is necessarily

\(^{35}\) Bloom has discussed this too, in *A Map of Misreading* (New York: OUP, 1975), p. 126.

\(^{36}\) Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 2. Rajan's fifth chapter considers the *Lyrical Ballads* in relation to readers, real and fictional, and to representations of communication and response. Rajan considers the inscription of the reader function further in 'The Other Reading: Transactional Epic in Milton, Blake, and Wordsworth', in Low & Harding, pp. 20-46, in which this strategy is seen to be inherited from *Paradise Lost*.

\(^{37}\) This tentative shift is undercut by a contrasting movement. For though closure on the textual level is avoided, with an emphasis on 'literature as a productivity rather than a product', an alternative 'romantic hermeneutics' proposes a new place of resolution: the psychologically-complete 'work' that lies behind the text, where like-minded writer and reader meet. Meaning is 'displaced from language to consciousness' (pp. 28-29).
Consciously intended, 'recognizability' has been extracted as another defining criterion, and it has been posited as a principle by which to distinguish allusion from echo (as by Hollander, p. 64). But it shades, on the one hand, into the definition-by-type-of-marker with which I began this discussion, (quotation's 'literal presence' will be more recognizable than allusion's 'fragmentary or periphrastic' one, and so forth), and on the other, into the question of conscious intentionality. From the latter it is not really separable, acting only as a mirror-image: an allusion is easily recognizable because it was put there deliberately, which makes it obvious to spot.

However, the reader must be in possession of the relevant information to fulfil his side of the bargain. If he has no knowledge of the source text, he will either be unable to decipher an allusion, though suspecting that it is present, or else he will miss it altogether. Even if one were to concede that it is the author's intention that enables an allusion to be an allusion, it is additionally the reader's shared knowledge of the source that allows it to act as an allusion. It is not only on the level of our fumbling attempts to define that allusion and echo become confused: in practice, too, allusion fades to echo when 'such access [to the "portable library"] is lost in a community of reading' (Hollander, p. 65).\textsuperscript{38} The reader's interpretative cooperation is indispensable. Allusion cannot work without it, which suggests that the reader's role must be taken into account in our attempts to define allusion, and that 'recognition' of the allusion is too passive a description of that role.

Some writers make extensive use of consciously intended allusions to a wide range of sources, including foreign-language texts, T. S. Eliot being the obvious example. If one believes that knowledge of the source text is necessary to an enjoyment or understanding of this

\textsuperscript{38} John T. Shawcross attacks those who 'find' lines of direct influence that they have actually drawn. "Allusion" tells us more about critics' than poets' reading. Intentionality remains important to Shawcross, but he points out that it is far more difficult to establish than is admitted. The critical 'discovery' of allusions is therefore necessarily in part a creative process (\textit{John Milton and Influence: Presence in Literature, History and Culture} (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1991)). Regarding this problem of the identification of 'genuine' influence, Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein explain that 'some versions of intertextuality would make this hotly debated topic irrelevant, since if a resemblance or parallel is seen as inhering in the mind of the reader in the first place, then one does not need to worry about whether the author really read, remembered, and imitated a specific precursor' ('Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality', in Clayton & Rothstein, pp. 3-36 (p. 31, n. 3)). Michael Riffaterre is one such critic. He claims, for example, that the 'reaction of Wordsworth's editors ... to see \textit{the Aeneid} as a source for "Yew-Trees" ... [is] irrelevant to interpretation. Vergil's phantoms may form part of the poem's intertext for learned readers, including Wordsworth. This is no longer an important factor, for the days are long past when the average reader brought to his reading a mind full of Latin' ('Interpretation and Descriptive Poetry: A Reading of Wordsworth's "Yew-Trees"', \textit{New Literary History} 4 (1972-73), 229-56 (p. 245)).
kind of allusive text, then this practice cannot fail to seem unpleasantly exclusive. This is the form of allusion condemned by Richards as a game for the intellectual elite:

to turn the capacity of recognising recondite references into a shibboleth by which culture may be estimated is a perversion to which scholarly persons are too much addicted ... [For the writer,] when it becomes a habit it is a disease. (p. 170)

We have seen, however, that the author is not necessarily the game-master, since it may be language that plays. But if, as for Rajan, such an idea is mistaken in its exclusion of the reader, it may be he who is more usefully considered as the player. Wasserman suggests that the reader has a power that is not dictated by the writer. He is ‘actively invited ... to exercise, within poetic reason, his own invention by contemplating the relevances of the entire allusive context and its received interpretation’ (p. 443). The reader needs to be familiar with that context, but it may be a wider field than even the author knew. The contract is loosened; the writer no longer controls the game. Perri, too, considering allusion’s connotative possibilities, finds that allusion excites the reader because it is up to him or her to decide the extent of relevant connotation:

contemplation of the linked texts may activate further meaning patterns between them, or the marked text may evoke properties of texts other than itself (‘intra-textual patterns’) any of which affect the significance ... of the alluding text. (p. 296)

Allusion – like Rajan’s ‘heuristic’ reading generally – involves ‘a creative act by the reader’ (Wasserman, p. 443).

Because of the etymological connection with word play – “allusio” – Perri considers allusion in the light of Freud’s analysis of joking (p. 301), and again, the emphasis is on the reader’s pleasure in working out the game, by exploring the connotative field. The writer’s hold is slackened, the reader becomes ‘writerly’, in Barthes’s term. Barthes redefines the practice of reading in S/Z: ‘it would be wrong to say that if we undertake to reread the text we do so for some intellectual advantage ... it is actually and invariably for a ludic advantage: to multiply the signifiers, not to reach some ultimate signified’ (p. 165, my italics). Robin Jarvis considers the reading activity as creative play, to suggest that ‘allusion may denote not only textual echoes of varying degrees of magnitude, but also an act performed by the interjacent reader’ (p. 107). Allusions, he argues, ‘are constituted not by the will of the author or by the

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39 Jarvis formulates a theory of the reader’s activity based on Freud’s primary and secondary mental processes (pertaining to the pleasure and reality principles), combined with a reworking of Bloom.
demonstrable facts of "influence", but by the act of reading in an allusive or relational manner' (p. 17). Language and the reader seem to play together, as the intertext 'is a function ... that exceeds or suspends the conscious control of the reader, who must be considered rather as a function of the intertext' (p. 145).\footnote{The primary activity is a daemonic 'influx incorporating unprincipled associations from other texts', the secondary a reactive movement in which logic and temporal continuity are reimposed (p. 67).} The reader's own power is a new kind of influence, influence in the performative sense ... Influence, that is, not as a historical and biographical phenomenon, or as a factor in the genesis of the poem, but as the active construction and pursuit of relations, an influencing of the poem by the reader. (p. 151)

Finding an allusion, Jarvis suggests, 'predisposes one to find further relations ... there is, as it were, an allusive frame of mind. It is this that turns allusion into a labyrinthine activity, and renders the work of interpretation potentially endless' (p. 112).

The 'allusive frame of mind', and the legitimacy of its findings, is illustrated in critical investigations such as Christopher Ricks's. Ricks's interest is in what Hollander calls 'metaleptic' allusion, that variety which includes an awareness of its own allusiveness within its signification. In 'Tennyson Inheriting the Earth', Ricks identifies allusions that play on metaphors of their own allusiveness. Amongst these are images of inheritance and money, companionship (and its absence), speech (and the unutterable), echoing, growing, feeding, and returning. Most of Ricks's examples are based on striking verbal resemblances, but what is more important is Ricks's convincing construal of them. I argued above (p. 24) that, though \textit{a priori} principles for distinguishing 'allusion' from 'echo' may be established, the status of each individual instance will always, in practice, be open to debate. Ricks quotes Tennyson's quotation of Eckermann that 'the prosaic mind finds plagiarism in passages that only prove "the common brotherhood of man"'.\footnote{Christopher Ricks, 'Tennyson Inheriting the Earth', in \textit{Studies in Tennyson}, ed by Hallam Tennyson (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 66-104 (p. 67).} His own essay, ostensibly revealing the richness of Tennyson's allusions, showing how far the poet's mind was from being 'prosaic', might be said to do the same for his own.

It is always up to the reader to 'discover' allusions, to construe them in such a way as to find meaning rich enough to be considered as true 'allusiveness'. When it is found, most readers assume that it was already there, created by the writer. But what if conflicting claims are made? They can only discredit one another, as regards their supposed status as accounts of
consciously intended allusions evidencing lines of influence. Still, their own interest as interpretations may remain, necessitating a move towards an understanding of allusion as an act on the part of the reader, an investigation of unconsciously and accidentally created parallelings that are only ‘there’ for so long as one believes that they are. To Ricks’s collection of self-referential allusive metaphors must be added another: the ghost. Considering an echo in Wallace Stevens as ‘a true ghost’, Hollander suggests that:

like all phenomena of this sort, we must always wonder what our own contribution was – how much we are always being writers as well as readers of what we are seeing. (p. 99)

George Myerson, going one step further, has suggested that the very fascination of allusion is our inability to establish, as with a ghost, whether or not it is truly there.① Wordsworth’s allusions to Shakespeare’s ghosts, which I discuss in Chapter 9, are metaleptic, bringing their ghostly (elusive) allusiveness into the sphere of their own significance. The spot of time in Book XI of The Prelude in which a thirteen-year-old Wordsworth waits for the horses to take him home, to his father’s death, is haunted by Hamlet, as Hamlet is haunted by his father’s death (XI 344-88). In Paris, as a young, regicide-condoning republican, Wordsworth hears the voice that disturbed the sleep of the ghost-seeing Macbeth (X 64-82).② The sense of a dead precursor’s presence is always half-there, so that the use of allusion, which sees, or thinks it sees, that ghostly figure, harmonizes with these other ghostly hauntings.

Wordsworth celebrates ‘the ghostly language of the ancient earth’ (Prelude II 328), and reflections that are uniquely real and unreal, visible, but insubstantial. The rainbow, symbol of Wordsworth’s ‘natural piety’, is an optical phenomenon more truly ‘half-created’ by the spectator than are most objects of sight, and echoes – recurring so frequently in Wordsworth’s poetry – are another species of the real/unreal.③ Ricks adapts Wordsworth’s view that the poet has ‘a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present’ (Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, ll. 435-36) to a consideration of the

③ Stein explores the role of echoes in Wordsworth’s ideas of poetic genesis in his second chapter.
present/absent white space at the end of the poetic line. Allusion, too, like all these images, exists on the border of the objective and the imagined, the perceived and the created, where seeing things is believing.

PART II: THE LANGUAGE OF ALLUSION
CHAPTER 2: INCARNATIONAL LANGUAGE

‘troublesome disguises’
(Paradise Lost IV 740)

If expression is the dress of thought, allusions are either borrowed robes, or decorative additions to ordinary clothing, seemingly inappropriate, either way, to Wordsworth’s linguistic ideals. But these ideals are not easily attainable. Wordsworth uses allusion to explore the difficulties of language itself, in his quest for a language where no indirection will be needed, where the linguistic sign is ‘motivated’ not ‘arbitrary’. Whilst the ‘natural’ language of Eden, which expressed the essences of things, was probably mythical, certainly lost, its fragments might remain, its principles be employed, to escape the empty structures of modern language.

In the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth uses the image of language as the clothing of thought. The poet is a tailor, trying to create a ‘language ... exquisitely fitted for the passion’ (ll. 479-80) he is endeavouring to convey. This metaphor reflects the belief that language is secondary to thought and feeling, which is why “poetry” is prior to its translation into language, so that Wordsworth could believe that his brother John was legitimately a “silent poet”. Wordsworth advocates the plain style, arguing that the poet ought not to ‘interweave any foreign splendour of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests’ (ll. 396-97). ‘Transitory and accidental ornaments’ (l. 610-11) are to be discouraged.

Sometimes, Wordsworth is confident of achieving this style, as in the ‘glad preamble’ of The Prelude:

To the open fields I told
A prophesy; poetic numbers came
Spontaneously, and clothed in priestly robe
My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
For holy services.

(I 59-63)

So appropriate is the poetic effusion that it invests the spirit that has been dedicated to the service of that poetic impulse. This episode enacts the ‘expressive’ theory of the origin of language, which, in turn, exalts poetry itself:

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1 These terms are from Robert N. Essick’s thorough treatment of language-theory from pre-Socratic Greece to the Romantic period, ‘In Pursuit of the Motivated Sign’, Chapter 2 of William Blake and the Language of Adam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Essick identifies many points of disagreement regarding the ‘motivated’ and ‘arbitrary’ sign. Certain rationalists attempted to evolve a logically, rather than transcendentally motivated language. For others, since the crisis of Babel was interpreted as a gradual descent into artifice, there was hope that the artifice could be undone.
poetry, rather than a decorative feature superadded to language, was viewed by Blair, Rousseau, Herder, and many other theorists as superior to logical discourse because of its contact with origins. By the last few decades of the eighteenth century, the pursuit of the motivated sign had become an aesthetics of primitivism.

(Essick, pp. 70-71)

Language began as an expression of feeling, and must at first, when vocabulary was limited, have been rich with metaphors: language was originally poetic. But, despite the ‘preamble’, clothing is more often in Wordsworth a metaphor for that which is at best artificial and obscuring, at worst, dangerous. For language is not only secondary, but arbitrary. An entirely conventional symbolic system, it has no organic relation to thought and feeling. Stephen K. Land points out that ‘Wordsworth shares with the philosophical traditions of Descartes and Locke a profound mistrust of words, which sets him apart from both the linguistic primitivism of Vico and his successors and from the organicism of Herder and Coleridge’. Language may be a disguise, rather than an expression.

In Book III of The Prelude, clothes feature as a prominent part of the experience of Cambridge upon which Wordsworth looks back as, in the main, anticlimactic, indulgent and insignificant, an eddy in the stream of his development. A truly scholarly Cambridge experience would be characterized by ‘naked chambers’ and ‘plain weeds’ (III 463, 470); the ‘passing day’ might ‘learn to put aside / Her trappings ... strip them off abashed’ (II. 400-02). Wordsworth, however, was as concerned with his clothes as with his studies. On arrival, he went

From shop to shop about my own affairs,
To tutors or to tailors as befel

(III 24-26)

Cambridge becomes defined by its ‘gownèd students’ (VII 59); Wordsworth’s residence there is recalled as, merely, the time ‘when I wore / A student’s gown’ (VI 335-36). Far from being invested in a ‘priestly robe’, he hurries late to chapel:

Upshoudering in a dislocated lump
With shallow ostentatious carelessness
My surplice, glorièd in and yet despised

(III 316-18)

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^ Stephen K. Land, ‘The Silent Poet: An Aspect of Wordsworth’s Semantic Theory’, University of Toronto Quarterly 42 (1972-73), 157-69 (p. 163). James Thompson argues that ‘Romantic poets, most notably Wordsworth, are far more distrustful of language than their Augustan precursors’, and finds that Wordsworth (at times) comes closer than any theorist of the time to an absolute fear ‘that language cannot express thought’ (‘Jane Austen and the Limits of Language’, JEGP 85 (1986), 510-31 (pp. 513, 519)).
He is more interested in his 'lordly dressing-gown' (III 38).

Clothing not only characterizes, but even represents, Cambridge, which strikes Wordsworth as a showy, artificial place, where he puts on a way of living, for a time, that is easy to take off again. Life there is described as a kind of woven fabric. Wordsworth notes:

The surfaces of artificial life
And manners finely spun, the delicate race
Of colours, lurking, gleaming up and down
Through that state arras woven with silk and gold –
This wily interchange of snaky hues,
Willingly and unwillingly revealed

(III 590-95)

This description recalls the advice to the poet not to 'interweave any foreign splendour', in the Preface, so that the style of life at Cambridge is analogous to a style of poetry: the artificial, ornate style of which Wordsworth disapproves. The parallel is drawn again, by Wordsworth's two uses of a striking reference. At this time,

The very garments that I wore appeared
To prey upon my strength, and stopped the course
And quiet stream of self-forgetfulness.

(IV 292-94)

He has in mind those poisoned vestments, read of in the stories of superstitious times, which had the power to consume and to alienate from his right mind the victim who put them on.

(Essay Upon Epitaphs III, 182-84)

In the Essay, they are an image, not of a way of life, but of language. He surely has language in mind, too, in the Cambridge passage. He describes his 'strange transformation' into a fashion victim 'attired / In splendid clothes', 'as if by word / Of magic or some fairy's power' (III 32-36), a fantastic idea, suggestive of the fabulous adventures that were the younger schoolboy's sickly taste in literature. The fiction of the fairy's spell is an imported ornament, 'glittering' like the student's own powdered hair (l. 37) in a flashy way against the backdrop of the plainer style. The 'artificial life' passage, meanwhile, mimics its own artificiality by using a description of a creation, the arras, that is itself someone else's creation: Spenser's. To

3 Faerie Queen III xi 28 has a description of an 'arras' that is 'Woven with gold and silke' in which 'rich metall' that 'lurked' 'shewed it selfe, and shone unwillingly'. This allusion to another poet's (allusion to) artifice, to overlay his own, is in sharp contrast to the allusion to Milton's (allusion to) God's creation, discussed below, p. 69, to which Wordsworth's own is a hoped-for equal in genuine creativity.
create a fabric of artificiality suitable to the description of such, Wordsworth ‘interweave[s] ... foreign splendour’, in the form of another’s description of a splendid fabric. In this satirical section, such a style is appropriate, though Wordsworth presumably intends it to work ironically to convey a serious and ‘plain’ point. But if allusions to other poets’ works are ‘foreign splendour’, how, if at all, are they to be used in passages that do not have this ironically mimetic surface? At Cambridge, studying set texts in a superficial way, and robed in his ‘lordly dressing-gown’, Wordsworth resembles the child who is subjected to a modish educational system, ‘fenced round’ in ‘panoply complete’ (V 314-15). This is ‘no child, / But a dwarf man’ (V 294-95), whose panoply (a borrowed robe/word),

\[\text{Hang[s] loose about him, like a giant’s robe} \]
\[\text{Upon a dwarfish thief.} \]

\[(\text{Macbeth V ii 21-22})\]

Wordsworth’s gowns too, like his style, are ‘borrowed robes’ (\textit{Macbeth I iii 109}).

In the \textit{Preface}, this image of language as clothing is elided with another, which Wordsworth expresses most clearly in the third \textit{Essay Upon Epitaphs}, commending:

\[\text{those expressions which are not what the garb is to the body} \]
\[\text{but what the body is to the soul, themselves a constituent part} \]
\[\text{and power or function in the thought. (ll. 163-65)}\]^4

The body is natural, whilst clothing is artificial, however plain its style may be. The implicit hope of the \textit{Preface} is that ‘a more naked style’ (l. 714) of clothing will more closely approximate a natural ‘embodiment’, and the two images become provocatively entangled.\(^5\)

For the garment that the poet ‘weaves’ and ‘fits’ is also a body. Comparing the language of poetry and of prose, Wordsworth argues that

\(^4\) Wordsworth has in mind Pope’s line, ‘Expression is the dress of thought’ (\textit{Essay on Criticism} l. 318), having just criticized eighteenth-century epitaphs that have suffered from Pope’s influence.\(^5\) Wordsworth uses a subtle paradox of the clothing / nakedness theme to describe, appropriately, the paradoxical power of metre. He notes the ‘tendency of metre to \textit{divest} language in a certain degree of its reality, and thus to \textit{throw} a sort of half consciousness of unsubstantial existence \textit{over} the whole composition’ (ll. 743-45 my emphases). In the very act of, in one sense, stripping the situation bare, metre at the same time ‘throws over’ a kind of covering, like a cloak, but one that is made of ‘unsubstantial’ material: by adding a sense of artificiality, lessening the impact, metre paradoxically allows the reader to participate more fully in the passion, or pain. Wordsworth’s description of London: ‘This City now doth, like a garment, wear / The beauty of the morning; silent, bare’ (‘\textit{Composed Upon Westminster Bridge}’ ll. 4-5) is less convincing, despite Wordsworth’s justification: ‘the contradiction is in the \textit{words} only – bare, as not being covered with smoke or vapour; – clothed, as being attired in the beams of the morning’ (Letter to John Kenyon, c. 24 September 1836, \textit{LY} III, 292).
they both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred, and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep', but natural and human tears; 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.

(Il. 363-71)

The metaphor of language as the clothing of thought slides easily into the metaphor of language as the embodiment of thought, via an intermediate metaphor: the body as the soul’s own clothing. But this easy correlation depends on a particular view of the body, and one that is in part denigratory. Insofar as Wordsworth accepts that language is clothing, he prefers a plain style. But when he considers language as a body, he encounters not a ‘difference in degree’ but a difference in kind. There are no ‘plain’ or ‘ornate’ styles of body to choose between, but two utterly different notions of it. One is the platonic sense of the body as the soul’s prison, at its most negative, a Manichean sullied flesh – dualism in the extreme. The other at least tends towards monism: Milton’s angels’ bodies are physical, but only just so, made of ether, the finest of the elements. The angelic body is a manifestation so perfect that it is not distinguishable from the angel’s self. Angelic sex is absolute communication, knowing no ‘obstacle’ or ‘bar’  (*Paradise Lost* VIII 624, 625), and it is an analogous communication that Wordsworth seeks for poetry. Despite his use of the metaphor in the *Preface*, Wordsworth requires the language of poetry to be a body that is not like clothing, but that presents its meaning, its essence, unclad, as does the angel’s body. Such is the transparent Adamic language, the perfect expression of meaning.

Elsewhere in the *Preface*, then, Wordsworth discards the clothing metaphor, as if to differentiate between that image and the metaphor of embodying, claiming an embodiment that is not the base one of the platonic body. A good poet will come to the realization, he argues, that ‘there is no necessity to trick out … nature’ (l. 471). This is because the words of ordinary speech ‘are the emanations of reality and truth’ (ll. 475-76). As if realizing that the image of a body is too closely tied up with the idea of clothing, Wordsworth rejects them both, now describing language as, not the body, but the soul itself. The ‘emanation’ is that which flows out, like the breath or blood, and indeed Wordsworth describes language in just such a way in the very sentence in which he has used the combined clothing and body metaphor: the language of poetry, as of prose, is like ‘human tears’, ‘human blood’. To solve the troubling sense that
language is external to meaning, and therefore inevitably obscures it, Wordsworth boldly
moves, within one sentence, to an image of language as internal.

But he is bolder still, for though his idea of language as a perfect, transparent body,
inseparable from what it clothes, seems to glance towards the bodies of Milton's angels, he
inverts the hierarchy of angels and men, as if to assert that the human body, human language,
might be superior. The language of poetry, as of prose, is not 'celestial ichor'. The wordiness
of that phrase, and the suggestion that such ichor would be 'boasted' of, hints that the artificial
language which Wordsworth rejects might be like 'ichor': rarefied, unnatural, where 'natural'
means 'human'. Paradoxically, the suggestion is that man's blood is more integral to him than
is the angel's 'ichor'. The poet, meanwhile, acquires the status of an angel, but one who serves
at a greater event:

If the time should ever come when what is now called Science,
thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a
form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to
aid the transfiguration. (ll. 602-05)

Whilst Christianity holds that Christ's incarnation glorified human nature, Wordsworth alters
the emphasis: this transfiguration of knowledge into poetry – poetry which is like a human
body – seems itself to be an exaltation. I have slipped from describing the language of poetry
as a body (or its blood, or as clothes), to describing simply 'poetry' as such, because
Wordsworth does: 'poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge' (l. 570-71); books are
a 'spirit breathed / From dead men to their kind' ('Expostulation and Reply' ll. 7-8).

Wordsworth makes the shift as he moves from the discussion of the style of poetic language, to
the discussion of poetry itself, beginning 'What is a Poet?' But it is appropriate that the
imagery slips in this way, since Wordsworth's concern is that the style, the language, the form
of poetry ought not to be separable from (so that it does not distort, or obscure) the passion, or
meaning, or content. If the language of poetry is its life-blood, essence, or spirit, then the
language of poetry is poetry.

ii

'purer robes than those of flesh and blood'
('Brook! whose society the Poet seeks' l. 12)

'Words', Wordsworth wrote in 1829, 'are not a mere vehicle, but they are powers either to kill
or to animate.' The dead letter is itself deadly, so that Wordsworth, reading the name of his
dead teacher on a tablet, grieves in asking

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can it be
That these two words of glittering gold
Are all that must remain of thee?
('Matthew' II. 30-32)

In a note to 'The Thorn', however, where 'Poetry is passion', Wordsworth celebrates 'words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as things, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion.'⁷ D. D. Devlin explains that

what he recommends are phrases which have been so hallowed by tradition and time (many examples can be found in the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer) that they cease to distract or obstruct the reader and become the very things which the words denote. This is not an attack on language but an assertion of its power, an assertion of language as incarnation.⁸

But this is not the language of true incarnation, the embodiment by the living spirit, of language, but a raising of the dead word. Such a process is like the reanimation of Lazarus (or of Frankenstein's monster), Christ's physical resurrection, possibly, but not his incarnation. Here, words are bodies, into which new life is breathed, whilst the Word was made incarnate by the agency of the Spirit. Jonathan Wordsworth comes closer than Devlin to distinguishing Wordsworth's idea of poisoned vestments from his celebration of words as things:

there is a very important distinction to be made between the substitution of words for things that takes place as the result of failure to connect them to their archetypes, and the tendency of words when being creatively used to achieve in their own right the status of things.⁹

It is the creativity that approaches the incarnational miracle, though still, words are 'used': they are already there. Allusion is a reanimation of another's words, but then so is every use of language. The resurrection of the dead is human language's greatest achievement, but it is not incarnational.

Wordsworth describes 'the language of the heavens' in Book XII of The Prelude (ll. 264-74), as the language of 'men for contemplation framed', recalling Adam, who was himself 'for contemplation ... formed' (Paradise Lost IV 297). But we cannot hear their Adamic language, because these are "silent poets":

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⁷ PW II, 513.
Words are but under-agents in their souls –
When they are grasping with their greatest strength
They do not breathe among them.

(II. 272-74)

'[Silence or] inarticulateness is not a mere device within Wordsworth's poetic fictions but rather a necessary correlative to the semantic theory upon which his theory of poetry rests' (Land, p. 168). In the third Essay, his darkest statement about language, Wordsworth fears that Adamic language is unspeakable because it has shared Adam's fate: 'thoughts cannot ... assume an outward life without a transmutation and a fall' (ll. 198-99).

Children, however, are strangely half-unfallen in Wordsworth's poetry, so that they retain a hope of speaking 'the language of the heavens' out loud. The child of 'To H. C., Six Years Old', for example, has an ambiguous double existence. H. C.'s 'fancies' are brought 'from afar' (l. 1), that glorious realm from which, in the *Intimations Ode*, 'the Soul', 'our life's Star', also comes (ll. 59, 61). (The adult Wordsworth sometimes receives special communications, 'like dreams', 'as from some distant region of my soul' (*Prelude* IV 394-95) – a phrase hinting that the heavenly place might be in the soul, rather than vice versa; but the child habitually enjoys such fancies.) His expression of these fancies is in one sense grossly inadequate, for his words are only a 'mock apparel'. But the precise relation of 'mock' to 'apparel' is unclear. H. C.'s words might be 'mock' in that all those expressions which are mere 'apparel' are a mockery, or they may be even more of a mockery. Compared to adult speech, H. C.'s childish prattle might well be nonsensical, or else, as with the child of the *Ode*, it might be 'mocking' in the sense of 'mimicking', with 'words uttered by rote with the impertinence of a Parrot or a Mocking-bird'. H. C., like the *Ode*’s ‘four years’ Darling of a pigmy size’ who plays at being grown up, ‘fram[ing] his song’ and ‘fitt[ing] his tongue’ (ll. 86, 96, 97) to adult matters, is another ‘pigmy’ dressing up in language that is too big for him. However, like the child in the *Ode*, H. C. has another, solemn, side. For what he attempts to find words to ‘fit’ is ‘unutterable thought’ (l. 3). It is not immediately clear whether Wordsworth is considering H. C.'s ‘thought’ as a special case, or whether ‘thought' is, in

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11 *Reply to 'Mathetes*', ll. 588-89. Wordsworth is discussing one of his favourite subjects: the right and wrong way to educate a child.

12 Wordsworth is commonly believed to have had an eye on Hartley Coleridge when he wrote of the child of the *Ode*, especially since Coleridge's little son had the nickname 'the philosopher' ('Thou best Philosopher' l. 110). In 1815, the pigmy's age was changed to six, as in 'To H. C.'
general, ‘unutterable’. The *Ode*’s ‘best Philosopher’ is ‘deaf and silent’. His knowledge is incommunicable because it is a function of his lack of self-consciousness, that infant state which disintegrates when language is learned. The ‘unutterable thought’ might then be related to this special thought, which cannot be spoken because it is only experienced by the unspeaking child. But H. C. is not unspeaking, and ‘fit[s]’ to that ‘unutterable thought’ ‘the breeze-like motion and the self-born carol’ (l. 4). The *Ode*’s child’s attempt to ‘fit’ was ridiculous, but H. C.’s seems to be successful. Wordsworth’s ‘and’(l. 3) is noncommittal. He refuses to spell out the relation of the making of mock apparel to the fitting of unutterable thought. I think that this is because they are neither simply analogous nor in exact opposition. This double child is more complicated than that of the *Ode*. For H. C., even as he struggles comically to speak like an adult, also speaks another language, one that, confusingly, does ‘fit’, or utter, the thought that was defined as ‘unutterable’. This language is like the inspired poetic language that Wordsworth occasionally claims for himself. ‘Breeze-like’, it recalls the poet’s own ‘mild creative breeze’ (*Prelude* I 43), which, ‘felt within’, is as natural and as life-giving as breath: ‘inspiration’. It is described as ‘motion’, and perhaps Wordsworth means this literally: H. C. fits the unutterable to physical movement, speaking in the body-language of his play. But ‘motion’ (rather than ‘movement’, which would scan equally well) suggests also ‘emotion’ (as it does in ‘A Slumber did my Spirit Seal’ (l. 5)), which, coming between ‘thought’ and ‘carol’ might be their mediator, so that part of H. C.’s secret is that his feeling and thought are integrated in the way that Wordsworth thought they had to be for poetic composition.

Whether in his own breeze-like movements, or in the movement of his breath within him (breath which might be just that, or might be the physical substance of his speech), H. C. expresses the unutterable. Whilst his ‘apparel’ seemed to be borrowed, an inappropriate ‘exterior semblance’ (*Ode* l. 108), his ‘carol’ is ‘self-born’, utterly underived, as internal as his own breath. Perhaps his carol has no words, but is only music. This would explain how H. C. can express thought that is ‘unutterable’, that is, unsayable. Both the ‘breeze-like motion’ and the ‘carol’ might be wordless, resolving the paradox. But Wordsworth does not say that they are, and they hint towards speech, suggesting that H. C. might speak in a prophetic way. His meanings are, presumably, not fully understood by the poet, like Sibylline utterances, yet he believes in their validity. Unlike the child of the *Ode*, whose two selves never seem to overlap, H. C. exists on a fascinating brink, which is why he is other-worldly, a ‘faery voyager’, even in
his everyday life as a 'happy child'. (The child-seer of the Ode, by contrast, is entirely mythical, or figurative. His blessedness recedes as his earthly existence develops, but there is no point of contact between the two. For H. C., 'earth and heaven do make one imagery' (l. 10). He seems to live in two realms at once.) Fairy-like, and also a 'wild' 'child' (ll. 11, 12), H. C. joins the ranks of those creatures whose undeveloped or diminished rationality allows them access to a less conscious, more imaginative region. If he does speak, his is that puzzling language that is either meaningless or else mysteriously meaningful, like the idiot boy's description of what he has seen, or the illogical reasoning of the children in 'We Are Seven' and 'Anecdote for Fathers'.

The description of the child himself echoes that of his self-expression, which is entirely appropriate given the nature of that self-expression. For H. C.'s language (wordless or otherwise) has the transparency of Adamic language, which is what it expresses: the child's essence is indistinguishable from his behaviour. Language, Wordsworth argues, should 'uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe' (Epitaphs III, 185-86). Wordsworth, Peterfreund argues, echoes Newton, who had denied the Johannine Logos, but revises him, so that 'gravitation' becomes an incarnational breath of life. Whilst H. C.'s breath seems to be his language, the river of his life is as 'clear' (l. 6) as his transparent language, so clear as to seem a stream of 'air' – 'breeze-like', like his 'motion'. 'Suspended' in this stream, H. C. is also suspended in time, for the inevitable progress from sunrise to sunset by which life is represented in the Ode is in this poem arrested. H. C. will be a spring lamb forever, the 'morn' will not decline into the light of common day. His exemption from mortality's soiling parallels the self-sufficiency of his language, which is 'self-born', not fathered in the usual way. Wordsworth goes on to describe H. C. as a dew-drop, borrowing his language from Marvell's poem 'On a Drop of Dew', in which the dew-drop is a metaphor for the soul. H. C., by implication, is a pure soul, who, though here on earth, has magically escaped incarceration in the body's 'prison-house'. He is miraculously bodiless, a pure dew-drop, whose substance seems less physical than common matter, whilst the 'body' that is his language, is like an angel's body. Thought is inextricable from

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14 Marvell's 'On a Drop of Dew' is among the Poems and Extracts Chosen by William Wordsworth for an Album Presented to Lady Mary Lowther, Christmas 1819 (London: Frowde, 1905), pp. 66-68.

58
expression, as H. C.’s soul is from his self: ‘thou art a dew-drop’ (l. 27). Just as he will avoid
the suffering of mortal life, as if, ‘self-born’, or immaculate, he had avoided the soiling of
original sin, so too his thought escapes the ‘transmutation and [the] fall’ that ordinary language
brings.

But how are Wordsworth’s own words, the language of this poem, to be assessed in
accordance with his ideas about language as clothing, or as a body, whether the mortal prison-
house, or a more heavenly, ethereal body? Is Wordsworth’s language transparent or opaque?
Certainly, his use of the image of the dew-drop in ‘To H. C.’ does not simply appropriate the
status of the perfection that it expresses. Though H. C.’s expression and his essence are
presented by Wordsworth as perfectly harmonized, or undifferentiated, he has no way of
expressing as much of himself. And, interestingly, in the second Essay Upon Epitaphs,
Wordsworth uses a very similar image to express a far more divided feeling about the language
of a particular epitaph:

> These fantastic images, though they stain the writing, stained
> not [the writer’s] soul. – They did not even touch it; but hung
> like globules of rain suspended above a green leaf, along which
> they may roll and leave no trace that they have passed over it.
> (ll. 403-07)\(^{15}\)

The self-sufficiency that rendered H. C., like a pure soul, immune to the soiling touch of mortal
life becomes here a failure to connect with the ‘soul’. In this instance, the mistaken poet has
believed that ‘the Garb … makes the Muse’, rather than understanding, as Wordsworth does,
that ‘the Muse … puts on the Garb’ (ll. 409-10), or ought to do so. His language is
superfluous, communicating nothing, though Wordsworth claims to be able to tell that
‘notwithstanding his extravagant expressions’, he ‘was a sincere mourner’ (ll. 401-02). How
he does so he does not explain, and it is puzzling, since he admits in the third Essay that words
‘hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts’ (ll. 179-80). There, the
language of poisoned vestments

> is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange,
> to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve. (ll. 186-88)

That list of variations on an idea might betray an anxiety on Wordsworth’s part to find
the right expression – one that is right enough to avoid the charge of being a poisoned

\(^{15}\) Wordsworth uses this image of self-completedness in a third way, in a letter of 22 April 1833:
‘Instead of looking at [the sonnet’s] 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.’ (LY II, 603).
vestment. His careful effort to be precise might suggest a honing down, a painstaking pursuit of perfect expression. Or else his own list might seem to wander, and finally to dissolve. In fact, Wordsworth more often imagines the danger of language — described here as a destructive power — in terms of false constructions. A misled poet might ‘construct a fabric to be wondered at’, and Wordsworth discusses the language of epitaphs as ‘the superstructure’, which, as expressed by the image of the rain globules, he feels to be separable from the poetic impulse, and the sincerity of the feeling (pp. 364-65, 481). In Book VII of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth finds both the physical fabric of London — ‘labyrinths’ (l. 201), suggestive of Satan’s Pandemonium — and also the tangle of different languages encountered there, disturbing. The city is a ‘Babylon’ (l. 85), its sounds are a ‘Babel din’ (l. 157), and the two words are historically related. Wordsworth constructs a superstructure in Book VII that mimics the confusion that is London, using foreign names that convey little more than their own foreignness, or incomprehensibility, and a greater number of lists (like that quoted above), which lack the prepositions that forge relationship, than is common in his poetry. His artful imitation is intended paradoxically to communicate more meaning than does the ‘hubbub’ (l. 227) of his model. (‘HUBBUB’ is used by Milton to describe Chaos in *Paradise Lost* II 951.) But there is also a genuine fear that Wordsworth’s own language might be more like the ‘parrot’s note’ (l. 106) or monkey’s ‘chattering’ (l. 668) than the ever-expressive book of God, Nature, which is the poet’s positive, meaningful model.

In London, the superstructure is so overwhelming that Wordsworth seems to come close to wondering, not only if language can express, or must always slip out of meaning as a raindrop rolls off a leaf, but whether there is a coherent world, or meaning, to be expressed. Each of the three expressions that I have considered here, that of H. C., that of the mistaken epitaph writer, and that which is London, fails in some way. H. C.’s perfect language could not be translated, other than into the silence of his death (he resembles the boy of Winander in this respect, whose communion, which occurs when the owls, and himself, stop calling, and ‘pauses of deep silence mocked his skill’ (Prelude V 405) leads — directly in the story, suggesting a mysterious causality — to his death). His language, like his self, ‘slips’, whether it rolls, whole, off a leaf, or is evaporated, like Marvell’s dew-drop, ‘dissolving’ ‘into the Glories of th’Almighty Sun’ (l. 39-40). If language does not ‘dissolve’ meaning, as Wordsworth fears in

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16 The name ‘Babel’, according to the *OED*, is ‘associated in Genesis with the idea of “confusion”, but not referable to any known Semitic root’, which is pleasingly appropriate, as is the note that the sense of ‘babble’, though that word is not related to ‘Babel’, has been affected by a false association.
the third *Essay*, it seems itself to dissolve. The bad poet’s language, meanwhile, failed to touch
his, more earthly, soul (though Wordsworth believed he could glimpse it), and London
expressed only chaos, or unmeaning.

In ‘To H. C.’, Wordsworth uses Marvell’s expression to explore expression. For
Marvell, the dew-drop seemed perfectly to

in its pure and circling thoughts, express
The greater Heaven in an Heaven less.

(ll. 25-26)

Yet still it is said to ‘exclud[e]’ ‘the World’ (l. 29). H. C.’s perfect expression, too, is other-
worldly, having nothing to do with this ‘soiling earth’. This becomes more of a problem for
Wordsworth, who wants the world, as well as heaven, to be expressed. In this instance,
allusion aided expression, though its contribution to the superstructure – the addition of
another passage (of verse) to the labyrinth of language – might equally well be mistrusted as ‘a
fabric to be wondered at’.

iii

‘The eye – it cannot chuse but see;
We cannot bid the ear be still’

(‘Expostulation and Reply’ ll. 17-18)

The inverse of the question of poetic communication, of the poet’s search for an incarnational
language, is a question of perception. For a prophet is an intermediary who first receives, and
then passes on, truths, which are spoken through him. The problem of how to communicate
truth, second hand, to the people, can only come after the discovery of how truth is first
communicated to the prophet. Wordsworth positions himself in a double role, as teacher and as
pupil. To receive prophetic communications, a peculiar apprehension is needed, which may
either be a heightening of the senses, or else an abandonment of them, in favour of a different
kind of vision.17

Little Emmeline is said, in ‘The Sparrow’s Nest’, to equip her brother with the most
vital faculties for apprehending in this meaningful way:

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17 William Empson discusses the ambiguous ‘sense sublime’ of *Tintern Abbey* (l. 95) in *Seven Types
of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953), pp. 151-54. It is either a mystic, extra-
sensory perception of something transcendent, or else an experience of immanence. Wordsworth
equivocates between these alternatives.
She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;  
And humble cares, and delicate fears;  
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;  
And love, and thought, and joy.  

(ll. 17-20)

Stein comments that the 'urtext' for these lines, and for the lines from Charles Churchill's 'Independence', which Wordsworth's seem, coincidentally or unconsciously, to echo, 'is Acts 28. 27' (p. 244, n. 1, and see p. 211). But in Acts Luke (though the words are put into St. Paul's mouth) is himself alluding to a passage in Isaiah. He had already done so, furthermore, in his Gospel, and the passage is alluded to in Matthew and Mark as well. Isaiah tells how God sent him out as a prophet:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.  
Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.  
(Isaiah 6. 9-10)

Already, this passage is extremely testing. In verse 9 God might be telling Isaiah to inform the people of their lack of understanding ("you do not understand"). On the other hand, the words that Isaiah is to utter can be read as imperatives ("do not understand"). Verse ten confirms the latter, harsh and difficult interpretation. God wants Isaiah to prevent the people from understanding: in verse 13 he explains that a tenth of the people shall be saved. The passage seems to promote the notion of predestined election.

In one way, the writers of the Gospels found this passage very useful, because it anticipates the Jews' rejection of Christ, their failure to recognize the Messiah. It can be quoted, therefore, in defence against those who ask why Jesus did not have a more instantaneous, large-scale impact: God always said it would be this way. This is just one point that Wordsworth can be seen to pick up on. As well as searching for evidence of his own (poetic) election, the notion of the chosen few, elided with the idea of the unrecognized poetic genius, justifies the poet's neglect. 'I know that the multitude walk in darkness', Wordsworth

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18 I do not know whether the grammar is equally ambiguous in the original Hebrew, or whether it is clear, but neither would Wordsworth. In the Greek Septuagint, which, it is thought but not proven, was the text that the writers of the gospels knew, the verbs are not imperatives, but future indicatives. But God's foreknowledge might make this one and the same thing.

19 It is especially useful for Luke in this context, in explaining why St. Paul turned to preach to the Gentiles: the Jews had had their chance and, as Isaiah prophesied, had failed to accept Christ.
quoted, with reference to politics, and he took a similarly Calvinesque tone about poetry: 'it is an awful truth, that there neither is, nor can be, any genuine enjoyment of Poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live ... in the broad light of the world' In the 'Prospectus' he applies Milton's famous phrase, 'fit audience find, though few', to his own poetry (l. 81), and Coleridge uses it of him too in Biographia Literaria.

The gospels use Isaiah's words differently, or report Jesus's use of them differently, relating them to his practice of teaching in parables. I do not have space here to explore this crux of New Testament criticism. In short, however, these allusive texts form a complicated exploration of man's relative understanding, or lack of understanding, of God's word, an exploration which is extended in Wordsworth's own discussion of different kinds of understanding.

Isaiah and the gospels raise two related problems. The second point involves a question of self-consciousness: can one know something without knowing that one knows it? I shall consider this problem presently, but the first issue is the way in which understanding and perceiving might be separated from the physical ability to hear and see. Wordsworth explores this idea in those passages where he experiences his most visionary insights, 'when the light of sense / Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us / The invisible world' (Prelude VI 534-36).

At the beginning of The Prelude, having first received the gift of prophecy (159-63), Wordsworth foresees his future home and future work, as he lies on the earth 'seeing nought, nought hearing' (l. 91). In Book IV, again, the trance-like state that fits him to receive the full impact of the sight of the discharged soldier is described as a suspension of sensory effort, particularly of the eye's vision:

I looked not round, nor did the solitude
Speak to my eye, but it was heard and felt
(IV 390-91)

Climbing Snowdon, too, Wordsworth glances towards a similar suspension - 'by myself / Was nothing either seen or heard' (XIII 20-21) - until the dog's bark temporarily breaks the silence. When sight is extinguished, insights of the invisible world may be experienced, and when sound ceases, as in those 'pauses of deep silence', more meaningful noises are heard, 'carried

20 Isaiah 9. 2 in a letter to William Mathews, 8 June 1794, EY, p. 125.
far into [the] heart', not just the ear (V 405, 408 – the Boy of Winander). Indeed, the ‘song’ of the ‘one life’ is said to be

Most audible then when the fleshly ear,
O’ercome by grosser prelude of that strain
Forgot its functions and slept undisturbed.

(II 430-34)²³

‘There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body’, writes St. Paul (I Corinthians 15.44); ‘Adam was made a living soul’ (15:45). In Tintern Abbey, it is when ‘we are laid asleep / In body’ – ‘natural body’ – that we ‘become a living soul’ (II. 45-46). Perhaps in this state, Adamic language, a ‘spiritual body’, can be spoken.

Yet this idea, of perceiving most profound truths when suspended in the abyss of idealism, is one about which Wordsworth is deeply equivocal. Far from the senses, Emmeline’s gift, being mistrusted, their testimony is often the route to imaginative heights, whilst the departure from them that happens at that climactic moment can be more of an annihilation than a revelation, as for the woman in ‘A slumber did my spirit seal’ who, like those whose ‘heart is waxed gross’ and whose ‘ears are dull of hearing’, ‘neither hears nor sees’. She might be one of those of whom it is said ‘neither do they understand’ (Matthew 13.13). Her senses are suspended only in her death, and death, too, follows quickly on the boy of Winander’s experience of ‘deep silence’.

iv

‘shining garments’
(Luke 24.4)

The fear of annihilation by, or in, a too overpowering apprehension of the eternal, or other-worldly, has a Biblical precedent too. The problem of whether or not the senses (and everyday ‘sense’, or understanding) are employed, or suspended, in such apprehension, is not actually the simple binary opposition that I have thus far suggested. A more subtle possibility is that the senses are used, but in a different way; that revelation is mediated by them, as if they were an

²³ ‘Grosser’ recalls Matthew and Luke. The word occurs again, at a climactic moment: when Nature presents Wordsworth with her ultimate revelation, ‘the perfect image of a mighty mind’, on Snowdon, he reflects that at such times she

Doth make one object so impress itself
Upon all others, and pervades them so,
That even the grossest minds must see and hear,
And cannot chuse but feel.

(XIII 81-84 my emphasis)

Her powers of communication, it seems, are stronger than Christ’s, undoing the failures of the senses and of sense, that Isaiah’s prophecy inflicted.
interpretative cypher. This idea is connected to the image of the veil that softens the too-brilliant radiance of God, fitting it to human eyes, and it has a parallel in the analogous image of language as clothing.

The ordinary man, in his everyday experience, does not see God directly. But what of the prophet? In the Bible, there is some confusion. In chapter 33 of Exodus,

the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as man speaketh unto his friend. (verse 11)

We might expect this directness of a prophet, who is inspired, and speaks in an oracular way. Isaiah, too, seems to have a direct vision:

I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. (Isaiah 6. 1)

However, often even the revelations experienced by prophets are presented as veiled.

Elsewhere in Exodus, God explains to Moses that ‘I come unto thee in a thick cloud’ (19. 9). In Numbers, too, ‘the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him’ (11. 25), and, just a few verses after Moses is said to have seen Him ‘face to face’, God says

Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me and live....

And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:

And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen. (Exodus 33. 20, 22-23)

St. Paul says, most famously, ‘now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face’ (I Corinthians 13. 12). Though his words might apply to any Christian believer, he seems to be speaking even of the special vision of prophets, for not only do ‘we’, in this life, ‘know in part’, but we even ‘prophesy in part’ (verse 9). Even angels might not be permitted to look on God directly. In Paradise Lost, He appears to his faithful troops ‘midst a golden cloud’ (VI 28) – though He speaks ‘without cloud’ to the Son (XI 45) – and Milton, musing on the ‘glorious brightness’ that makes God invisible, imagines that even the cloud of His ‘skirts’ is so ‘excessive bright’ ‘that brightest seraphim / Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes’ (III 375-82). In fact, Isaiah, though he seemed to imply that he saw God face to face, saw these seraphim too:

each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. (6. 2)
Man's inability to see God directly was one of the consequences of the Fall. Adam laments the loss of this privilege:

This most afflicts me, that departing hence,  
As from his face I shall be hid, deprived  
His blessed countenance ...  
On this mount he appeared; under this tree  
Stood visible

(Paradise Lost XI 315-17, 320-21)

Now, instead, he beholds only 'his utmost skirts / Of glory' (II. 332-33), precursors of the 'clouds of glory' that clothe the child of Wordsworth's Ode. Before his birth, the implication is, he saw the light unclouded, or unclothed. Wordsworth introduces a paradox that encapsulates the central problem of this clouded light, or lighted cloud. For he is thankful that the child comes 'not in utter nakedness', but clothed in the clouds, though it is the naked, or unveiled image of God, the sight of His face itself, that Adam has lost. Because it is only on the memory of a loss that Wordsworth can ground his hope, the melancholic indication of that loss — the clouds that cover the light, the 'shades' ('of the prison house') — are at one and the same time the emblem of that hope. In the Bible, likewise, though Paul longs for the time that the veil, or 'glass', symptom of our imperfection, will be removed, nevertheless that veil, the cloud in which God descends, is the only means by which he can be seen at all, for God cannot be seen directly, His light being so bright that it is invisible (as in Paradise Lost III), or blinds (as it did St. Paul in Acts 9), or kills (Exodus 33. 20). What is in one sense a barrier between God and man, brought down with the Fall, and darkening our vision, is in another sense a beneficent gift, enabling that vision which would otherwise be impossible. For two reasons, then, this image of veiled sight is ambiguous: because it is paradoxically both a hindrance and a help, and because it is not certain that the truly inspired — Isaiah, Moses in some instances, and Paul and Milton, who both 'see' better when blinded — are not capable of seeing behind the veil.

Wordsworth inherits this uncertainty, so that his poetry, like the Bible, is fraught with explorative contradiction. The question, considered above, of how he is to experience the eternal, brings in its wake the parallel question of how he is to communicate it. Both are expressed in terms of clothing and nakedness. The paradox of the child who is fortunate to be clothed, though in clouds that darken the celestial light, returns again and again. We saw above that suspension of the physical sense can lead to flashes of insight, as if Wordsworth, like Milton, sees more when he is blind. Yet this suspension in practice tends to be temporary —
when it is not it is deathly – and the revelation that breaks in upon it is apprehended physically: it is, most often, a sight.24

The natural objects that capture Wordsworth in this most significant way are often described as 'naked'. One of the striking details near the Penrith beacon is a 'naked pool', named as such, as if in some kind of incantation, three times (Prelude XI 303, 312, 320). As a child, Wordsworth raids nests on 'the naked crag' (I 346), and on Snowdon Nature presents the moon to him 'naked in the heavens' (XIII 41). Nakedness is a mark of clarity, the simplicity of a revelation, that cannot fail to be understood.25 Wordsworth's confidence that he has made sense of cluttered, artificial London is conveyed by his comparison of it to 'valleys' which, though 'full of caverns, rocks' and so forth, are nonetheless 'naked'(VIII 793). Receiving this naked communication, Wordsworth sometimes describes himself as 'naked' too. A 'naked boy' (blessed in his nakedness, though the child of the Ode is in another sense blessed in not being naked), he resembles a 'naked savage'(Prelude I 292, 304), as if he were part of the naked world of nature, partaking of it because part of it. Crucially, he is naked in a different sense when he encounters Nature as an adult:

Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked as in the presence of her God.
(IV 140-42)

Though these lines might seem to suggest that Wordsworth is seeing God 'face-to-face', like Moses in Exodus 33, they do not in fact refer to God's veiling of Himself in a cloud, but recall much more specifically Moses' veiling of his shining face in the next chapter:

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24 Geoffrey Hartman, discussing the great 'Imagination!' passage of Book VI, characterizes it as 'a prophetic instance of that blindness to the external world which is the tragic, pervasive, and necessary condition of the mature poet' (Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814 (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 41 – further references to Hartman are to this work). Imagination is 'experienced as a power' which 'opens his eyes by putting them out' (p. 48). The violence of this image hints towards Hartman's central sense of Wordsworth's failure to embrace this 'power', and relinquish nature. Even Adam, Hartman shows, does not have to suffer such a complete and terrifying blinding in order to see God's workings (p. 52).

25 Ian Reid discusses Wordsworth's imagery of clothing and nakedness, particularly in relation to death, in "'A Naked Guide-Post's Double Head': The Wordsworthian Sense of Direction", ELH 43 (1976), 538-50. Implicit in his discussion is the sense that clothing – the heap of clothes abandoned by the drowned man of Esthwaite and, at the Penrith beacon, the woman's 'garments vexed and tossed' – is a linguistic code, asking to be interpreted.
And till Moses had done speaking with them, he
put a vail on his face.
But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak
with him, he took the vail off, until he came out...
And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses,
that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail
upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.
(Exodus 34. 33-35)

In taking off his veil, Wordsworth presents himself naked to God, as if undoing Adam's first,
guilty, clothing of himself, and making himself like a little child, 'a five years' child / A naked
boy'. But God himself may still be veiled, and it is noticeable that, even as Wordsworth
remarks on the nakedness of Nature, that nakedness is often veiled. The veil tends to be a
mist. Wordsworth describes himself waiting for the horses to bring him home for the vacation
during which his father dies, sitting 'half sheltered by a naked wall' whilst

the mist
Gave intermitting prospect of the wood
And plain beneath.
(XI 357, 361-63)

The old man at 'Point Rash-Judgment', who comes as an 'admonishment' (l. 76), is somehow
seen, in the sense of 'understood', more clearly because he is veiled. The walkers, without
knowing it, are on a kind of spiritually educational pilgrimage:

myself and two beloved Friends
One calm September morning, ere the mist
Had altogether yielded to the sun,
Sauntered on this retired and difficult way.
('A narrow girdle of rough stones' II. 6-9)

The revelation both comes as a shock, 'suddenly', but is also softened by the mist:

suddenly,
Through a thin veil of glittering haze, was seen
Before us, on a point of jutting land,
The tall and upright figure of a Man
(II. 44-47)

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26 This mist might be a (particularly Lake District) naturalization of the cloud that shrouds God in the
Bible and Paradise Lost. The Biblical 'cloud' to which Wordsworth alludes, meanwhile, is that which
guides the Israelites by day during their exile (Exodus 13. 21). This becomes the 'wandering cloud'
that might 'guide' Wordsworth (Prelude I 17-18). It is in part a projection of Wordsworth's own self
(as in 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'). In Exodus this cloud is not strictly separable from that in which
God appears to Moses: 'the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud'. As his own guide,
Wordsworth is his own God, though at revelatory moments he often does have a 'guide', as at the
Penrith beacon (XI 311) and on Snowdon ('our tried pilot' XIII 15).
On Snowdon, too, the revelation involves ‘a dripping mist’ (XIII 11). Here, Wordsworth emerges from it – ‘on the shore / I found myself of a huge sea of mist’ (ll. 42-43) – yet the mist itself is part of the vision:

Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea, the real sea, that seemed
To dwindle and give up its majesty
(XIII 47-50)²²

Again, the prophetic ‘roar of waters’ comes from the ‘chasm, a fracture in the vapour’ (l. 56), but it is too easy to say that this fracturing, the parting of the veil, is a simple removal of a barrier, a falling of scales from the eyes. For without the mist there would be no ‘dark deep thoroughfare’ (l. 64). It is the margin between mist and nakedness – as Wordsworth stands just on the edge, ‘the mist / Touching our very feet’, and as the hills break through the surface with their backs – or the combination of the two, that gives the scene its power. The hills which ‘their dusky backs upheaved’ (l. 45) recall Milton’s ‘mountains’ which ‘appear / Emergent, and their broad bare backs upheave / Into the clouds’ (VII 285-87). Precisely then, the scene on Snowdon recalls the creation, not as a completed work, but in its event. Wordsworth’s ‘image of a mighty mind’ (l. 69) is of a mind in motion, at the very moment of creative activity.

The power of ‘naked’ revelation is magnified by its veiling. The veil – God’s cloud, Wordsworth’s mist – does not cover in such a way as to conceal, but, paradoxically, to reveal. Wordsworth expresses this directly in the exclamation that ends Book V. But he is speaking, not of God’s or Nature’s revelations in the visual world, but of the poet’s in the world of language:

²² This, the climactic vision of the whole poem, chimes with every element of the wide and various theme of prophecy. The ‘tongues’ of mist, though it is their shape that is described, could be said to ‘Speak to my eye’ (IV 391), ‘tongues’ in the Biblical sense of an inspired language. Wordsworth’s repetition, ‘the sea, the real sea’ stresses the significance of that sea: it is symbolic of death, but here ‘dwindle[s] and give[s] up its majesty’ because Wordsworth is receiving an intimation of something greater than death – the immortal mind. The mist, a greater ‘sea’ than the ‘real sea’, is thus an integral part of the revelation.
This is a very great claim for the 'works / Of mighty poets' (ll. 619-20). The 'flashes' mirror those in which the 'light of sense / Goes out', 'shew[ing] to us / The invisible world' (Prelude VI 534-36), so that poetry has the same communicatory power as do those most mysteriously visionary moments of Wordsworth's experience. This enlightening power is conveyed by two seemingly contradictory images. On the one hand, words 'embody' the 'motions of the winds'. On the other, this veil of words is 'transparent'. To embody is to make physical, tangible, and, usually, visible. Though a physical thing can be transparent, a body is usually thought of as opaque. Transparency, contrarily, is close to invisibility. The contradiction is resolved, as far as it can be, by the image of the veil. For whilst the body is often thought of as the (physical, solid) clothing of the (invisible, immaterial) soul, a veil is a transparent, or at least translucent, piece of clothing. As a metaphor for language, as for the revelation of a God who cannot be seen directly, it alone combines the contrary powers of making what is unknown knowable whilst also managing not to corrupt, or cheapen the vision that it translates. Language is the intermediary between the incommunicable eternal and man, as the veil is between the invisible God and man.

Thompson notes a 'general shift during the eighteenth century from physical, spatial, or visual analogies for language, to a conception of language as “function, process, and activity”' (p. 524). Wilhelm von Humboldt, for example, developed a performative theory by which 'language everywhere mediates first between infinite and finite nature, then between one individual and another' (quoted in Essick, p. 84). In Wordsworth's view, poetry most powerfully performs both of these mediated. The poet communicates the eternal, apprehended by the imagination, to his audience in the temporal world: his poetry is both mysterious and didactic. The importance of a performative theory in models of language is that the idea of a structure is replaced by the idea of a process. Language becomes an event. David
Haney sees incarnational language as just such a process. Poststructuralist criticism attacked the Coleridgean symbol, 'characterized ... above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal', as an idealized escape from time. In reality, the conscious mind is trapped in language, in temporality. Haney complains that incarnational language has been wrongly categorized along with such symbols. Many assume too readily that for [Wordsworth] and other post-Enlightenment writers the idea of incarnation represents a desired ahistorical transparency between thought and language that is undercut by the actuality of language as death-ridden counter-spirit.

Since Christ incarnate is a sacramental symbol, the eternal made consubstantial with the temporal, it is easy to see why this connection has been made. But Haney argues that the incarnation was also an historical event, and cannot be separated from the violent death that followed it. In Wordsworth, he finds, it is everywhere accompanied by that death (a trace of primitive sacrificial rituals). As such, it is not a facile escape from time and mortality. Incarnational language is performative, a temporal image of mediation or communication, as the veil is a spatial one.

The veil (or 'the mystery of words') does not conceal the naked truth, even though it clothes it. Milton expresses this subtlety when he describes the unfallen Adam and Eve as 'with native honour clad / In naked majesty' (Paradise Lost IV 289-90). The 'honour' in which they are 'clad' is recognisable in their nakedness, so that their nakedness, paradoxically, clothes them. Eve's hair, which can strike a reader as troublingly suggestive of clothing — 'She as a veil down to the slender waist / Her unadorned golden tresses wore / Dishevelled' (ll. 304-06) — or of shame, is precisely this kind of veil, the clothing of (that is, constituted by) nakedness. 'Innocence' once lost, is described as 'a veil' which 'had shadowed them from knowing ill' (IX 1054-55). It is the loss of this 'veil', their very nakedness, which prompts them, 'naked left / To guilty shame' to make clothes. This new 'robe', however, taking the...
conceit to its natural conclusion, ‘Uncovered more’ (ll. 1057-59), and Adam himself, in the lines that follow, links this new-found need for clothing to the subsequent impossibility of looking on God, or even an angel, face to face:

Those heavenly shapes
Will dazzle now this earthly, with their blaze
Insufferably bright.

(IX 1082-84)

Wordsworth, too, spurns Adam’s guilty clothing, as an image of bad poetry:

Gray failed as a Poet ... He wrote English Verses, as he and other Eton school-Boys wrote Latin; filching a phrase now from one author, and now from another ... There are Poems ... that do not deserve to be thought of as literary Works – every thing in them being skin deep merely, as to the thought and [feeling,] the juncture or suture of the composition not [a jot] more cunning or more fitted for endurance than the first fastening together of fig-leaves in Paradise.^^

As Gray’s poetry is like the artificial arras, interwoven with threads of other poet’s language, dead letters, or fig-leaves, stitched together, Wordsworth’s ought to be like the veil of mist, the natural emanation of naked human nature, involuntarily exhaled. Yet this image is as ancient as the arras is archaic. The poetry-saturated poet cannot speak an original language. But he can use the allusion that he cannot escape to express his own inadequacy, and to portray his unattainable ideal.

v

‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings’
(Psalm 8. 2 & Matthew 21. 16)

The second large implication of the paradox of unseeing vision (see above, p. 63) concerns not the senses and the understanding, but knowledge and self-consciousness of knowledge: the possibility of an unknowing knowledge. The possibility of a communication that is more powerful than it appears not only involves the hidden meaning of texts, such as the parables, but also the notions of a prophetic language that is not fully understood, or intended, by its speaker, and of a knowledge that is, similarly, not self-conscious. It is very difficult to draw the line between consciousness and self-consciousness. In one sense, we do not know anything that we do not know that we know, or, at least, we cannot have access to that knowledge, cannot call it up at will. But in another sense we are always surprising ourselves by discovering that

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^^ Letter to R. P. Gillies, 15 April 1816, MY II, 301.

^3 The ‘mist’ of The Prelude’s climactic scenes might therefore be not so much a veil, a kind of clothing, as a visible ‘emanation’, like a person’s breath on a cold day.
we know things that we didn’t know that we knew. This kind of knowledge, unselfconscious, and so perhaps seeming to come to us all of a sudden from elsewhere, like a revelation, is closely connected to ideas of spontaneous prophetic utterance. In the Bible, the possessors of such knowledge are often likened to children.\(^{34}\) Jesus says of them that ‘of such is the kingdom of God’:

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.
And he took [the children] up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.
(Mark 10. 14-16)

I thank thee, O Father… because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.
(Matthew 11. 25)

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me…
Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.
(Matthew 18. 4-5 & 10)

Emmeline, who gives her brother ‘eyes’ ‘ears’ and ‘heart’, is both a child and a teacher, not just ‘blessed’, like the children in Mark 10, but a ‘blessing’ herself (1.15). Children in Wordsworth teach like the apostles, so that one of the allegorical figures in Cambridge is ‘blind Authority beating with his staff / The child that might have led him’ (Prelude III 640-41), echoing Isaiah, ‘and a little child shall lead them’ (11.6), whilst the narrator of ‘Anecdote for Fathers’ exclaims:

Oh dearest, dearest boy! my heart
For better lore would seldom yearn,
Could I but teach the hundredth part
Of what from thee I learn.
(II. 57-60)

Edward does not say what it is that he teaches, because he himself does not know. These children are prophets who speak wisdom involuntarily. When Edward ‘[does] his tongue unlock’ (1. 53) he almost resembles the apostles who, in Acts 2. 4 ‘began to speak with other

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\(^{34}\) They are not often actual children, though Samuel, a child, has a visitation from God and passes a message of doom on to the priest Eli (I Samuel 3), and Luke says of the unborn John the Baptist ‘the babe leaped in her womb’ (1. 41). Jeremiah, ordered to prophesy, complains, ‘I cannot speak: for I am a child’ (1. 6), though he isn’t.
tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance'. The apostles, presumably, know what they are saying though they do not know the languages in which they are speaking. Wordsworth expresses the discrepancy between knowing language and understanding meaning differently in his apocalyptic dream: the Arab Quixote speaks 'in an unknown tongue, / Which yet I understood' (Prelude V 94-95). His words are a 'loud prophetic blast of harmony' (l. 96). In each case, some element of incomprehension enables a higher kind of communication to take place. A child's ghost sings 'words of a forgotten tongue' in 'The Danish Boy' (l. 36), whilst the 'mighty prophet' of the Ode cannot communicate his wisdom, since it is when he learns language, mimicking adults, that he loses his vision. Childish prophecies are hard to understand, because they are, variously, nonsensical. The Blind Highland Boy cries 'Lei-gha, Lei-gha', and the Idiot Boy's lips 'burr'. In 'We Are Seven' it is the child's reasoning that is unfamiliar. That the extent to which her belief is a moving testimony to children's inability to understand death cannot be differentiated from a sense that what she speaks is in a special way 'true', is part of the poem's point. The poet's question, 'What should it know of death' (l. 4) is both rhetorical – she knows nothing of death – and genuine: she might know something very great about it, about the way in which death is not an end. It might be significant that two of the siblings 'are gone to sea' (l. 20). Literally speaking, they are still alive, and may still be counted, so the narrator tries to make the girl distinguish them from the dead Jane and John. But the child's knowledge is in a different sphere. Jesus said that 'whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea' (Matthew 18. 6). 'Drowned in the depth of the sea' is a particularly appropriate way to describe death, since the sea itself is often, in the Bible and elsewhere, a symbol of death.

The children of the Ode play near the sea, because they are closer to death – or, rather, to the immortal world beyond death – than are adults, who live 'inland'. The real reason that Edward prefers the home of his infancy, may be because it was near the sea: which comes to the same thing. The child of 'We Are Seven' speaks a symbolic language that is all her own because it is an inversion of this most familiar of symbols, the sea as death. The siblings who are dead are no more out of reach than those who are 'at sea', not because 'at sea' means 'dead', because here it clearly does not, but because 'dead' means simply 'not here in the way that we living people are', not here to be seen and touched. Her belief that her siblings still exist is Wordsworth's evidence that death is not the end. For in his first Essay Upon Epitaphs
he argues that the child’s ‘intimation or assurance ... that some part of our nature is
imperishable’ is not ‘blank ignorance’ (ll. 40-41, 54). In fact, the evidence put forward by the
narrator of ‘We Are Seven’ anticipates what, in the essay, Wordsworth calls the mistake of a
man ‘forlorn, and cut off from communication with the best part of his nature’ (ll. 49-50). This
man ascribes the child’s intuition to ‘the same unthinking gaiety or liveliness of animal spirits
with which the lamb in the meadow, or any other irrational creature is endowed’ (ll. 52-54).
The narrator, who makes the sole distinction between existence and nonexistence by noting that
‘Your limbs they are alive’ (I. 34), similarly overemphasizes the likeness of a child to the lamb
with its ‘unthinking gaiety’. In the essay, Wordsworth argues that children do make rational
enquiries into death, and uses the image of the sea once more. A child who ponders the origin
of a stream will always also ask

‘Towards what abyss is it in progress? what receptacle
can contain the mighty influx?’ And the spirit of the
answer must have been, though the word might be sea
or ocean ... nothing less than infinity.
(ll. 71-77)

The essay shows how seriously, if obliquely, Wordsworth responds to Jesus’s
injunction not to ‘despise ... one of these little ones’, since children’s testimony forms the
foundation of Wordsworth’s own argument. The children that Jesus commends have, in
Wordsworth, the same power as the prophets and apostles, one of Jesus’s own powers: to
communicate eternal truths. This is the power that Wordsworth – in his second role of poet-
teacher – claims for himself. His poetic gift is a vocation – ‘I made no vows, but vows / Were
then made for me’ (IV 341-42), which resembles an infant’s baptism, at which the parents and
god-parents make promises on his behalf. But though he recognizes the prophet in himself,
Wordsworth still faces the problem of how to communicate his knowledge. The prophet-
children communicate without knowing that they do so (Wordsworth’s childhood self might
join the ranks of the children who teach him). The prophets of the Bible are given their words
by God, and the apostles speak in tongues. What is to be Wordsworth’s equivalent? He is not
unselfconscious, like a child, nor does he hear voices, or fall into a bodily trance during which
he is inspired. His self-consciousness and his knowledge that he is ‘chosen’, his expectation of
prophetic inspiration, are an intellectual barrier to the anti-intellectual process of spontaneous
prophetic utterance.
His solution, in the childhood poems, is another form of mediation. For the children’s unknowing knowledge must be translated by the adult, with his different kind of understanding. It is only in the conjunction of the unselfconscious, unknowingly wise child’s utterance, with the adult’s interpretative gloss, that the mysterious meaning is made intelligible. The adult narrators who are taught by the children are figures of the reader, inscribed within the text, as described by Tilottama Rajan in *The Supplement of Reading*. In a performative theory of language, Essick explains, ‘the binary structure of the sign ... is supplemented by the field of interchange between two parties ...’ (p. 84). The interchange that takes place within Wordsworth’s poems is the model for that which he trusts takes place outside them too. The voices of his teaching children and learning adults are synthesized as the poem’s voice, and the reader must provide the new response to continue the process of communication. This double image of conversation is reproduced by allusion. The source text and responding text are in dialogue, but their exchange can only be communicated to an actively questioning reader.

‘Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him’  
(1 Kings 19. 19)

*The Prelude* begins with Wordsworth’s failure to be a spontaneous prophet. The failure descends through three stages, an omen-like, ominous three. Firstly, the present-tense ‘glad preamble’ dries up, and Wordsworth moves to the reflective past tense. Then, that failure is recorded, as ‘the harp / Was soon defrauded’ (ll. 104-05). Lastly, the poet’s later, repeated attempts fail too: ‘I have been discouraged’ (l. 134). Rather than trying to elicit immediate prophetic power, Wordsworth turns to memories of its former visits, attempting to convey the childhood experiences that did not, at the time, put themselves into words. His communicatory powers become secondary, then, as he later expresses the inexpressible, by admitting that it is so:

I should need  
Colours and words that are unknown to man  
To paint the visionary dreariness  
(XI 308-10)

Wordsworth’s present consciousness summons a second consciousness, that ‘of some other being’ (II 33), an other being that was closer to the other world. Whilst the adult needs ‘words that are unknown to man’, he has at least the words that are known to express his unknowing, and it is in this that he is more powerful than the child, who had no words. The adult’s gift is that of the reader, or interpreter, of the child-prophet who could not communicate directly. In
other words, it is another’s words (though they were never spoken), that Wordsworth speaks as a prophecy. The hope for spontaneity is replaced by an authorized, or second-hand prophecy. Whilst the spots of time are at least accounts of Wordsworth’s own experiences, we have seen that he acts as interpreter for other children’s prophetic utterances too. Rather than being inspired himself, Wordsworth gives a form to others’ inspiration, as if the words, rather than the poet, were inspired. As priests are chosen to repeat holy words, Wordsworth may utter others’ inspired utterances, including those of earlier poets, Milton especially, who, in his own appeal for inspiration also falls back on allusions to earlier inspired utterances. The ‘borrowed robes’ of allusion, rather than being the badly-fitting garments usurped by Macbeth, are the priestly vestments, or true poetic mantle, passed down as an inheritance, as from Elijah to Elisha, the next in line who may hear the ‘still, small voice’ (I Kings 19. 19 & 19. 12). The line of poets/prophets wear, not newly created robes, but the same ones, one after the other.

Though it was hoped that language might be a body, or even a soul, integral to its own meaning, Wordsworth is constrained to borrow after all, importing a form from elsewhere. But, just as Wordsworth prefers human blood to celestial ichor, so the archangel Michael temporarily eschews his angelic form for the practical purpose of speaking with Adam. He comes

Not in his shape celestial, but as man
Clad to meet man

(Paradise Lost XI 239-40)

The human form is said to clothe him, so that the body-as-clothing metaphor recovers an optimistic association, looking forward to Jesus’s incarnation. Milton parallels Michael’s assumption of human form with the expression of the supernatural in terms that man understands, for Raphael begins:

what surmounts the reach
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
By likening spiritual to corporal forms,
As may express them best

(V 571-74)

These angels are more like priests than prophets. The words they speak are ordinary, not esoteric, as befits their didactic purpose. In the Preface, Wordsworth advocated ‘a plainer and more emphatic language’ (ll. 109-10), ‘the very language of men’ (l. 268). Such language might preclude allusion, and Wordsworth admits that his choice ‘has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been

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regarded as the common inheritance of Poets' (II. 297-300). Coleridge troubled over the sense of this assertion in Biographia Literaria, but in Chapter 19 he admits, common-sensically, that the 'actual language of men' does not signify a total absence of poetic language, but, more topically, the rejection of eighteenth-century ornaments and artificiality, an unstrainedness, unstudiedness, found in the poetry of Spenser, Waller, Cotton, Chaucer and Herbert, for example (II, 89-97). Common men, it is true, do not tend to speak in literary allusions, but the ordinariness of their speech therefore entails a far deeper allusiveness: it is 'common' not only in being ordinary, but in being shared. Wordsworth explores this language in relation to a written form, one which verges on, and crosses over with, a literary form: the epitaph. An epitaph is most successful when it conveys 'the common or universal feeling of humanity' (Epitaphs I, 315-16). The appropriate language '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. (Epitaphs II, 486-89)

An epitaph ought to 'contain thoughts and feelings which are in their substance common-place, and even trite' (II. 573-74). Common men speak in common-places. The epitaph-writer, or poet, should speak them too, but 'not ... by rote' (I. 581). Rather, such inherited phrases must come from 'original intuition', with 'the River [of 'truth'] that murmurs in every one's ear' and 'has flowed from generation to generation' (II. 583, 585-86). This is Wordsworth's inheritance, taking the place of the 'common inheritance of Poets' which he rejects in the Preface; the poetic mantle, rather than the 'borrowed robes'. These clothes have, again, become 'substantial', they have 'substance', like bodies. Motivated by the truth coming from the 'sources of things', they have 'the freshness and clearness of an original intuition' (II. 584, 582-83, my emphases). Originality, it should not surprise us, is not new and unworn, but is an inheritance, passed down from the beginning. The truth of common-place is elided with the truth of prophecy, the parable with the inspired language of the poet-prophet. Where

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35 In the Essays Wordsworth discusses both literal inscriptions and poetic epitaphs. His conclusions about sincere language, discussed below, show the appropriateness of this cross-over, for he reveals the way in which ordinary language is wrought with the figurative and metaphorical, rendered so familiar that it seems 'natural', or non-figurative. Much of Wordsworth's poetry deals with death, and he often stresses the real-life source of his tales, so that the epitaphic is a recurrent mode in his work.
the latter escapes him, Wordsworth makes use of the former, relying on the authority that 'has flowed from generation to generation'.
In discussions of allusion, the term ‘authority’ tends to be introduced in a disparaging tone. Allusions that do no more than lend authority, citing the precedent of a respected forerunner, are the least interesting kind. Such allusion, says Bate, ‘serves the rhetorical function of auctoritas, the appeal to a sanctioning – and sanctified – authority’ (p. 36). The indebted poet imports a greater poet’s phrases to confirm his sentiments, rather than engaging with that greater poet by transforming the borrowed words, making them his own.

In his youth Wordsworth practised translation and imitation, and his early mature poetry has been described as too-heavily dependent on “authorities”. Bate finds that the problem of authority troubled him throughout his career, and cites his revisions of ‘O Nightingale!’ as a microcosmic example. In the 1807 version, Wordsworth used Shakespeare’s phrase ‘fiery heart’ (3 Henry VI 1 iv 87), but critical ridicule prompted him to replace ‘fiery’ with ‘ebullient’ in the 1815 edition. (Francis Jeffrey, for one, had quoted these lines of the 1807 version as an example of the ‘ineffable compositions’ of ‘Moods of my own Mind’.) In 1820, however, he restored ‘fiery heart’, and finally, in 1845, he put quotation marks around the phrase, which Bate sees as a ‘compromise’, ‘to point out that if anybody were to be criticized for the epithet it should be Shakespeare’ (pp. 89-90). If the quotation marks authorize or justify Wordsworth’s use of it, why had he not marked it earlier? Perhaps because the remembrance is not allusive, signalling no witty reworking of Shakespeare, but rather the absence of such, a blank. Only in old age was Wordsworth confident enough simply to point out the source of his preferred phrase, but in 1845 the quotation does not seem as inert as it might have earlier. After the revision, and the undoing of the revision, the phrase seems to be a quotation of itself, of Wordsworth’s troubled use of it, as well as of its Shakespearean origin.

Wordsworth engaged with the very idea of authorizing allusion itself. Authority is not only a ‘rhetorical function’, something simply borrowed from one poet by another, but is a deeper concern, and has a more complex relationship to the practice of allusion. For whilst prophetic utterance is considered by Wordsworth to be a simple language, sincerely,

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1 For the Juvenilia see PW I. Bate criticizes the overwhelmed Shakespeareanism of The Borderers (pp. 90-93) and Stein finds that Wordsworth ‘filched phrases patently in An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches’ (p. 26).

spontaneously expressed, this image of it, paradoxically, is itself far from being unborrowed. The Bible is the central model for the most important aspects of Wordsworth’s creed of truth-revealing poetry, and Wordsworth not only draws on its teachings, but alludes to its texts – alludes, even, to parts of the Bible which themselves allude to earlier books, including, appropriately, those of the early prophets.

The relationship between Wordsworth’s appreciation of the Bible as literature and his religious position is extremely difficult to ascertain. The classic study of Romantic appropriations of the Christian scheme of history (creation, fall, redemption) and of other biblical terms and structures is M. H. Abrams’s *Natural Supernaturalism.* Stephen Prickett takes issue with Abrams, finding in *The Prelude* ‘given its historical context, not so much the language of secularization, but of religious revival’.

To appreciate the Bible’s literary qualities was not to detract from its unique status as the revealed word of God. Prickett points out that the discipline of literary criticism descended from that of theology, the two only becoming distinctly separated after Baron Wilhelm von Humboldt’s reorganization of the University of Berlin in 1809. A faculty of Arts was created, and this model was imitated across Europe (p. 1). David Norton suggests that, in drawing an analogy between religion and poetry, Wordsworth implies that ‘the Bible may now be religion because it is literature’, though he would never have claimed this explicitly.

It is impossible to determine Wordsworth’s religious beliefs with any certainty. They were probably indistinct, and certainly contradictory and changeable. Hoxie Neale Fairchild challenges Edith C. Batho’s image of Wordsworth’s ‘“Catholic Christianity” – the incarnationalism and sacramentalism of his High Church childhood broadened to include the altars of nature’. He traces Wordsworth’s progress through the ‘clear, dry, shallow, unimaginative latitudinarianism’ of Cambridge (p. 146), but emphasizes a deistic tendency in the young Wordsworth to an extent with which few would concur. Wordsworth seems rather always to have balanced – or equivocated between – a felt immanence (the ‘One Life’; his “pantheism”) and a sublimely-revealed transcendence. Richard E. Brantley explores

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Wordsworth's close relation to Anglican and Nonconformist Evangelicalism — the 'broader, higher, and more reverential Evangelicism of Wesley and Wilberforce'.\(^7\) Like Prickett, Brantley sees Wordsworth as a remythologizer, not a secularizer. His fourth chapter, 'Wordsworth and the Book of Nature' convincingly places Wordsworth's use of this image in the typological tradition — Wordsworth's nature is a book written in the continually-revealed divine word, not an artefact created and abandoned by a distant maker. Vincent Newey finds in this allegorizing tendency an affinity with Bunyan. He believes Wordsworth to have had a puritan poetical temperament: his sense of election, and assertive individualism are further points of comparison.\(^8\) If most critics have agreed with R. D. Havens that 'any study of Wordsworth's religion must inevitably come to the conclusion that no formulation of his beliefs is possible' (quoted in Brantley, p. 175), most, too, detect 'a unique quality in Wordsworth's religiousness which eludes categorizing'.\(^9\)

It is regarding doctrinal points that Wordsworth most patently secularizes. His Christian faith in immortality was a long time coming — despite the assertions of the *Essays Upon Epitaphs*, the elegy on his daughter Catherine, written in 1812, has no Christian consolation — hence his near-obsessive concern with the retention of past time, memories that must not be lost as they provide the only after-life for that which has passed away.

Wordsworth's treatment of redemption, too, is unorthodox. Henry Crabb Robinson records him as saying, also in 1812, 'perhaps I do not want [a redeemer] for myself', but admitting that

> I can feel more sympathy with the orthodox believer who needs a Redeemer and who, sensible of his own demerits, flies for refuge to Him ... than with the cold and rational notions of the Unitarian.\(^10\)

In the poetry, the idea of redemption (part of the scheme of human history charted by Abrams) is secularized; it is by his own suffering, or in the participation of others', that man is redeemed.

The strongest element of Wordsworth's religion was his faith in a felt experience of the deity. In this aspect his poetry is, as Prickett and Brantley argue, resacralizing. But this

strongest faith verges on no faith, as the sense of a divine other becomes self-divinity. This impulse towards self-deification is defined by Fairchild as 'the highest romantic aspiration: removal of all boundaries and limits which distinguish man from God' (p. 167). It is perhaps religious feeling rather than religion; the tendency that prompted T. E. Hulme to describe Romanticism as 'spilt religion', whilst Harold Bloom preferred the phrase 'displaced Protestantism' — a (genuine) 'kind of religious poetry'. The question of Wordsworth's religion inexorably returns itself to the question of that religion's relationship with his aesthetic formulation. The two are interinvolved in a way that appears deeply problematic to most people, but does not seem to have done so to Wordsworth, who uses the Bible as a poetic example on many points.

Arguing in the note to 'The Thorn' that 'the mind luxuriates in the repetition of words which appear successfully to communicate its feelings', he cites the authority of 'innumerable passages from the Bible'. His example is from Judges 5. 12, 27 and part of 28, 'that tumultuous and wonderful Poem'. He admired the 'sacred writings' for 'a majesty, a beauty, a simplicity, an ardour, a sublimity, that awes and overpowers the spirit of Poetry in uninspired men'. 'Holy Scripture', too, has established with its 'impassioned introduction' certain metaphors, 'the Lion and the Eagle, the Palm-tree ... the Cedar'. When Wordsworth recommends the language of the Bible, it is the Authorized Version to which he refers. R. P. Graves reports his praise:

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12 Letter to George Husband Baird, 15 June 1827, LY I, 534. This list of qualities particularly resembles one of Lowth's:

than [the Hebrew Poetry] the human mind can conceive nothing more elevated, more beautiful, or more elegant; in which the almost ineffable sublimity of the subject is fully equalled by the energy of the language, and the dignity of the style. (Lectures, I, 37)

13 Fenwick note to 'Suggested by a Picture of the Bird of Paradise' (p. 67).
in his opinion [the translation] was made at the happy juncture when
our language had attained adequate expansion and flexibility, and
when at the same time its idiomatic strength was unimpaired by
excess of technical distinctions and conventional refinements; and
these circumstances, though of course infinitely subordinate to the
spiritual influence of its subject-matter, he considered to be highly
important in connection with a volume which naturally became a
universally recognized standard of the language; for thus the fresh
well of English undefiled was made a perennial blessing to the nation.
(Reminiscences, pp. 471-72)

This was no lately formed opinion, for in the 1802 Appendix to the Preface to the Lyrical
Ballads 'passages in the old and new Testament ... as they exist in our common translation'
are preferred over the 'metrical paraphrases' of them by Pope, Prior and Johnson
(ll. 104-38). Wordsworth associates the Bible with Milton, and with Shakespeare too,
elsewhere. Of course, the language of the Bible, being for Wordsworth the language of the
King James translation, is historically closer to Shakespeare and to Milton than it is to the
eighteenth-century poets whose eclipse Wordsworth desires. In the language of the Prayer
Book he found the same 'adequate expansion and flexibility' as in the Bible:

many of the collects seemed to him examples of perfection,
consisting, according to his impression, of words whose
signification filled up without excess or defect the simple
and symmetrical contour of some majestic meaning, and
whose sound was a harmony of accordant simplicity and
grandeur; a combination, he added, such as we enjoy in some
of the best passages of Shakespeare.
(Reminiscences, p. 471)

These 'best passages' included much of The Merchant of Venice, which Wordsworth found 'in
language ... almost faultless', as he did Paradise Regained. In terms of language these, for the
most part, 'were perfect, the genuine English expressions of the idea of their own great
minds.' It is not surprising, given his comments, to find Wordsworth turning to the Bible's
language as a model for his own:

he said his principle had been to give the oral part as
nearly as he could in the very words of the speakers, where
he narrated a real story, dropping, of course, all vulgarisms
or provincialisms, and borrowing sometimes a Bible turn
of expression. (Reminiscences, p. 426)

14 In 1827 Wordsworth declined to contribute to a project 'for enlarging the collection of Translations
and Paraphrases from sacred scripture, and otherwise improving the Psalmody' – see the note in LYI,
534.
15 Reminiscences, p. 430.
Though this comment dates from 1836, and might not, therefore, represent the state of Wordsworth’s ‘principle’ when actually writing the poetry to which he refers (it sounds very much as if he is describing the Lyrical Ballads), the practice is in fact borne out. Wordsworth’s language is authorized by the Authorized Version, and ‘Bible turn[s] of expression’ allude to the Bible’s authority, citing which the poet does not put on another’s knowledge, or power, but comes into his own. For the Bible, interpreted typologically, demonstrates that prophets, and especially Jesus, refer to their own precursors in such a way that their own words become not just equally meaningful, but even more so, for their allusion not only repeats, deepens, and updates their sources, but also fulfils them.

Besides encountering typological interpretation in a general way at school, Wordsworth read Isaac de Beausobre’s Introduction to the Reading of the Holy Scriptures at Cambridge, where it was a set text for the first-year exams, in which Wordsworth did well (Schneider, pp. 9 & 13). Beausobre explains that the New [Testament] having succeeded the Old, and been, as it were, the accomplishment of it, the sacred writers of the former have borrowed the language of the latter, have perpetually alluded to it, and applied the predictions to the events of their own times, in imitation of their Divine Master, who always referred back to that Source.¹⁶

Stuart Curran has recognized that ‘well into the eighteenth century, and still lingering into the nineteenth, the traditional shorthand of Old Testament typology constantly insinuates itself through every pathway of European art,’ and Brantley describes Wordsworth’s poems as ‘seemingly pure descriptions but actually resonant allegorizings of birds, blossoms, meadows, mountains, and the sea’: ‘naturalized emblemology’ (pp. 160, 166).¹⁷ If ‘allegorizings’ and ‘emblemology’ suggest a rather two-dimensional metaphorical scheme (Coleridge’s ‘picture-language’ allegory), Brantley rightly reminds us that typology was prevalent in Wordsworth’s day.

Harold Bloom, however, is outraged by this Christian, typological brand of interpretation. He rejects the reductive revision of the Hebrew Bible into the Old Testament, and argues that it ‘is canceled, not fulfilled, in … Christian mythology.’¹⁸ The so-called ‘New

Testament', he says, ought more properly to be thought of as 'the Belated Testament'. Bloom's own avowedly Romantic criticism could be described as another form of 'spilt religion'. Wordsworth, he argues 'sought to replace a dying god with a new one, the god of the perpetually growing inner self' (Ruin, pp. 131-32). 'J's God', writes Bloom, 'was not the God of the Sufferers' (Ruin, p. 19), and Bloom's favourite poet-model, after his beloved Satan, is the Torah's belligerent Jacob. But Wordsworth was a secularizer of Christianity, and his poet-model is closer to Christ, 'God / The Mourners, God the Sufferer' as he describes him as early as 1800 in manuscript lines for Home at Grasmere. His poetry, in Bloom's own phrase, is 'displaced Protestantism', and he inherits, too, a Christian interpretative method that is utterly antithetical to Bloom's. Firstly, in Christian terms, to be a late-comer is not necessarily a bad thing. Indeed, it is a positive benefit to be born after Christ: the first shall be last, in more ways than one. Secondly, as Ian Balfour explains, prophecy involves a paradox about its temporal status, namely that this future-oriented discourse aimed at persuading an audience in the present is substantially a thing of the past. A thing, more precisely, of the textual past, for the very discourse that is claimed as 'immediate', as the product of direct inspiration, turns out on inspection to be pervasively citational. In the beginning of the prophetic word, one could say, was the citation.‘Authority’, in this context, is a central idea even in those allusions that are richly transformative. This is not a crude power-struggle, with the ephebe usurping his precursor's authority. Rather, since Wordsworth's model, his authority, is a work that is itself structured by a pattern of anticipation, allusion, and fulfilment, that very pattern, the process of alluding itself, is where the authority is located. It is in the workings of allusion that the transference of authority takes place. Wordsworth does not assume his prophetic role and discard the apprenticeship that initiated him. Instead, the dual role of pupil and teacher, ephebe and precursor, is continuous. For, as the example of the child who is father of the man, 'the child that might have led' 'blind Authority' (Prelude III 640-41) shows, the pupil and teacher roles are often reversed. It is in being a child, in learning (under nature's instruction, for example),


that one gains wisdom that can be passed on, but the training (life's pilgrimage) does not come
to an end, which is why so many of Wordsworth's poems are narrated by a poet-pilgrim, who
is blind, or ignorant, or errs, and is corrected or even disciplined, even as, at the same time, the
poet himself, a didact, intends to instruct his (similarly ignorant) reader.

The image of the pilgrim stands large in the Prelude. Not only is Wordsworth often
travelling when he learns (he and Jones are 'two brother pilgrims' (VI 478)), but life itself is a
journey, frequently modelled on that of the Israelites in flight from Egypt. At the start,
Wordsworth has escaped 'a house / Of bondage' (I 6-7), alluding to Exodus 13. 3 and 20. 2.
The Israelites' experience in Egypt and in the wilderness is an archetype for all our
wanderings, and especially our long periods of being lost, as prodigal children. Wordsworth
borrows this allegorical structure from the Bible to make meaning and plot out of his
experience.

The story of Egypt, of suffering and imprisonment followed by escape and eventual
restoration, is hinted at several times. Not only do the trials and errors of the Bible-story act as
a model for Wordsworth's, but his own acts of interpretation become yet another instance of
mistaken effort and correction, so that the process of learning — which is then recreated in order
to teach — is doubled. We saw that at the beginning of the Prelude (which is also the end),
Wordsworth feels he has escaped from Egypt. But he has already made his escape, or has
thought that he had, several times. In his apostrophe to 'Imagination!' (VI 525-48)
Wordsworth exclaims that the mind is

blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward —
Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
Which hides it like the overflowing Nile.
(VI 545-48)

In 1850 he extends the description. 'Beatitude':

hides [the mind], like the mighty flood of Nile
Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds
To fertilise the whole Egyptian plain.
(1850 VI 613-16)

Hartman comments of this passage that
the appearance in relatively close sequence of abyss (VI. 594), Abyssinian (VI. 615), and 'a depth / Of Abyssinian privacy' (VI. 661 f.) makes one suspect a perhaps unconscious association of ideas. The earthly Paradise was sometimes placed in Abyssinia, near the hidden source of the Nile (see Dr. Johnson's Rasselas). 22

The mind is fertilized by Paradisal waters. This celebratory passage was written long after the events in the Alps occurred, and even after the account of them was itself written, and refers to that process of memory and composition. But it repeats a mood that runs throughout Book VI, the hopeful mood when 'human nature seem[ed] born again' (l. 354). 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God', St. John tells us (John 3. 3). Wordsworth seems to have seen it in France. Travellers there are like the happy souls in Elysium:

Like bees they swarmed, gaudy and gay as bees (l. 398) 23

Wordsworth and Jones, meanwhile, are

Guests welcome almost as the angels were
To Abraham of old
(ll. 403-04) 24

It is as if they are bringing news of a miraculous birth like Isaac's, prefiguring Christ's and hence the beginning of the restoration of Paradise. This land, like Wordsworth's mind, seems watered by a river from the Promised Land, or a Paradise in Abyssinia. He and Jones see 'pastoral life' (l. 437) in Switzerland, where Wordsworth's 'heart leaped up' (l. 446), as it does when he sees the rainbow, one of God's promises. Winter walks 'like a tamed lion' (l. 466), the 'young lion' that might 'lie down' with 'the fatling', as 'the leopard' does with 'the kid' ('and a little child shall lead them') (Isaiah 11. 6). 25 The Book closes with Wordsworth and Jones

shortening fast
Our pilgrimage – nor distant far from home –
(VI 689-90)

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22 p. 353, n. 35. The source of the Blue Nile was discovered in 1770 in Abyssinia by James Bruce, the account of whose adventures Wordsworth may well have known by this time (see Duncan Wu, Wordsworth's Reading 1800-1815 (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p. 32).
23 Milton, however, uses the bee image to describe the devils (Paradise Lost I 768-71), and see Wordsworth's later uses of 'swarm' below.
24 In Genesis 18 angels tell Abraham's wife Sarah that, though old, she will have a son.
25 The 'tamed lion' of the first trip might be compared to the later description of Paris as 'a wood where tigers roam' (X 82).
But the poet is mistaken in that his greater pilgrimage, and France’s peaceful millennium, is nowhere near. On his second trip to France, consequently, the image of Egypt returns, not as a land watered by the Abyssinian river, but as the ‘house of bondage’ itself.

It is Louis XVI who ‘with his children and his wife’ is ‘in bondage’ (X 41-44). Wordsworth approved of his deposition and even, in 1793, defended the execution. The image of a plagued Egypt emerges gradually and contradictorily, revealing Wordsworth’s confusion at the time:

   The land all swarmed with passion, like a plain
   Devoured by locusts
   (IX 178-79)

These passionate ‘locusts’ include Carra and Gorsas, journalists with Girondin connections, executed by Robespierre. They are not themselves plagues, though these lines clearly recall the locusts ‘swarms of flies’ of Exodus (10. 12 ff & 8. 21 ff). Wordsworth’s allegiance emerges as the Austrian and Prussian troops are also described as a ‘swarm’ (X 13). But, nightmarishly, the events mutate with the Terror, as the Revolutionaries themselves commit atrocities:

   it was a reservoir of guilt
   And ignorance, filled up from age to age,
   That could no longer hold its loathsome charge,
   But burst and spread in deluge through the land.
   (X 436-39)

The ‘abyss’ of (1850) VI 594, which Hartman connected to the ‘Abyssinian’ Paradise, turns into Milton’s ‘dark unbottomed infinite abyss’ (Paradise Lost II 405) as France resembles those ‘towns and cities’ (denounced, noticeably, by ‘ancient prophets’),

   wallowing in the abyss
   Of their offences
   (X 404-05)

If the ‘loathsome charge’, a ‘deluge’, conflates the Flood and the turning of the Nile to blood, (the first plague), it is the latter that is repeated to describe the Terror:

   behold,
   They who with clumsy desperation brought
   Rivers of blood, and preached that nothing else
   Could cleanse the Augean stable, by the might
   Of their own helper have been swept away.
   (X 545-49)
The idea that Robespierre is ‘swept away’ as by another flood is continued, and this confused rendition of the plagues clarified, by an oblique suggestion of the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Wordsworth hears of his death whilst travelling by the Leven Sands. Out in the water is a ‘Romish Chapel’ (l. 520), a symbol of faith in hope, perhaps, though less suggestive than the ‘rocky island’ (l. 518) that it stands upon. It can only be reached at low tide, and at this moment Wordsworth sees a crowd

Wading, beneath the conduct of their guide,  
In loose procession through the shallow stream  
Of inland water; the great sea meanwhile  
Was at safe distance, far retired.  
(ll. 526-29)

It is at this point that Wordsworth hears that Robespierre has been ‘swept away’, as if the tide swept in, or the Red Sea closed, drowning the Egyptians. After the fall of Robespierre, Wordsworth grasps at Paradise again, but is again disappointed, as the Biblical errors and punishments continue:

How Babel-like the employment was of those  
Who, by the recent deluge stupefied,  
With their whole souls went culling from the day  
Its petty promises to build a tower  
For their own safety –  
(X 618-22)

The first trip to France has a parallel relationship to the second, like that of the Old Testament when interpreted as a type of the New. For in Book VI, despite his hopes, Wordsworth does suffer a series of disappointments. He crosses the Alps without realizing it, missing out on the expected climax, and he goes out to witness the sunrise at Lake Como, only to endure a long night of darkness (like the ninth plague). This pattern of disappointments in nature anticipates the disappointment in man (according to Wordsworth’s scheme of moving from love of Nature to love of Mankind, described in the intervening Book VIII). And though, in the imagery of Egypt and Abyssinia, the hopes of Book VI were a delusion, Wordsworth’s experiences nevertheless foreshadow what will be his eventual restoration, as Isaac’s birth (alluded to in Book VI, lines 403-04) foreshadows Christ’s, and his sacrifice, Christ’s sacrifice. Wordsworth wrote some lines that might have Isaac’s sacrifice in mind for Book VIII which he then cut and revised for the Excursion. They describe a climactic vision:
by happy chance we saw
A twofold image; on a grassy bank
A snow-white ram, and in the crystal flood
Another and the same! Most beautiful ...
The breathing creature stood; as beautiful,
Beneath him, showed his shadowy counterpart.

(Excursion IX 439-42, 445-47)

In Genesis 22. 13 God replaces (mirrors) Isaac with the ram, anticipating the sacrifice of his own Son. Isaac is Christ's 'shadowy counterpart', 'another' yet, according to typological interpretation, 'the same'. Wordsworth's two rams, saving creatures in that their sight might be one of those 'renovating' spots of time, have a doubleness that hints at Wordsworth's parallel worlds: of nature and of man, of dependence and of the independent mind. The same doubleness also reflects on the fact that this image is a reflection of those in the Bible. In Book VIII, these lines might have helped to mark this transition that is that Book's subject. In The Excursion the ram is seen - 'Grand spectacle from the side of a hill' ('Argument') - just thirty or so lines after the Wanderer's prophecy, 'Glorious effects of this [system of National Education] foretold' ('Argument'):

Begin even now,
Now, when oppression, like the Egyptian plague
Of darkness, stretched o'er guilty Europe, makes
The brightness more conspicuous that invests
The happy Island where ye think and act

(IX 408-12)

The lesson that Wordsworth learns in Book VI of The Prelude is that revelation and reward come only after disappointment, and not in the expected form. It is the downward journey through the Simplon Pass, not the topmost height of the Alps, and the darkness, rather than the sunrise, at Como, that remain as spots of apocalyptic time. Significantly, the lesson is not delivered in the same terms as the experience which it foreshadows. Hence, it is not consciously 'learnt' at all. Wordsworth's disappointments here involve the landscape, whilst the 'real' ones of Book X concern the world of man, both as a political and as an intellectual being. As in the Old and New Testaments, the terms of the Law are translated. Disappointment precedes renewal, and Wordsworth himself makes the translation on Snowdon (another Bible-like mount), where he realizes that what he sees is 'the perfect image of a mighty mind'

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26 This crystal flood (revised from a 'peaceful flood' in the Prelude manuscript) may recall the 'sea of glass like unto crystal' before the throne in Revelation 4. 6. The lamb appears, 'in the midst of the throne' at 5. 6.
But though the terms are different, they themselves were anticipated by the "old testament" – Book VI. For the lesson there was not to look upward, and for a light, but to travel downward and into darkness. Firstly, reward comes through trial, fear, and bewilderment (Wordsworth conflates the physical and the mental at Como where he is 'bewildered' in the 'wilderness' (II. 631 & 647)). Secondly, this dark, deep, downward movement is suggestive of the mind. The source of renewal is to be found within, in the caverns of the memory and the mysterious imagination. In France (via Book VIII), Wordsworth moves towards an interest in man, but in his outward, social form. In Books XI to XIII he finds his restoration, his equivalent to salvation through Christ, in the imagination, the discovery of which is anticipated by the apostrophe to the imagination in Book VI, with which I began.

Whilst alluding to the Bible then, using it as an authority to make sense of his experience, and to make it archetypal for man's difficult pilgrimage, Wordsworth also inherits its structure of allusive foreshadowing and fulfilment. The significance of Isaac's sacrifice is only discovered by Christ's, and his is 'authorized' by its anticipation in the earlier one, even as it fulfils and surpasses it: authority proceeds from the relationship between the two. Wordsworth's experience of the Revolution is similarly anticipated by, and fulfils, his physical, or literal journeying of the first European trip, whilst his work as a whole finds meaning in relation to the model whose structure it adopts, and to which it frequently alludes.27 His allusions to the Bible are not a mere appeal to authority, but transform their source, so that his work, like the New Testament, might fulfil, renew, and surpass his model.

ii

'And shepherds were the men who pleased me first'
(The Prelude VIII 182)

When Wordsworth describes his transition from love of Nature to love of Mankind, the shepherd is introduced as the archetypal man, a common man, living in the natural world. Wordsworth differentiates this 'real' shepherd from those of Arcadia, his pastoral world from the golden age, Shakespeare's Arden and Bohemia, and Spenser's land of the May. But

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27 Alan Bewell shows that the two parts of Peter Bell have an Old and New Testament structural relation, in Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989). Peter is linked to David and to Christ, and the story alludes, in a characteristically oblique and eclectic way, to many biblical episodes. In the context of Bewell's study of Wordsworth's anthropological interest, 'the poem is not so much an imitation of the Bible as a complementary or rival interpretation of the history documented by the Bible of primitive mankind's changing understanding of nature' (p. 140).
Wordsworth’s shepherds do have a literary heritage: the Bible. The idea of an authority proceeding from its relationship to a former authority, which it validates in return, is explored also in terms of this figure of authority himself, prophet and disciple, the father/priest/shepherd and his prodigal son or flock. Just as his use of this authority-relationship is the source of his own authority, so too his figures of authority and his figures of dependence become synthesized.

The shepherd is an ordinary man – like those who were present at Christ’s nativity – but he is a special man too, and these two qualities have equivalents in Wordsworth’s idea of the poet, as described in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. The poet ‘is a man speaking to men’, yet one ‘endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind’ (ll. 425-29). This extraordinariness must never be cut off from his ordinariness; he must speak always ‘as a Man’ (l. 510), a kind of Everyman, ‘singing a song in which all human beings join with him’ (ll. 568-69).

The shepherd has a far longer-standing counterpart in the pastor, and he too is both representative example, and exemplar, the leader of his own flock, but also one of Christ’s. Wordsworth’s poet is priest-like, as well as prophet-like. Christ himself is the highest shepherd, for whom the priest is representative, so it is not surprising that Wordsworth’s poet, or poetry itself, is sometimes God-like, though the boldness of this expression does surprise:

[the poet] is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder and preserver (ll. 575-76)

Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge. (ll. 586-87)

He is most striking when he describes

the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which [man] knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. (ll. 520-22)

Even Christ, though, is not only a shepherd, but, in the Johannine writings, a lamb too – no ordinary member of the flock, but a sacrificial lamb, exemplary as is the shepherd, though in a

28 Compare Psalm 31. 2, ‘be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me’, and Revelation 1. 11, ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last’ (Mason, p. 77).
29 Compare Acts 17. 28, ‘in [Christ] we live, and move, and have our being’. In making such claims for poetry, Wordsworth does not mean to compromise Christian instruction. When he likens poetry to religion, it is poetry that is elevated, rather than religion that is brought down.
different way. With God the doubling pattern stops, He being only guide and Father, shepherd-king of Israel or mankind. This chain of shepherds demonstrates again the interlinking of authority and dependence, as each child can be another's leader, or the father of (another) man. In the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth adopts this scheme of shepherds who are also sheep, fathers who are child-like, dependent on their children, though, because he is less certain of the founding rock or ultimate Father, the 'first and last' where the chain ends, his doublings are more troubled and come at unexpected times. Dependents are at risk of being abandoned, sheep may be lost and not found, sometimes because the identity of their shepherd is not clear. Wordsworth's parables are darker than Christ's, as if fulfilling Christ's prophecy at the last supper (which alludes to Zechariah 13. 7):

> All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.
> (Mark 14. 27)

Mason points out that the several biblical tales of fathers or fathers-in-law and sons that are recalled in *Michael* 'have a happy outcome, as does the parable of the Prodigal Son' (p. 341), though *Michael*, of course, does not. The story of Richard Bateman, who goes away to find success, recalls Joseph's prosperity in Egypt (Genesis 39. 1-4, 41. 40-49, Mason, p. 351). The commercial nature of his success, and Michael's financial dilemma, also recalls the parable of the lost silver piece, which comes between the lost sheep and the Prodigal Son, (Luke 15. 8-10) and those of the unjust steward (16. 1-8) and of 'the Talents', in which the servant 'renders nothing back' (Luke 19. 12-28 and Matthew 25. 14-30).^30

In Book VIII of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth includes the matron's tale, which was originally written as part of *Michael*. The story is especially interesting because it balances a retrieved child with an irrevocably lost sheep, and works by seeming to present an allegorical retelling of both the Prodigal Son and of Christ's self-sacrifice, yet in such a way that the allegory disintegrates. The shepherd and his son set out to find a lost sheep. The son then heads off alone, saying “Father, with your leave I will go back” (l. 248). His words suggest Christ's undertaking at the incarnation, and he sets out, as if to redeem mankind, with confidence, saying “I know where I shall find him” (l. 252). Yet, though he finds the sheep, 'with a prophet's joy' (l. 280), he immediately loses him again, so that the myth goes awry. He is himself transformed from triumphant saviour to Prodigal Son, and has himself to be rescued.

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[^30]: Wordsworth refers to this parable in *The Prelude* (l 269-71).
His father recovers him, but still the parable is tainted since the sheep, the boy's counterpart, has been 'borne headlong by the roaring flood' (l. 282), as if to the ocean that is death. Within the context of *Michael*, the tale foreshadows the loss of his son, whose name is a hint that Luke's version of Jesus's tales of recovered children is being broken down. In this 'real' pastoral setting, restoration is not always achieved.\footnote{In the pious 'Westmoreland Girl' (written for children in 1845), by contrast, the lamb and the 'Lamb-deliv'rer' (l. 81) who leaps into the brook are both saved.}

Several of the *Lyrical Ballads* reveal similar distortions of this archetypal tale. In 'The Last of the Flock', the shepherd tells of his own 'youthful follies' (l. 22). He was a prodigal who was recovered. But, again, his own sheep will not be restored, and his failure as a shepherd is mirrored by his failure as a father. His own interpretation is that 'God cursed me in my sore distress' (l. 86), but there is an explanation in this world too:

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I of the parish asked relief.
They said, I was a wealthy man;
My sheep upon the uplands fed,
And it was fit that thence I took
Whereof to buy us bread.
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(ll. 44-48)

The parish has failed him – one of its flock – in its practical duty. It is as if corruption on this level of the shepherd-sheep scale has spread down the chain. Lost himself, the shepherd loses his own flock (and fails to love his children). As well as being interested in this element of social criticism, Wordsworth is struck by the man's spiritual or psychological suffering. If the church ought to have been responsible for this element, it has failed in its pastoral obligation, nor, in this instance, does the poet step in to take its place (unless the poem is supposed to counter the break-down), failing to relieve the man, as Dr. Burney pointed out, or to offer any words of consolation.\footnote{Dr. Burney, review of *Lyrical Ballads* in *The Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal* 29 (1799), 202-10 (p. 207).}

Despite the bold words of the *Preface*, Wordsworth finds the assumption of priestly duties problematic. In 'The Idle Shepherd-Boys', the poet's intervention spoils the pastoral mood – an unusually idealized pastoral. He saves the lamb from the 'gulf profound' (l. 71, from *Paradise Lost* II 592), but 'upbraid[s]' the boys who might not even, Mason suggests (p. 265), have been responsible for that particular lamb in the first place. Someone had to take on the pastoral duty, but the poet seems uncomfortable in doing so, and he distances himself from his own representative. It is as if he finds the necessity for such duties – pastoral duties in
a golden pastoral world gone wrong – hard to accept, for the boys, singing nativity songs, 'a Christmas hymn' (l. 17), though on a perfect May day (hence a kind of double beginning of time), had seemed to be in Arcadia. There is no easy way to admit Death into Arcadia too. The poet is a kind of kill-joy who points that dark fact out.

In 'The Brothers', the authority-figure of the priest is more fully satirized than was the poet of 'The Idle Shepherd-Boys', this time for failing in his duties. He fails, at the start, to recognize one of his own sheep ('lost', one might say, suggestively at sea – Leonard has been a sailor). Leonard himself, more profoundly, seems to have failed his brother. The priest recalls the time when he used to carry 'his brother on his back' (l. 259) through the fords on stormy days. They were dutifully going to school, though others stayed away, and the priest commends their diligence as 'piety' (l. 267). He is characteristically missing the point, as the real piety is in Leonard's (emotional) supporting of his brother, and even, somehow, in their care of their books, which they placed 'on a dry stone / Upon the hither side' (l. 262-63) of the ford. They seem almost to have placed their faith on a rock, the 'rock of defence' of the Preface (see above p. 93). The priest himself calls 'these rocks' '[God's] great book of the world' (ll. 264, 266) and he did give Leonard a Bible before he went away. But the rock on which James founded his comfort was his brother. Returning from the sea, as from death (he is actually believed to be dead, see ll. 319-20), Leonard is like Christ, or the Prodigal Son, whose father exclaims:

> this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. (Luke 15. 24)

Withholding his identity from the priest until he has been told his own story, Leonard is even suggestive of Christ on the road to Emmaus, who lets the disciples tell him of his own death (Luke 24. 13 ff). Yet he comes too late to be James’s saviour, and James has died a deeply suggestive death himself. The priest insists that he did not commit suicide, but the very inclusion of the possibility introduces a dark doubt. Whether or not he really sleep-walked, there is a peculiar hint of disgrace about the lasting monument of his death:

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33 Though Wordsworth mocks him, the priest can be likened to the Poet of 'The Idle Shepherd-Boys', and hence to Wordsworth, by the 'typological idiom' that he uses (Brantley, p. 162, see Mason, p. 237). Brantley points to the phrase 'the third day'(l. 381), as an example. Wordsworth uses the Biblical three also, in his three failures to start The Recluse (Prelude 1), and the three questionings of Edward in 'Anecdote for Fathers'.

96
We guess, that in his hands he must have had
His shepherd's staff; for midway in the cliff
It had been caught; and there for many years
It hung – and mouldered there.

(1800-1820 version, ll. 399-402)

In this poem, fraught with a distorted rendition of the story of Christ, whose resurrection does not happen, or comes too late, the staff is the emblem of James's own pastoral duties, which 'moulder' along with it.

These poems' recasting of biblical themes is more sceptical than that of The Prelude. If the Lyrical Ballads imply a criticism of Christian optimism (by emphasizing the most dark and difficult elements of the Bible), in The Prelude it is the errors of Wordsworth's own life-pilgrimage that are explored through typological patterning and biblical allusion. That this faithful use of the Bible as a model is a move towards accepting its authority on other points is demonstrated in the first five books of The Excursion, in which both these methods – ironic reworking of Bible material and adoption of biblical structures – are used. The first, however, is now distanced, and subject to criticism by its context.

Early versions of Book I demonstrate Wordsworth's familiarity with the typological interpretation of the book of Nature. Wordsworth transfers lines from the pedlar's biography into his own autobiography, so that each is a 'chosen son' (Ruined Cottage I. 76, Prelude III 82), interpreting 'a stone, a tree, a withered leaf', 'the broad ocean and the azure heavens' (Ruined Cottage II. 97-98, Prelude III 161-62) with a prophetic power and an extra-sensory mystical perception of the 'one life' (MS B, p. 177, Prelude II 430). After the exodus of the 1805 Prelude it comes as no surprise when, in lines dating from the summer of 1806, the Wanderer takes the poet on a symbolic walk in Book II of The Excursion.

May festivities tempt the young poet, a 'summer pilgrim' (I. 113) to turn aside, as By-Path-Meadow tempts Christian in The Pilgrim's Progress, but the Wanderer leads him up 'a steep ascent' (I. 324) to find one who is 'lonesome and lost' – the Solitary who, suggestively, was once a pastor himself. With the pattern of disappointment before reward familiar from

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34 I am using the MS B Reading Text of The Ruined Cottage (1798), in 'The Ruined Cottage' and 'The Pedlar', ed by James Butler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Hassocks: Harvester, 1979), plus additional MS B lines (also 1798). The image of Nature's book is more explicit in these lines, where Wordsworth compares the landscape's 'writing' to the Bible (p. 159).

The Prelude, the pilgrims first reach a ‘dreary plain’ (l. 324 – descriptive of hell’s fiery lake in Paradise Lost, I 180). Recompensed with a ‘sweet Recess’ (l. 349), the enthusiastic poet sees it as an Arcadia, exempt from ‘Sickness, or accident, or grief, or pain’ (l. 369), or death, we assume, until the sound of a funeral dirge breaks the silence. But if death has most unsubtly entered Arcadia, it is with the words of Psalm 88:

\[\text{Shall in the grave thy love be known,}\\n\text{In death thy faithfulness?}\]

(ll. 381-82)

This is one of the darkest psalms, the cry of a man whose ‘soul is full of troubles’ (verse 3), and Wordsworth answers the quoted question in a complexly allusive way. First, the Wanderer, assuming the funeral to be his friend’s, exclaims ‘God rest his soul! … He is departed, and finds peace at last!’ (ll. 382-84), inadvertently answering that question in the affirmative. But this answer is in one sense belied, as it is not the Solitary who has died at all. At the sight of him, it is the narrator’s turn to exclaim, ‘Behold the Man whom he had fancied dead!’ (1. 497). This is the Ecce Homo of John 19. 5, but said not of the suffering Christ crowned with thorns, but of a man who, by way of a mistake, seems risen from the dead. He comforts a bereaved child with Christian commonplaces, but responds to the Wanderer’s half-quotations of scripture, ‘We shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed’ (1. 578) with a ‘sarcastic smile’ (1. 594).

This resurrected man is a sourer allusionist than was the Wordsworth of Lyrical Ballads, and tells a tale of vision and death that is too obscure to be resolved into optimism. An old man, lost overnight, is discovered by the Solitary and others in a chapel, but one that is ‘a heap of ruin’ (l. 812). Bringing him home, the Solitary sees a vision of the celestial city and exclaims of himself ‘I have been dead … And now I live!’ (ll. 875-76), as of the prodigal recovered, the type of Christ risen. But he prays, in consequence, for death, and despite his own reference to the promise of the Hebrew Prophets’ vision (l. 867), his prayer seems rather to spring from present pain than to reach towards the late revelation. The recovered old man relapses after three weeks and dies, whilst the Solitary lives reluctantly on.

The Solitary’s final disillusionment was the result of the French Revolution. In Book III he describes the Paradisal hopes that it represented in the same words with which he described the cloud-vision, ‘Glory beyond all glory ever seen’ (II 832 & III 720). Its promise is like that of the ‘Hebrew Scriptures’ (l. 759), and prompts the Solitary to resume church-going, which he had abandoned when his family died. His faith lost once more, he indulges in ironic
allusion to the Bible. As Stein notes (p. 160), his questioning of ‘Faith, Hope, and Charity’, ‘where are your triumphs? your dominion where?’ (V 333, 347) is an inversion of I Corinthians 15. 55, ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’

This ironic allusiveness recalls that of several of the narrators of the *Lyrical Ballads*, but the Solitary is far more differentiated as a character from Wordsworth himself than are those narrators, and the Wanderer and the Pastor set out to re-educate him. On one level then, the Solitary is a version of one of Wordsworth’s perceived earlier selves, now objectified and submitted to criticism, so that his allusive practice is distanced (the allusion to Corinthians dates from 1809 or 1810).36 There are a great many remembrances of the Bible in this poem, used conventionally and nonallusively. The Wanderer, certainly is Wordsworth’s better, or idealized self, and the poet is far more sympathetic to *The Excursion’s* pastor than to that of ‘The Brothers’. But the figure of the poet himself is one of youth, as yet impressionable, liable to further changes of mind. And, if Wordsworth has moved towards an orthodoxy that rejects such disrespectful distortions of biblical texts, he nevertheless preserves the trace of his earlier, more unconventional self. In fact, conflicting voices run concurrently through the years. Earlier in Book IV, for example, the Wanderer embarks on a sermon regarding the edifying effect of observing animals, but is interrupted, ironically, by the cry of a lost lamb (ll. 402-12). The narrator reasons that his mentor stops talking ‘through consciousness that silence in such place / Was best, the most affecting eloquence’ (ll. 414-15), but if the voice of the ‘poor lamb’ has disturbed the Wanderer’s complacency, it is a voice, also, from Wordsworth’s past. The Wanderer’s discourse was written, for the most part, in 1806, but the lost lamb dates from an 1804 *Prelude* manuscript (in which it precedes the white ram and its reflection, discussed earlier).37 Yet whilst past doubt returns, it too had been preceded by hopefulness, since lines 332-72, upon which the Wanderer’s sermon builds, were drafted in 1800 work on *Home at Grasmere*.38 Whilst Wordsworth felt the need to distance himself from the voice (and allusive practices) of his earlier self, he preserved it, and not in straightforward segregation, but as a vital thread in the *Excursion’s* texture. The conflict of this poem’s authority-figures is too

36 The Wanderer borrows sentiments from Spenser’s Despayre: (*Excursion* III 277-81, *Faerie Queene* I ix 40), a hint (to the knowledgable) that his attitude is morally reprehensible.
great a problem to be resolved here. Developments in that poem’s exploration of allusion will be discussed at a later point.

iii
‘thy rod and thy staff’
(Psalm 23. 4)
The shepherd’s staff is the mark of his authority. One of the idle shepherd-boys, characteristically, uses his only to help him balance as he crosses the waterfall. The shepherd of the matron’s tale (or Michael), on the other hand, rescuing his son:

   stretched his staff
   Towards him, bade him leap –
   (Prelude VIII 309-10)

This is the proper way to use the staff, with a gentle authority, and the bishop’s crozier, likewise, ought to symbolize responsibility rather than power: David says of God’s ‘rod’ and ‘staff’, ‘they comfort me’ (Psalm 23. 4). But in this world, authority has been misused, so that Milton berates the bishops:

   Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
   A sheep-hook
   (Lycidas II. 119-20)
‘Pastoral’ duty is the duty of feeding (the Lord, ‘my shepherd’, ‘maketh me to lie down in green pastures’). A bishop, episcopus, ought to be an ‘over-seer’, but, being blind, he needs his staff himself, for support. Wordsworth’s aged men – the Old Cumberland Beggar, Timothy the ‘Childless Father’, and the travelling cripple in ‘Andrew Jones’ – have staffs like these, which are in part emblems of themselves, as, in ‘The Brothers’, James’s staff seems grotesquely to represent his own body, as if he were hanging like the crucified Christ (as the crozier is (etymologically) a cross as well as a shepherd’s crook). The discharged soldier is without support:

   He was alone,
   Had no attendant, neither dog, nor staff
   (Prelude IV 415-16)

Yet, it transpires, he does have a staff after all:

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39 Wordsworth uses a phrase from this psalm, ‘for thou art with me’, of his sister in Tintern Abbey (l. 114).
At this he stooped,  
And from the ground took up an oaken staff  
By me yet unobserved, a traveller's staff  
Which I suppose from his slack hand had dropped,  
And lain till now neglected in the grass.

(ll. 459-63)

This mistake is no mistake if one considers that the staff he doesn't have, and that which he does, have different significances. He has no human (or canine) supporting companion, but he does have a 'traveller's staff', something archetypal, a kind of life's-pilgrim staff, which accompanies us on our life's journey. Perhaps it is a faith in God, or perhaps only an emblem of the journey itself, of our life itself, single and self-sufficient. The soldier's 'neglected' staff is certainly like himself. 'Remembering the importance of his theme / But feeling it no longer' (ll. 477-78), he is scarcely himself, has momentarily dropped his staff, and is very near the end of his life's journey.

Milton's image of authority abused returns in Wordsworth's figure of 'blind Authority beating with his staff / The child that might have led him' (III 640-41). The staff is another image of the authority that is inseparable from dependence. Being blind, Authority needs a staff, and that staff could be the child. A shepherd-priest who abuses his power harms those whom he not only ought to care for, but who might care for him. Wordsworth imagines being blind, one 'among those who lean / Upon a living staff -  his daughter Dora ('A little onward lend thy guiding hand' ll. 9-10). Luke fails to repay his debt to his father, to be a staff for Michael's old age. The shepherd himself prepares a crook for the five-year-old child:

Then Michael from a winter coppice cut  
With his own hand a sapling, which he hooped  
With iron, making it throughout in all  
Due requisites a perfect shepherd's staff,  
And gave it to the Boy

(ll. 180-84)

It is suggestive that Michael cuts, specifically, a 'sapling' from a 'winter coppice'. Luke is intended to be a branch of new growth, continuing the family business, as dead wood gives way to living. The image of the staff is never far from that of the living tree: the tree of

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40 Another misused staff is that of the priest satirized in The Prelude, who uses allusion  
To entwine the crook of eloquence with which  
This pretty shepherd, pride of all the plains,  
Leads up and down his captivated flock.

(VII 564-66)
knowledge and Christ's cross from the tree of life. Moses' staff became a living serpent (Exodus 4. 3)\textsuperscript{41}, and this power was passed from him to Aaron, whose rod (which later blossoms into almonds (Numbers 17. 8)) became a serpent and devoured those of Pharaoh's sorcerers (Exodus 7. 12), the 'rod[s] of the wicked' (Psalm 125. 3).\textsuperscript{42} Yet the need for the Israelites' staff to be held at Passover, the injunction, 'with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand ... eat ... in haste' (Exodus 12. 11), betokens the imminent exodus, the long pilgrimage of life, in which a staff is needed for constant support. The staff is a sign of weakness, at the same time as being an emblem of authority. Old men with staffs, and children who are staffs, are both figures of inspirational emotional support, though they are the weakest members of society.

In II Kings, Rab-Shekeh warns Hezekiah of Judah that his staff is a false one:

> Now behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it; so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him. (II Kings 18.21)

A false staff is worse than useless, it becomes a weapon, as 'blind Authority' beats his true staff, the child, with his own staff. James's staff, hanging, became an image of his own death and 'The Thorn' is a kind of tree of death, on which, the superstitious locals conjecture, Martha may have hanged her baby (II. 210-13). It lives on, like a grotesque analogue of the hawthorn that sprung from Joseph of Arimathea's staff, and an image, again, of Martha herself. The boy of 'Nutting', meanwhile, uses his nutting crook, once cut from a living tree, perhaps, like Luke's shepherd's crook, not to support, but to maim other trees. A chosen child of Nature, he betrays the parent whom he might have supported.

On the one hand, then, Wordsworth is anxious about his own responsibility as a father, or priest, or shepherd figure, and on the other, he may fail even as the child that is

\textsuperscript{41} Though a serpent might strike us as ominous, it is an image of Jesus as well as of Satan. In Numbers, Moses hoists a brass serpent on a pole, the sight of which cures those who have been bitten by the fiery serpents that have been sent as a plague (21. 6-9). Jesus alludes to it in John 3. 14, interpreting the saving serpent as 'a type and emblem of his own crucifixion', as Beausobre explains (p. 42). On its pole, it resembles Christ on the cross, the inverse parallel image of the serpent wound round the tree of knowledge. The serpent with its tail in its mouth is an ancient symbol of eternity, as if the staff-serpent were passed down from fathers to sons as an unending legacy.

\textsuperscript{42} Wordsworth uses Egypt as the type of tyrannical France in two of the Poems Dedicated to Liberty and Independence, written many years apart. In a manuscript version of 'What if our numbers barely could defy', written in 1802, 'a petty Band / Of gallant hearts ... / Hath might beyond the might of Moses' wand' (Cornell edition of Poems in Two Volumes, pp. 584-85). In 'By Moscow self-devoted to a blaze' (1822) Wordsworth compares the Russian victory against Napoleon, which is aided by the elements, to the drowning of the Egyptians in the red sea.

102
himself a staff, father and support of the man. One of the most striking figures of self-sufficiency, and hence support for the poet, is the leech-gatherer of Resolution and Independence. He is a pilgrim in the ‘wilderness’ (I. 58):

His body was bent double, feet and head
Coming together in life’s pilgrimage.
(II. 66-67)

And he has a staff:

Himself he propped, limbs, body, and pale face,
Upon a long grey staff of shaven wood
(II. 71-72)

He uses it, not just for support, but as a tool for the powers he represents

At length, himself unsettling, he the pond
Stirred with his staff, and fixedly did look
Upon the muddy water, which he conned,
As if he had been reading in a book
(II. 78-81)

He is a kind of diviner, but the confidence that Wordsworth places in him is rare. More often, as we have seen, the staff tends to fail, and there is a sense that Wordsworth, like Prospero, whom the leech-gatherer with his ‘staff’ and ‘book’ resembles, may be inclined to relinquish the burden of his powers. Prospero denounces the workings of his magic, ‘the baseless fabric of this vision’, as an ‘insubstantial pageant’ (The Tempest IV i 151, 155), and declares ‘I’ll break my staff’ (V i 54). When the staff is wielded, it becomes a symbol only of the bearer’s power, like a monarch’s sceptre. Wordsworth is more comfortable with the staff that stands for both strength and the need for strength, authority in dependence. A soldier at the poet’s imagined grave is told

Welcome! – but lay thy sword aside,
And lean upon a peasant’s staff.
(‘A Poet’s Epitaph’ II. 15-16)

The staff here is an equivalent to the sword it replaces, but at the same time an inverse equivalent, to ‘lean upon’, not brandish.

In The White Doe of Rylstone, more overtly allegorical than most of Wordsworth’s poetry (and prefaced by a dedicatory poem that links it to Spenser’s allegory), Francis is torn between two conflicting authorities, two ‘standards’ to be upheld. His loyalty to his father

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43 My text is the Reading Text of The White Doe of Rylstone; or The Fate of the Nortons, ed by Kristine Dugas (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1988), which follows the first edition, of 1815.
ought to be an integral part of a higher scale of loyalty (Wordsworth invokes the ‘chain of being’ in his use of a quotation from Bacon’s ‘Of Atheism’ as a preface). But Norton’s misguided rebellion has broken the allegiance to nation and to God, so that Francis has to choose between them. Norton’s banner, which the luckless Emily is obliged to decorate, stands for this false assumption of rebellious authority. Rather than signifying a responsible power-in-humility, like the shepherd’s staff or bishop’s crosier, it resembles the arms which the rebels also take up. Francis refuses to bear arms, so Norton ‘seize[s] the staff’ (l. 406) and confers it, along with the family inheritance, onto his second son:

‘Thou, Richard, bear’st thy father’s name,
Keep thou this ensign …’
(II. 407-08)

Richard’s willingness to join the rebellion, breaking his bond of loyalty to Queen, country, and God (Elizabeth being the head of the Church), is, by painful contradiction, an act of loyalty to his father, to whom he is as Aaron was to Moses, or Elisha to Elijah. The standard thus represents, also, Richard himself, who becomes the next branch, or new shoot of life, on the family tree. This image resounds as Francis addresses Emily:

thou, my Sister, [art] doomed to be
The last leaf which by heaven’s decree
Must hang upon a blasted tree
(II. 570-72)

Old Norton has ‘magnifie limbs of withered state’ (l. 750). The brothers, preparing to die, ‘stood like trees when earth and heaven / Are calm’ (ll. 1335-36), but Emily, after the disaster, lingers:

Among the ruins of a wood,
Erewhile a covert bright and green,
And where full many a brave Tree stood
(II. 1604-06)

She sits, later, ‘beneath a mouldered tree, / A self-surviving leafless Oak’ (II. 1648-49).

The banner bears an image of ‘the Rood’ (l. 1284). Norton trusts that it will bring the same righteous fortune as did Cuthbert’s relic. At the Battle of Durham,

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44 It is interesting that whilst the brothers are branches, Emily is a ‘leaf’ — the phallic symbolism cannot be applied to her.
45 Compare James’s ‘mouldered’ staff (‘The Brothers’ l. 404) and the gibbet-mast which has ‘moulder’d down’ near the Penrith beacon (Prelude XI 290).
The prior of Durham with holy hand
Saint Cuthbert's Relic did uprear
Upon the point of a lofty spear
(ll. 835-37)

This emblem recalls Moses' lifting of the brass serpent upon a pole, which Christ alludes to as a type of himself, crucified (see note 41 above). But Norton's banner is unholy, so that, despite the cross that is emblazoned upon it, it becomes a type of that other tree entwined by a serpent, the tree of knowledge. It is associated with violent rebellion, so that the brothers stand

in a ring
Each with a lance – erect and tall,
A falchion, and a buckler small,
... by their Sire, on Clifford-moor,
In youthful beauty flourishing,
To guard the Standard which he bore.
(ll. 727-32)46

Lance, falchion, Sire and standard are images of each other. Though the brothers are as yet 'flourishing' branches, they will soon be blasted.

Francis's dilemma is painfully worked through. Having refused the banner, as an emblem of insurrection, he later takes it up, as an emblem of his familial line, to which he wants to remain faithful. In the beginning, he stands 'leaning on a lance / Which he had grasped unknowingly' (ll. 436-37), but, deciding that he cannot obey his father, he rejects it along with the banner:

Therewith he threw away the lance
Which he had grasped in that strong trance,
Spurned it – like something that would stand
Between him and his pure intent
Of love on which his soul was bent.
(ll. 520-24)

'Soul was bent' may be an echo of Milton's sonnet 'When I consider how my light is spent' (l. 4 – 'though my soul more bent'), for it is later said of Emily that 'Her duty is to stand and wait' (l. 1070), alluding to the sonnet's last line. Emily's passive self-sacrifice, which, like that of Chaucer's patient Grisilde (The Clerk's Tale), has caused many readers discomfort, is heroized by this allusion, which makes it plain that she is preserving the highest bond of

46 Lear boasts that in his youth, 'with my good biting falchion / I would have made them skip' (King Lear V iii 277-78). In The Ancient Mariner the 'falchion' (a sword) becomes a staff:

    'Now get thee hence, thou greybeard Loon!
    Or my Staff shall make thee skip.'

(1798-1800 version, ll. 15-16)
loyalty, to her (Protestant) God. Her duty acquires a hint of irony from the possibility that ‘stand’ refers to military operations (other possibilities are that Milton pictures a monarch’s courtiers, or the highest orders of angels, who, according to some commentators, do not perform tasks as messengers, but merely attend on God). In the sonnet, the righteous are those who ‘best / Bear [God’s] mild yoke’ (ll. 10-11), introducing another wooden bough which must be borne (as Christ carried his own cross), not wielded.

Unlike Emily, Francis cannot stand resolutely by his choice of competing loyalties. When his father and brothers are executed, he takes up the banner, as Norton asks, intent on setting it on ‘Saint Mary’s’ (Catholic) shrine in Bolton Priory. He believes that he can serve his father thus much, without being a traitor to the higher cause, but the fact that he is mistaken is revealed by his consequent need to bear arms (though ‘in self-defence’ (l. 1496)):

He stood, – nor weaponless was now;  
He from a Soldier’s hand had snatched  
A spear

(ll. 1497-99)

He dies, because he cannot remain true to both sides, but his intentions are clarified in the revised description:

The guardian lance, as Francis fell,  
Dropped from him; but his other hand  
The Banner clenched

(1836 revision, l. 1509 ff)

It is wrested from him, but he has fallen holding onto the emblem of his father’s authority, but not to that of the rebellion, making the precise distinction that was previously impossible. At the moment of his defeat, he remains true to father and cross, bearing the emblem of himself as the new branch of his family, the yoke or staff of faithful authority, whilst rejecting the sword-staff of Satan’s rebellion, ‘instrument of woe’, falchion, lance, and the evil tree, but by doing so, he must sacrifice his life.

To adopt the role of the child-staff is not easy. We have seen the difficulty with which Wordsworth attempts to become as a little child, so that his only solution is to be a kind of mediator, adult and child, ‘two consciousnesses’ in one in The Prelude, or poet of the child-teacher in several of the Lyrical Ballads. In the ‘Matthew’ poems, Wordsworth presents an attempt to become a child, surrogate son of Matthew, his supporting staff. These poems offer the subtlest expression of the metamorphic image of the staff, and its own fragility. In ‘The Fountain’ the poet makes an explicit offer, “I’ll be a son to thee!” (l. 62), but is rejected.

106
Matthew, at seventy-two, might be approaching his second childhood, or else the child in him lives on, so that he needs no surrogate:

‘My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard.

Thus fares it still in our decay:
And yet the wiser mind
Mourns less for what age takes away
Than what it leaves behind …’

(II. 29-36)

Yet he has lost children, and feels their loss. Why, then, does he reject the poet’s offer? In ‘The Two April Mornings’ he likewise does not wish that the ‘blooming Girl’, ‘happy as a wave /
That dances on the sea’ (II. 43, 51-52) were his own, despite her resemblance to Perdita, ‘a wave o’ th’ sea’ (The Winter’s Tale IV iv 141), who is restored to her parents, and restores them in return.

There is some kind of failure in the father-child continuum, suggested, I think, by an oblique reference to a famous father and surrogate son relationship. Matthew ends by resuming

those witty rhymes
About the crazy old church clock
And the bewildered chimes.

(‘The Fountain’ II. 70-72)

He might, like Shakespeare’s Falstaff, have ‘heard the chimes at midnight’ in his youth (2 Henry IV III ii 214). Since Maurice Morgann’s Essay on the Dramatic Character of John Falstaff (1777), affection for Falstaff had grown. Hazlitt argued that ‘the truth is, that we never could forgive the Prince’s treatment of Falstaff . . . to the readers of poetry at present, Falstaff is the better man of the two. We think of him and quote him oftener’, and Coleridge concurred. Matthew, ‘the grey-haired man of glee’ (I. 20), like Falstaff, is characterized by his age, his song, and his jests, author of a ‘half-mad thing of witty rhymes’ (I. 15). Falstaff and Shallow muse on old age, lost youth, and the deaths of their friends, and Shallow moralizes

Death, as the Psalmist saith, is certain to all, all shall die.

(III ii 37-38)

On his own death-bed, Falstaff tries to recite the twenty-third psalm, and Michael Platt argues that 'the death of Falstaff is ... designed to recall the death of King David.' Discovered by the gradual chilling of his body from the feet upwards, it also recalls Socrates', Plato's description of which Wordsworth once counted as one of the three most pathetic of human compositions. Like the near-mythical Socrates, Matthew is an archetypal 'wise old man', the figure of 'insight, understanding, good advice', described by Jung, who may even symbolize 'the pre-existent meaning hidden in the chaos of life', inaccessible now, since Matthew is dead before these poems are written.

Coming to 'Leonard's Rock' (l. 69), Matthew perhaps has something on which to found his faith, but, unlike Falstaff, he will not rely on a shadowy semblance of a father-son relationship. 'How ill white hairs becomes a fool and jester!' Hal is to exclaim (V v 48) having betrayed him, 'I know thee not, old man' (l. 47) in words that may recall Christ's to some of the lost. If Hal fails to be a son to Falstaff, it is because the latter was no responsible 'father' to him, but a false staff, who is paid in kind. Matthew, wiser than Falstaff, will not rely on a relationship that is not a true one, however whole-heartedly offered. But it is not just wisdom that governs his decision, but pain. Having suffered loss once, he is reluctant to commit himself again, since children are not restored, like those of Shakespeare's romances, and dependencies, as much of the poetry discussed here shows, can be betrayed.

Yet Matthew, at the end of 'The Two April Mornings', holds some kind of branch, which is related to the child-staff. As Mason notes (p. 292), its significance is subtle and shadowy. It may, he suggests, be a staff, or else a sapling, a sprig of a wild plant like those mentioned in the discussion of 'the grafting of cultivated types' in the scene from The Winter's Tale to which Wordsworth here alludes, and which was hinted at in Michael. As well as being suggestive of the living staff, symbol of the child who supports his parent whilst

49 Reminiscences, p. 468.
51 Matthew 25. 12, as suggested by Norman N. Holland, Signet Classic Edition (New York: New American Library, 1965). The bridegroom, often identified by theologians with Christ, says to the foolish virgins whose lamps are extinguished, 'I know you not'. It is in the next chapter that Christ is himself denied by Peter, 'I know not the man' (26. 74).
52 The grafting image is found in the Bible too. The Jews - branches of the olive tree - are broken off because they have failed to accept Christ, and the Gentiles are grafted in their place (Romans 11. 17 ff).
extending the line as living legacy, the ‘bough / Of wilding in his hand’ (ll. 59-60), recalls Dido with a willow in her hand’ (*The Merchant of Venice* V i 10). The ‘willow’ of which Wordsworth’s ‘wilding’ is an aural half-echo is emblematic of a lover’s desertion particularly – hence Dido’s willow-bough – but more generally of death and mourning. Appropriately, then, as Matthew has lost his child, the prop of his old age, he has, not a staff like Wordsworth’s other old men, but a bough symbolizing that loss. Rather than leaning on a pilgrim’s staff, he finds emotional support in another timeless emblem, which again shares a family resemblance with the tree of life, the cross, and the new branch of spring growth. Loss and comfort, death and life, are united in the image, as they are in the spring, marriage, and funeral flowers that Wordsworth also inherits from Shakespeare and elsewhere. And the poetic representations of them are akin to the epitaph, a written tribute, rather than a floral one, which also marks both loss and continuance, mortality and immortality. The unoriginal originality of this family of images is that of those ‘modes of fiction … which have been acknowledged by the human heart’ (*Epitaphs II*, 487-88). In his discussion of dependence and authority, prophetic communication received and delivered, lessons learnt and passed on, Wordsworth articulates an authorizing dependency, a teaching by learning, that is itself inherited. Allusion is a source of authority, in this vital sense. The practice of alluding, as well as the allusions’ content, performs, as it expresses, this power by inheritance, a self-sufficiency in participation.

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53 Wordsworth alludes to this famous scene elsewhere (see Chapter 8 below).
54 Ophelia drowns beneath one (*Hamlet* IV vii 166), and Desdemona sings the forsaken Barbara’s ‘song of willow’ (*Othello* IV iii 40 ff). Spenser lists the significances of trees, including ‘the Willow worne of forlorne Paramours’ at the start of *The Faerie Queene* (I i 9). Wordsworth often replaces the lost lover with the lost parent or child, erotic love with familial.
PART III: ALLUSION AND INFLUENCE
CHAPTER 4: SHAKESPEARE AND MILTON

Milton and Shakespeare

Now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires! Hesperus, that led
The starry host, rode brightest; till the Moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length,
Apparent Queen, unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

[Paradise Lost IV 604-09]

‘Hesperus, that led The starry host,’ is a poetical object, because the glory of his own Nature gives him the pre-eminence the moment he appears; he calls forth the poetic faculty, receiving its exertions as a tribute; but this Ship in the Sonnet [Wordsworth’s own ‘With Ships the Sea is sprinkled’] may, in a manner still more appropriate, be said to come upon a mission of the poetic Spirit ... My mind wantons with grateful joy in the exercise of its own powers, and, loving its own creation,

This ship to all the rest I did prefer,

making her a sovereign or a regent, and thus giving body and life to all the rest.¹

Using an illustration from Milton to justify his own technique, Wordsworth chooses an image of poetical pre-eminence and influence. Milton’s ‘soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart’ ('London, 1802' I. 9), ahead of the rest of the ‘starry host’, those luminaries celebrated in the 1815 Essay, Supplementary to the Preface – Chaucer, 'the morning-star of English Poetry' and ‘the bright Elizabethan constellation’ (II. 647-48). Wordsworth misreads the passage from Milton as though it were a Romantic poem, brooding on its own creativity: Milton writes of Hesperus, but Wordsworth reads of the ‘call[ing] forth [of] the poetic faculty’. And as that faculty’s ‘tribute’ is more to be applauded than the star that inspires and receives it, so Wordsworth’s own offering surpasses the image of Hesperus (which, under the name of Lucifer, is also Satan), the model of Milton. (In his own poem on Hesperus, ‘It is no Spirit who from heaven hath flown’ (1803), the sight of that ‘most ambitious Star!’ (I. 9) rouses Wordsworth’s own competitive aspirations.) Wordsworth’s image comes like an angel ‘upon a mission of the poetic Spirit’ to call forth his own faculty which, in self-congratulation (because the inspiring image was ‘its own creation’), transforms the ship not into a mere star, but into the sun, ‘a sovereign or a regent’, ‘Regent of day’, in Milton’s words, from that more familiar

passage of *Paradise Lost*, the creation of the sun, moon and stars (VII 352-86), which echoes, 'shedding sweet influence', throughout Wordsworth's poetry.²

It has always been clear that Milton is the paramount poetic influence on Wordsworth. This is evident on all levels, the surface texture of allusion and diction, the broader structure of works, and deep patterns of subject-matter and thought. In the first instance, Stein, looking at 280 of Wordsworth's works, finds 550 of his 1300 detected echoes to be Miltonic (p. 10). Shakespeare is rated second, but with only 100 reminiscences. In the matters of form and content, both *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, Wordsworth's epic attempts, have often been read in relation to *Paradise Lost*. Charles Lamb wrote of *The Excursion*:

Those who hate the Paradise Lost will not love this poem.  
The steps of the great master are discernible in it; not in direct imitation or injurious parody, but in the following of the spirit, in free homage and generous subjection.³

Book XI of *The Prelude* (1805) is provocatively titled 'Imagination, How Impaired and Restored' – a softening of Milton's 'Lost' and 'Regained' – and loss and recompense, failure and unexpected success, create a recurrent pattern through the poem. The philosophical pretension of the work, which explores through Wordsworth's personal experience the underlying, ultimate relations of man's mind to nature, makes him an exemplar, a kind of archetypal fallen Adam. The other-worldliness of its epiphanies – albeit that other world is problematically resident now in nature, now in the mind, or in the conjunction of them both – makes the work religious. As philosopher, Wordsworth explores the natural and supernatural in the passages of rational discourse. But his prime mental tool is the imagination, which is more than rational; revelatory, communicating the eternal through its inspirational experience of it, so Wordsworth (as represented in *The Prelude*), like Milton, hopes to be a prophet too.

A survey of Wordsworth's comments reveals certain distinct qualities of which Milton is the prime example, one of which is his political commitment. Milton is one of England's 'deliverers and defenders', upholding 'liberty', 'freedom', whether as a 'republican' or 'an

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² In the early *Vale of Esthwaite*, for example, twilight arrives, and warbles softly sweet,  
With voice which was ordained to cheer  
In Eden our first father's ear,  
When first he saw day's regent drop  
Behind the western mountain top  
(ll. 84-88, my emphasis)

³ Charles Lamb, 'The Excursion; a Poem', *Quarterly Review* 12 (October 1814 to January 1815), 100-11, (p. 111).
aristocrat in the truest sense of the word'. Milton is also one of England’s ‘moralists’, teaching ‘faith and morals’, ‘wisdom’ and ‘truth’. But this last term, ‘truth’, belongs more correctly not to Milton’s role as moral didact, theologian, thinker, but to his poetic-prophetic gift. It is ‘uttered’ by ‘our blind Poet’ (Prelude III 284), Homer’s descendent. That ‘wisdom’ is ‘married to immortal verse’ (Excursion VII 536). It is the verse that is immortal, so that Milton’s ‘highest, holiest raptures of the lyre’ (l. 535) are ‘holiest’ not because they deal with religion, but because they are themselves inspired by the eternal element. Wordsworth disapproved of those who read Paradise Lost ‘not as a poem, but a religious Book’, who ‘wished to possess the Poem’ (Wordsworth was much concerned with the vicissitudes of Milton’s sales) ‘as a religious work’. Similarly, though Wordsworth praised Milton’s political efforts, he later criticized him for being ‘so much concerned’ with ‘public affairs’.

In the Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty political concerns are both mythologized, and at the same time lead irresistibly to poetical concerns, so that Milton emerges as a spiritual redeemer, whose vehicle is poetry. Napoleon, in an image from the Bible, is a false messiah, a hollow reed (‘Calais, August, 1802’), whilst ‘new-born Liberty’, symbol of France’s spiritual rebirth, has been betrayed, so that “Citizen”, ‘as if a dead man spake it’, has become a ‘hollow word’ (‘Composed near Calais’). But words from Milton’s sonnet ‘On the Lord General Fairfax’, are taken to deplore London’s ‘Rapine and avarice’ (‘Written in London, September, 1802’ l. 9). Milton’s words are not hollow; his is a life-giving force, so that the next sonnet looks to him for redemption, ‘Oh! raise us up, return to us again’ (‘London, 1802’ l. 7).

It was not as a political or theological moralist that Milton was most revered by Wordsworth, but as the possessor of the most exalted imagination. Wordsworth once defined ‘the imaginative’ as ‘that which is conversant [with] or turns upon infinity’. Milton was a

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4 The Convention of Cintra, l. 2721; Letter to William Mathews, 8 June 1794, EY, p. 125; ‘London, 1802’ l. 8; Letter to Landor, 20 April 1822, LY I, 126; Reminiscences, 461.
5 ‘Great men have been among us’ l. 5; ‘It is not to be thought of’ l. 12; Excursion VII 536; Prelude III 285.
6 Letter to Edward Quillinan, 9 March 1840, LY IV, 43; 1815 Essay, Supplementary, II. 327-28.
7 Fenwick note to At Vallombrosa, p. 72.
8 Newlyn discusses the Romantic tendency to identify Milton with Christ in her first Chapter.
9 In Matthew 11.7 John the Baptist is described as a reed shaken by the wind.
10 L’Allegro, Lycidas, and Paradise Lost are all echoed in part II – see the notes to sonnets 10, 12, 14 & 31 in PW III, 458 & 460.
'truly divine poet' (1815 Preface, 1815-36 version, l. 416ff), for he had this especial imagination, and in this he was distinct from Shakespeare:

The grand store-houses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination, of poetical, as contradistinguished from human and dramatic Imagination [of which ‘the works of Shakespeare are an inexhaustible source’], are the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures, and the works of Milton. (1815 Preface II. 310-14)

It was Milton’s kind of imagination to which Wordsworth aspired, as he said in the lost letter to Lamb of February 1801, and his own words were picked up by others, most famously, by Hazlitt: ‘Milton is his great idol, and he sometimes dares to compare himself with him’. 12

Bloom detects a more audacious challenge, pointing out that, two years before the prayer of ‘London, 1802’, Wordsworth had written the ‘Prospectus’, in which Milton’s example is surpassed, ‘unalarmed’ (l. 35). Bloom concludes that the sonnet’s covert prayer ‘is to be an influence, and not to be influenced, and the precursor is praised for having been what one has become’ (Anxiety, p. 126), in an instance of apophrades, in which time is reversed.

Coleridge had taken poetry out of time:

The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible space
Shed influence!

(‘To William Wordsworth’ ll. 50-52)

The illusion of apophrades is to make time run backwards. Milton, though later in age than the Elizabethan constellation, might, like Hesperus, appear to lead them. Hazlitt seems to hint at this when he recognizes how influences upon Milton are subsumed into his own inspiring power:

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or prophane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer ... In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty intellect, that the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them.’ 13

A bright star makes its dimmer neighbours invisible, usurping their lesser lights; ‘mature poets steal’. 14

The self-consciousness of Wordsworth’s allusions to Milton is suggested by the frequency with which they are metaleptic: echoing images of echo. In Paradise Lost, ‘celestial

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12 The Spirit of the Age, in Howe XI (1932), 92.
voices' are heard 'from the steep / Of echoing hill or thicket … / Sole, or responsive each to other's note' (IV 680-83). 'Cherubic songs by night from neighboring hills / Aeriel music send' (V 547-48). That the echoes are angelic is of particular significance, as will be discussed shortly. These echoes resound, from Descriptive Sketches (1793), 'Soft music from th'aereal summit … / answering every close' (ll. 421-22), through 'Composed Upon an Evening of Extraordinary Spleandour and Beauty' (1817): 'field and watery cove / With modulated echoes rang, / While choirs of fervent angels sang' (ll. 9-11), to On the Power of Sound (1828), in which 'Images of voice… / From rocky steep' are 'flung back' (ll. 34-36), and the nightingale's song 'might tempt an angel to descend' (l. 167). The echoes have rung round in a circle, so that the angels' visits to earth, which ended at the Fall, begin again: another turning round of time.

But Wordsworth, attempting to outshine Milton, also adopts a different strategy to Milton’s (and Bloom’s) powerfully subsuming one. Apophrades is glossed by Bloom as ‘the return of the dead’. Wordsworth revives the influence of other poets to counter and modify Milton’s, in Jackson Bate’s ‘leapfrog’ use of the past for authority or psychological comfort: ‘the leap over the parental’ by which ‘the English Romantics … invoked the Elizabethans and Jacobeans against their own immediate precursors’ (p. 22). Jonathan Bate has shown that Wordsworth’s prioritizing of Milton over Shakespeare has been exaggerated. Hazlitt, especially, perpetuated an idea that ‘Wordsworth was antipathetic to Shakespeare’ (p. 71), but Bate reveals that this was not so. Even in the ‘Prospectus’, he reminds us, that poem which most overtly challenges Milton’s epic supremacy, Shakespeare’s language is usurped – or invoked – as well: the ‘prophetic Spirit! that inspir’st’ (l. 83) is Shakespeare’s ‘prophetic soul’ (sonnet 107), as signalled by the closely following, distinctive phrase, ‘Dreaming on things to come’ (Bate, p. 95). Without repeating Bate’s argument here, I will just point out that Wordsworth often couples the two poets in shared greatness. “Shakespeare and Milton”, paired, epitomize the ‘invaluable works of our elder Writers’, and ‘British freedom’. Wordsworth names these two only as ‘labourers divine’, as possessing ‘Imagination … of the first order’, and again to argue that their writings ‘infinitely transcend those of the Greeks’. 15 Examples from each of them are given in the 1815 Preface to show Imagination’s employment

15 Preface to the Lyrical Ballads ll. 241-43; ‘It is not to be thought of’ l. 2; Prelude V 165; Letter to John Gardner, 19 May 1830, LY II, 265; annotation to Knight’s Taste in Wittreich, p. 116.
of the word 'Hangs', and even Hazlitt recalls Wordsworth’s words on ‘the greatest [poets]
(such as Shakespeare and Milton).’

In another place, Hazlitt himself describes Shakespeare as, in a sense, a
Wordsworthian poet. Criticizing Johnson’s criticism of Shakespeare, he writes that
‘Shakespeare’s bold and happy flights of imagination were equally thrown away upon
[Johnson]. He was … without any particular fineness of organic sensibility, alive to all the
“mighty world of ear and eye,” which is necessary to the painter or musician’. He is quoting
_Tintern Abbey_ (with a slight error), to express a quality that Wordsworth and Shakespeare
share, a sensitivity to the ‘sensible warm motion’ of the living universe. This last phrase is
Shakespeare _(_Measure for Measure_ III i 119), but it sounds like Wordsworth, so that his
twice-attempted theft of it is another example of apophrades, whereby ‘one can believe, for
startled moments, that [poets] are being _imitated by their ancestors_’ (Anxiety, p. 141).  

Wordsworth polarizes the Miltonic ‘enthusiastic and meditative Imagination’ and the
Shakespearean ‘human and dramatic Imagination’ in the 1815 Preface, as Keats was similarly
to distinguish the ‘wordsworthian or egotistical sublime’ from the chameleonic Shakespearean
‘poetical Character’. To set up Shakespeare and Milton as in some sense equal and opposite
greats was a tendency of the period: Coleridge, for example, seats them on ‘the two Golden
Thrones of the English Parnassus’:

> the one darting himself forth, & passing into all the forms of
> human character & passion, the other attracting all forms & things
to himself, into the unity of his own grand Ideal –/ Sh. became all
> things, yet for ever remaining himself –/ while all things & forms
> became Milton.

Even though twentieth-century critics have recognized the limitations of polarizing
Shakespeare and Milton themselves in this way, circumstances have conspired to perpetuate
the tendency in terms of their respective influences. Bate, for example, countering the many
explorations of the Romantics’ engagement with Milton and arguing against the critical

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16 Hazlitt, _The Plain Speaker_, Essay XVIII, in Howe XII (1931), 203.
17 Preface to _Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays_, in Howe IV (1930), 176.
18 Wordsworth used this phrase in his MS work on _An Evening Walk_ and _Salisbury Plain_. For these,
and related echoes of the ‘motions of the sense’ (Measure for Measure I iv 59), see Bate,
pp. 89 & 110.
19 John Keats to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, _The Letters of John Keats_, ed by Maurice
20 Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature, ed by R. A. Foakes, _Collected Coleridge_ 5, 2 vols, (1987), I,
244. Newlyn discusses this tendency (p. 59).
overemphasis upon Milton’s influence, cannot avoid setting up Shakespeare as a contrast to Milton. This is largely because Bate posits a different kind of ‘influence’ from Bloom, consolatory rather than anxious. Because Bloom’s prime example of the Oedipal precursor was Milton, Shakespeare, Bate’s subject, becomes the hero of his alternative influence, as if Shakespeare and Milton are themselves doing battle. Bate suggests that the sympathetic Shakespearean character might itself inspire a more benevolent influence than Milton’s, but the opposition is also an inevitable consequence of his project. Exploring the Romantics’ use of Shakespeare and putting forward his own idea of influence, Bate has no room (and his book is not the place) to explore Milton’s and Shakespeare’s own relations, to synthesize, as it were, the challenge that he has put up to face Bloom’s Miltonic influence.

Stein argues that ‘Shakespeare is often made a naturalistic foil to Milton, in order to support Wordsworth’s radical “horizontalizing” of Milton’s vertical order’ (p. 191). This is true (instances are considered below, as in the discussion of ‘Nutting’), but it is not always the case that the presences of Shakespeare and Milton are so distinct from one another, especially since the relationship is something of a triangle: Wordsworth alludes to Shakespeare and to Milton, who himself alludes to Shakespeare. Often in Wordsworth we find allusions to Milton and to Shakespeare in the same poem, with accompanying language that is reminiscent of both. Sometimes, the Milton and Shakespeare will not seem to have been themselves directly related. In Wordsworth’s pastoral world of ‘Ruth’, for example, there are evocations of both Lycidas and of Shakespeare’s world of Arden and the Athens neighbourhood. Here, Shakespeare and Milton each made use of the language associated with this chosen mode, or genre. At other times, however, the links seem causal. Where Lycidas enters Wordsworth’s poetry, The Winter’s Tale may come too, and it is often argued that Milton’s poem recalls Shakespeare’s sheep-shearing festival. It is not always clear whether we are encountering coincidence or direct link. John Shawcross warns against the danger of ‘discovering’ allusions by means of aspect blindness, highlighting a single line of ‘influence’ against a field of analogues.21 In studies of a single poet’s influence, creations of this kind are inevitable.

Finding allusions to Hamlet and Lear in The Vale of Esthwaite (ll. 268-71), for example, Bate comments that

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21 Shawcross, John Milton and Influence, passim. Shawcross provides less familiar, alternative evidence of resemblances, which destabilize assumed genealogies of influence. See especially the parallels to supposed Shakespeare-Milton connections listed in Chapter 2, pp. 22-27.
Wordsworth seems to have been led to his Shakespearean vertigo by the preceding couplet to this, which reads
‘But these were poor and puny joys / Fond sickly Fancy’s idle toys’ – ‘idle toys’ is a phrase from *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (IV iii 168). (p. 88)

But ‘idle toys’, or rather the couplet as a whole, might as easily recall the opening of Milton’s *Il Penseroso*:

Hence vain deluding *Joys,*  
The brood of Folly without father bred,  
How little you bestead,  
Or fill the fixed mind with all your *toyes;*  
Dwell in some *idle* brain,  
And *fancies fond* with gaudy shapes possess  
(II. 1-6, my emphases)

Wordsworth’s ‘but’ signals a change in attitude, and the couplet opens a new verse paragraph, like *Il Penseroso*’s opening move away from *L’Allegro*, so that Milton’s seems the more comparable piece, the more likely influence. It was the more famous passage, more likely to have been available to Wordsworth’s memory, conscious or unconscious, even though, as Bate says, it is Shakespeare who informs Wordsworth’s next lines. Bate is on the look-out for Shakespeare, and so he finds him where Milton could as easily have been found.

Generally speaking, this is one of the traps that besets any single work’s scope. More specific to this argument is the question of Shakespeare’s relation to Milton. If, as I see it, it is Milton who suggests Wordsworth’s phrasing, is Shakespeare nonetheless at the end of the line, having influenced Milton? This seems unlikely, for Shakespeare’s and Milton’s lines have very little in common. It is Wordsworth who reunites ‘idle’ with ‘toys’, recreating Shakespeare’s phrase, which was divided in Milton. ‘Idle’ and ‘toys’ (in the older sense) are words that are fairly likely to appear close together, by sheer coincidence. A fourth possibility, then, is that Wordsworth very ingeniously saw the accidental similarity between the Shakespeare and the Milton and accomplished a double echo, using five of Milton’s words, rearranging two into Shakespeare’s phrase. But this seems far-fetched indeed. It is most likely, I feel, that *Love’s Labour’s Lost* merits no place in a discussion of intentional (whether conscious or unconscious) allusion or echo, other than as an accidental curiosity.

But this is not to say that Shakespeare and Milton are not elsewhere doubly evoked. Bate points out that a popular eighteenth-century image of Shakespeare was one created by Milton in *L’Allegro* of Shakespeare as ‘fancy’s child’, warbling ‘his native wood-notes wild’.
For Milton and Shakespeare to become poles, ‘two mighty forbears ... pitted against each other’ (Bate, p. 3), the former ‘intentional and closed’, the latter ‘ambiguous and open-ended’ (Newlyn, p. 5) when it is Milton’s own admiring description of Shakespeare that has become prevalent is confusing enough. It becomes deeply ironic when one discovers further that Milton’s lines ‘characterize Shakespeare by means of Shakespearean allusion ... “fancy’s child” echoes “child of fancy” in Love’s Labour’s Lost (I i 170)’ (Bate, p. 6). Milton’s own intimate relation to Shakespeare becomes clear. Indeed, since L’Allegro echoes Love’s Labour’s Lost, then perhaps Il Penseroso does too, after all, especially since it is another from that Milton-Shakespeare cluster of words, ‘fancy’, that is at issue. Milton is so involved with Shakespeare that it is impossible to set them up as poles, separate, alternative precursors.

In another instance, Bate points out that Othello’s ‘pomp, and circumstance of glorious war’ (III iii 354) is echoed in The Excursion, in a typically Wordsworthian claim that humble, rural life is fit for the ‘tragic Muse’ (VI 550-51). This much is clear, but Bate goes on to claim that ‘there is a more telling evocation of “Farewell the tranquil mind!...” [...] in the “Elegiac Stanzas” on Beaumont’s picture of Peele Castle’ (p. 256). The lines in question are these:

Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone ...
But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer
(‘Elegiac Stanzas’ ll. 53, 57)

Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troops and the big wars
That makes ambition virtue! O, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th’ ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
(Othello III iii 348-54)

Warren Stevenson, however, argues that Wordsworth is echoing Satan’s valediction:

So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,
Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my good
(Paradise Lost IV 108-10)\(^\text{22}\)

The plot thickens when one finds Stuart Peterfreund suggesting that some lines in Home at Grasmere echo another, similar speech of Satan’s:

Then farewell to the Warrior's schemes, farewell
The forwardness of Soul which looks that way
Upon a less incitement than the cause
Of Liberty endangered, and farewell
That other hope, long mine, the hope to fill
The heroic trumpet with the Muse's breath!

(Home at Grasmere, MS D Reading Text, ll. 745-50)

Farewell happy fields
Where joy forever dwells: hail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest hell
Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place

(Paradise Lost I 249-54)

In *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom implicitly concurs, quoting this last speech as 'the authentic voice of the ruminative line, the poetry of loss, and the voice also of the strong poet accepting his task, rallying what remains' (p. 33), and later analyzing the 'Prospectus' in relation to Milton, and interpreting Wordsworth's 'farewell to the warrior's schemes' as the abandonment of the possibility of being 'a more externalized maker' (pp. 124-25). But Wordsworth's 'farewell to the warrior's schemes' could, as Peter Manning argues, be a reworking of Othello rather than of Satan, whilst if it were the latter, then it seems closer to the lines from Book IV, which mention 'hope', as Wordsworth does. On the other hand, Peterfreund's point that 'Wordsworth's stance with respect to Satan's argument would probably be that the mind may be its own place' (p. 18) is very convincing, given *The Prelude's* project of shifting epic to the psychological realm. Perhaps Satan's speeches themselves recall Othello, or else both are simply analogous instances in a convention, catalogues of 'Farewells' (though even if they were, Wordsworth would be most likely to recall, and to value, Shakespeare's and Milton's examples). Wordsworth's two uses might be half-conscious and collective memories of all these pieces.

25 Certainly, Satan's 'Farewell happy fields... hail horrors' is a reversal of the *ave atque vale* motif, of which the *locus classicus* is Catullus's 'Carmina 101' (l. 10).
Newlyn recognizes that, in its use of the convenient polarization of Shakespeare and Milton, criticism has been more reductive than poetry—a recognition that strikes one as convincing, even without exploration, when one considers the general analytical and pattern-making strategies of criticism, as compared to the more variously expressionistic, complex and contradictory effects of poetry. In the criticism and poetry of the Romantic-period writers she finds an ‘apparent contradiction between the ‘Milton’ who is constructed through conscious and explicit acts of appropriation and the Milton who emerges from carefully receptive and imitative habits of allusion’ (p. 4). The Romantics, in their direct comments, presented an image of Milton as ‘intentional and closed’, but their poetic use of him was a response to his ambiguities and his openess. For in their allusive engagement with Milton they ‘replicate Milton’s open-ended textual procedures’ (p. 5), revealing a complex, dialogic Milton, with a chameleon capacity for ‘negative capability’, that belies their own critical image of him as univocal.

Wordsworth’s relationships with Shakespeare and with Milton cannot be experienced in isolation from one another, especially since “Milton”, as a text, involves its own negotiations with Shakespeare. But Wordsworth’s two relationships do not simply merge; they demonstrate, in their union, a sympathy, a sharing in society, that Shakespeare himself stands for. Wordsworth occasionally attempts to ‘Miltonize’ Shakespeare, to bring Shakespeare into the sphere of his dominant Miltonic mood. But his Shakespeareanizing of Milton is far more significant, and stands for the multiple relations that are the theme of this thesis. Their sympathetic union demonstrates a form of literary relationship very different from Bloom’s model. From the allusive network within which Wordsworth is bound to Milton, to Shakespeare, and to tradition, emerges a scheme of salvation, which may redeem poetry from the anxiety of influence.

Shakespeare is Wordsworth’s prime example of the ‘human and dramatic Imagination’ (1815 Preface l. 312). He is pre-eminent, as Bate says, for his qualities of ‘variety, impersonality, and humanity’ (p. 80). This ‘variety and impersonality’ denote Shakespeare’s celebrated Protean quality, commonly admired by Wordsworth’s contemporaries. Coleridge, Hazlitt and Keats all contrasted this quality to Milton’s egotism, in which Wordsworth was seen to share. ‘Variety and impersonality’ have a particular relationship to the third term, ‘humanity’. ‘Human’ is not simply to be set against the non-human, or divine supernatural, that sphere over which Milton presides, but indicates also the ‘language of sympathy’ (Bate,
Not only does Shakespeare have the greatest insight into human nature, but he is also most sympathetic towards it – 'understanding', in two senses of that word. 'Impersonality', especially, suggests a selflessness that is not so much a matter of non-egotistical, non-ventriloquizing style (Coleridge criticized Wordsworth for 'ventriloquizing' in *Biographia Literaria*), as it is a moral imperative.

In the 1802 version of the Preface, Wordsworth stresses that a poet is a man of heightened sensibility. He applies a comment of Dryden's on Shakespeare combined with one of Shakespeare's on man, to 'the poet' in general, so that man, poet, and Shakespeare are fused: to be sympathetic to man, a poet needs to be like Shakespeare. In 'The Pedlar' (later 'The Wanderer' of *The Excursion*), Wordsworth says of the pedlar,

He could afford to suffer
With them whom he saw suffer.

(MS E Reading Text, ll. 328-29)

This is an allusion to *The Tempest*, in which Miranda exclaims, 'O! I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer' (I ii 5-6). In an earlier version, the pedlar describes Margaret's story as 'a common tale, / By moving accidents uncharactered' (*The Ruined Cottage* MS B ll. 290-91), in one of Wordsworth's several references to a favourite passage from Othello, Act I scene iii. The poet described *Othello* as one of the three 'most pathetic of human compositions', and Miranda's 'suffering', via the 'pathos' of Othello, becomes 'sympathy'. Wordsworth summons sympathy by alluding to – showing sympathy with – Shakespeare. His allusive entrance into Shakespeare's language-world is analogous to Miranda's and the pedlar's participation in the suffering of those whom they witness, and whose story the pedlar, a poet-figure himself, tells. Wordsworth achieves a type of 'impersonality', akin to Shakespeare's, by silencing his own voice, his own words, in favour of Shakespeare's. Repeating Shakespeare's expressions of sympathetic fellow-feeling, he achieves, through this 'impersonality', a 'humanity' far different from the egotism in which Wordsworth shares when he alludes to

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26 See Bate, pp. 78-79 for these allusions.
27 I refer to MS E Reading Text, in 'The Ruined Cottage' and 'The Pedlar'. MS E, dating from November 1803 to March 1804, is the earliest version in which the story of Margaret and the full-length history of the pedlar are combined.
28 Wordsworth's other references to this scene are discussed in Chapter 6.
29 *Reminiscences*, p. 468.
Milton; to his epic, prophetic claims in particular.\(^\text{30}\)

**ii
Angels of Influence**

In an interesting moment Wordsworth criticizes Milton by reference to Shakespeare— to Shakespeare’s superior sympathy. He made some notes in a copy of *Paradise Lost*, and one of the passages that he picked out was that of the angels’ laughter at the sight of Babel’s destruction:

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Forthwith a hideous gabble rises loud
Among the Builders; each to other calls
Not understood, till hoarse, and all in rage,
As mockt they storm; great laughter was in Heav’n
And looking down, to see the hubbub strange
And hear the din; thus was the building left
Ridiculous, and the work Confusion nam’d.\(^\text{31}\)
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Wordsworth wrote by this:

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This picture is not consonant to what might be expected from superior beings spectators of such a scene;... Shakespear is far more rational and impressive “Oh! but proud man - - - - plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep.”
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He refers to Isabella’s words in *Measure for Measure* (II ii 117, 121-22). It is interesting that Wordsworth sets up Shakespeare’s angels to rival Milton’s, since angels are a most apt metaphor for influence. Wordsworth sometimes glances towards the medieval idea that each star was guided by an angel, and frequently describes angels coming on embassies to earth. Angels travel from the stars to earth, as celestial (and etymological) messengers, just as astral influence does. In ‘The Cuckoo-Clock’ (1840), descending angels and stars’ influence come to be one and the same, as if the angels *carry* the influence:

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blessings come,
Streaming from founts above the starry sky,
With angels when their own untroubled home
They leave, and speed on nightly embassy
To visit earthly chambers
(II. 38-42)
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\(^{30}\) An early enthusiastic Coleridge found in *The Borderers* ‘those profound touches of the human heart, which I find … often in Shakespeare’ (Letter to Joseph Cottle, 8 June 1797, in *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71), I, (1956), 325. However, an older one reflected that ‘although Wordsworth and Goethe are not much alike… they both have this peculiarity of utter non-sympathy with the subjects of their poetry’ (*Table Talk*, ed by Carl R. Woodring, *Collected Coleridge* 14, 2 vols (1990), 16 Feb 1833, II, 200). \(^{31}\) Reprinted in Wittreich, pp. 108-09.
It is not surprising, then, that Wordsworth alludes to Milton’s angels at least as frequently as he does to his “influence”. Havens notes two allusions to the description of Raphael’s blush, ‘that glowed / Celestial rosy red, love’s proper hue’ (VIII 618-19), one of which is a striking naturalization, as the landscape itself is ‘ting’d like an angel’s smile all rosy red’ (Descriptive Sketches 1. 567). Wordsworth transforms Milton’s angels into the natural and the domestic several times. The subject of ‘To the Clouds’ (1808) is described as a ‘wingèd Host’ (I. 1). Ravens, and water fowl which ‘might scarcely seem / Inferior to angelical’, fly in phrases descriptive of Milton’s angels. ‘A mailed angel on a battle-day’ describes, in the language of Milton’s angels’ armour, a ‘beetle panoplied in gems and gold’, peered at through glasses by Coleridge (‘Stanzas Written in My Pocket-copy of Thomson’s “Castle of Indolence”‘ (1802), II. 60-61). Particularly significant is the often-mentioned identification of Milton, imagined at Cambridge as ‘a stripling youth, / A Boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks / Angelical’ (Prelude III 290-92), with his own Satan. Infusing ‘bad influence’ (Paradise Lost V 694-95), setting out to spoil the creation so that the stars start to shed ‘influence malignant’ (X 662), Satan disguises himself as a ‘stripling cherub’, to cheat his way to Earth (III 634-44).

It is appropriate that Wordsworth imagines Milton, whose works are ‘grand storehouses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination’, as an angel, because angels themselves are for Wordsworth an emblem of the imagination — there is just one mention of an angel in the poems that Wordsworth grouped as ‘poems of the fancy’, whilst there are hosts of them in the poems ‘of the imagination’. They represent the imagination because they link this world to

32 Wordsworth’s interest in Milton’s angels, and particularly his adoption of the classifications of Milton’s angelic hierarchy, were noted in ‘Wordsworth’s Use of the Miltonic Word’, Academy 77, July to December 1909, pp. 293-97, (pp. 295-96).
33 Havens, p. 607.
34 ‘A little onward’ (1816) I. 32; ‘Water Fowl’ (1800), II. 2-3, and see De Selincourt’s notes, PW II, 522. It was in this naturalizing spirit that Wordsworth wrote, in a copy of Paradise Lost, ‘it has been said of poets as their highest praise that they exhausted worlds and then imagined new ... But how much of the real excellence of Imagination consists in the capacity of exploring the world really existing’ (Wittreich, p. 104). This naturalization can be seen to culminate in the inspiring breeze that comes to Wordsworth at the beginning of The Prelude: described as a ‘messenger’ (I 5), it has just a hint of the angelical.
35 Stein suggests that Wordsworth’s reworking ‘teeters on the edge of undermining subterfuge’ (p. 97).
36 The only angel in the Poems of the Fancy is in ‘The Pilgrim’s Dream; or, The Star and the Glow-worm’ (1818). The dream is the angel’s gift. In Poems Founded on the Affections angels are exclusively comforters of the sick, afflicted & deranged, as in ‘Lament of Mary Queen of Scots’ (1817), ‘The Widow on Windermere Side’ (1837?), and ‘The Redbreast’ (1834). The interest here is in the ‘guardian’ element, and the promise of the angelic state as our own destiny.
the next, the human to the divine. They tend to be represented either in flight, travelling
between the two realms, or perched on mountain-tops, the high-points of this world, where
sublime intimations of eternity can be felt. Wordsworth’s messenger-angels are descended
from *Paradise Lost* and also from Milton’s sonnet ‘When I consider how my light is spent’,
one of Wordsworth’s favourites, in which

 Thousands at [God’s] bidding speed
   And post o’er land and ocean without rest
   (ll. 12-13)⁰⁸

In his sonnet ‘In the Woods of Rydal’ (1827) God ‘gives his Angels wings to speed through
air’, but also cares for each ‘sparrow’ that ‘falleth to the ground’ (ll. 10-11). In Milton’s
sonnet, too, those who, though dutiful, do not ‘speed / And post’ are valued: ‘They also serve
who only stand and wait’ (ll. 12-14). Emily Norton’s ‘duty is to stand and wait’ in *The White
Doe of Rylstone* (l. 1070), while Francis ‘like a heavenly Messenger / An Angel-guest’ (ll.
1394-95 - ‘Of speediest wing’ from 1836 onwards) should appear, but does not. Wordsworth
became more attached to the ‘lowliest duties’ (‘London, 1802’, l. 14) in later life.⁹⁰ Milton
explains that

 God doth not need
   Either man’s work or his own gifts, who best
   Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best
   (ll. 9-11)

Wordsworth, who quoted the sonnet’s sestet in his *Speech at the Laying of the Foundation
Stone of the New School in the Village of Bowness, Windermere, 1836*, echoes him:

   God for His service needeth not proud work of human skill;
   They please Him best who labour most to do in peace His will
   (‘The Poet’s Dream: Sequel to “The Norman Boy”’ (1842) ll. 65-66)

Another recurrent echo in Wordsworth is of Act V, scene i of *The Merchant of Venice.*

Its angels represent the workings of the imagination as the music of the spheres:

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³⁷ Angels alight on peaks in ‘View from the Top of Black Comb’ (1813), ‘To — on Her First Ascent
to the Summit of Helvellyn’ (1816 – Satan on Niphates), and *Vernal Ode* (1817).
³⁸ Wordsworth numbers this sonnet amongst those he most admires in a letter to an unknown
recipient, November 1802, *EY*, p. 379.
³⁹ In 1845 he decided to use ‘If thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven’ as the epigraph to his
poems, with its recommendation, modest in comparison with the ambitious Hesperus poem, ‘Shine,
Poet! in thy place, and be content’ (ll. 3 & 16).
How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears. Soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold;
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins:
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

(V i 54-65)

Wordsworth described this scene as 'an exquisite piece of relief', singling out the play as 'in language ... almost faultless'[^40]. I discussed his interest in the 'gross' enclosure of 'this muddy vesture of decay' in Chapter 2. Shakespeare's song of the stars inspires two of the Poems of the Imagination. Lorenzo describes the 'power of music' (I. 79), a phrase Wordsworth takes for his own 'Power of Music' (1806), and echoes also in the prefatory note to On the Power of Sound (1828). The later poem uses several of Lorenzo's details: the taming of animals (dolphins listen to the 'dulcet sound' (ll. 133-35) echoing the 'mermaid on a dolphin's back, / Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath' of A Midsummer Night's Dream II i 150-51), 'Orphean Insight' (I. 115), and, of course, singing angels (ll. 201-04). Stooping to 'this grosser sphere', music, in 'voice and shell', 'drew forth a tear' (ll. 117, 119): the music of humanity is a sound of weeping, such that makes Isabella's 'angels weep' in sympathy.

To set Shakespeare's angels up against Milton's is to weigh their respective claims as imaginative influences in the balance. Seeing Shakespeare's angels, like Shakespeare himself, as more sympathetic than Milton's, Wordsworth sets the two poets up as the divinely egotistical and humanly sympathetic poles described earlier, and in doing so he misreads both of them. Firstly, Isabella goes on to say that, if the angels had 'spleens' they would laugh, (the spleen is the seat of laughter). Secondly, as Wordsworth knew, Milton's angels weep too; intertextual currents do not allow superiority and sympathy to be so easily divided between Milton's and Shakespeare's angels. In the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, discussing, again, the humanity of poetry, Wordsworth argues that 'Poetry sheds no tears "such as Angels weep," but natural and human tears' (ll. 367-68), alluding to Paradise Lost I, 620, where Satan cries. In a sense, Milton has fallen short again. His angels laughed when they should have wept like

[^40]: Letter to John Kenyon, 26 Jan 1832, LY II, 483; Reminiscences, pp. 430-31.
Shakespeare’s, and, where his poetry concerns ‘tears such as angels weep’, Wordsworth prefers the poetry of human tears – Shakespeare’s again, we might conjecture, since Shakespeare is the ‘exemplary poet of the “human Soul”’ (Bate, p. 95). But the case is more complex still, for Milton’s humans weep, too, in a passage that Wordsworth knew well. When he and Dorothy read Book XI of Paradise Lost on 2 February 1802, Dorothy remarked in her journal ‘we were much impressed & also melted into tears’. It is to Adam’s tears that she refers, as Milton addresses him:

thee another flood,
Of tears and sorrow a flood thee also drowned,
And sunk thee as thy sons
(XI 756-58)

His is ‘another’ flood, because it is at the sight of the flood that he is crying. He weeps in sympathy for his sons, a sympathy that the whole creation shares (as ‘Sky loured and muttering thunder, some sad drops / Wept’ when Adam fell (IX 1002-03)), for the flood is anticipated as a universal crying: ‘The world ereelong a world of tears must weep’ (XI 627).

Bloom weeps for the flood too, because it inaugurates the anxiety of influence: antediluvian poetic giants are to be found no more. But in Christian typology the flood, like the fall, is made fortunate. For it is the type of which the sacrament of baptism is the antitype. After the flood comes the rainbow, the old covenant, which is replaced by the new, that is, by Christ. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Bloom is outraged by this line of interpretation, but this episode in Paradise Lost is important for Wordsworth. Michael cheers Adam with the sight of the rainbow, the model for Wordsworth’s own, in ‘My heart leaps up’, as if it springs from his tears as well as from the rain. His sorrow educates him, rather as Wordsworth is to say ‘A deep distress hath humanized my Soul’ (‘Elegiac Stanzas’ l. 36) after he has wept, not for a son, but a brother. (One thinks, also, of the humanizing of Alonso following his ‘sea-change’ – of weeping for Ferdinand – in The Tempest.) One can understand Wordsworth’s distaste for Milton’s laughing angels (the Babel passage influenced him too – he echoes the ‘Babel din’ in Book VII of The Prelude (l. 157), to describe London). Yet he underplays, in this instance, the human sympathy that is in Milton. This is made especially clear when one notes, as Newlyn does, that Milton’s weeping angels may themselves involve an allusion to Shakespeare’s.

Newlyn argues that in Book I of Paradise Lost Milton recalls Isabella; that very passage that Wordsworth sets against Milton’s laughing angels (p. 73). Milton thus ‘gains access to this Shakespearian world’, so that Satan is made ‘subtly human’ (p. 74). The
illustration is part of Newlyn’s demonstration (mentioned above p. 121) that Milton practised the very kind of dialogic allusion, a doubleness suggestive of ‘negative capability’ that the Romantics themselves made such rich use of. Recalling a lecture by John Carey, Newlyn argues that Milton’s mind ‘turns to Shakespeare at moments of compassion’ (p. 73). Wordsworth’s does the same.

Wordsworth’s poetic endeavour cannot however be characterized by a clear division between Miltonic-prophetic and Shakespearean-human territories, for neither precursor is to be so simply defined. Wordsworth claims a quality in Milton that complements his prophetic grandeur. Though Milton’s ‘soul was like a Star’, his voice ‘majestic’,

yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

('London, 1802' ll. 13-14)

Milton, like the skylark, is both superior and humble, ‘True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!’ (‘To A Skylark’ (‘Ethereal Minstrel’), l. 12). If Shakespeare is the best exemplar of the earthly, human realm, Milton nevertheless represents it too.

And Shakespeare, too, is not without his divinity. One of Bate’s most forceful pieces of evidence, showing that Wordsworth did not under-rate Shakespeare, is the poet’s own indignant reaction to Hazlitt’s accusation that he did so in *The Spirit of the Age*:

This is monstrous! ... Modesty and deep feeling ... how superfluous a thing it is to praise Shakespeare ... have kept me often and habitually silent upon that subject. Who thinks it necessary to praise the Sun? (Bate, p. 73)

If Milton is a ‘star’, Shakespeare is the ‘sun’. On the other hand, in a late comment he complained that Shakespeare ‘does not assign as large a place to religious sentiments as enters into the constitution of human nature under normal circumstances’ (Bate, p. 72). The word ‘sentiments’ suggests the late Wordsworth, as if he wished that Shakespeare’s characters were

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41 Paul Stevens also argues for a Shakespearean Milton in *Imagination and the Presence of Shakespeare in 'Paradise Lost'* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). Stevens refutes the tradition of Milton’s “renunciation” of Shakespeare, that is, of imagination or fancy, in favour of inspiration. ‘The opposition between imagination and inspiration is misleading’ (p. 5). Though Milton warns against the delusion that is consequent upon imagination that is uncombined with reason, ‘imagination is the vehicle of faith’ (p. 7). ‘Shakespeare is ... a continually stimulating symbol of the magical, liminal possibilities of the imagination ... [which] come to be seen not as magical at all but divine’ (p. 5). For shared influences upon these two precursors see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and Richard J. DuRocher, *Milton and Ovid* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985).
more pious. But one wonders whether the word 'religious', which means so much more than piety to Wordsworth, retains a trace of his earlier self. Shakespeare's humanity might not demonstrate enough of its divine nature, that mysterious access to knowledge of another world. His people might not, in a sense, be fully human, though in a way that renders them more human; weak, mortal, and therefore most sympathetic, most suffering.

In Chapter 2 I discussed incarnational language as the model for the perfect union of the physical word and transcendent meaning, the human and the divine. The veiling of God's invisible brightness, in nature, was analogous to that language, that poetry, which was both expressive of eternal truths, yet also communicable in human terms. Milton's Michael's appearance 'Not in his shape celestial, but as man / Clad to meet man' (Paradise Lost XI 239-40) and Raphael's 'likening [of] spiritual to corporeal forms' (V 571-74), a parable-like teaching technique, both anticipate Jesus's perfect synthesis of God and man in a single being (and his own parables). In Wordsworth's view a poet seems to be, paradoxically, both supremely human and also something other than human, quasi-divine. The figure of the incarnated Jesus might also be the perfect model which Milton and Shakespeare can only approximate, dividing his divinity and his humanity between them, not in simple opposition, but in unequal measures. Only the combination of them both is perfectly expressive of this world and the next, the mortal and immortal elements of man.

In the 1815 Essay, Supplementary to the Preface Wordsworth describes poetry as 'ethereal and transcendent, yet incapable to sustain her existence without sensuous incarnation' (ll. 141-43). His verbal echoes of Christian terminology and Christian poetry cannot be purged of the context from which they are taken. Though the Christian models (used more conventionally in the later poems) are often secularized in Wordsworth's earlier works, they depend for their significance on the tradition of which they are a part, even if that tradition is itself suppressed or abandoned. Later in the Essay, Wordsworth observes that 'Shakespeare stooped to accommodate himself to the People' (ll. 235-36). Bate characterizes this comment as 'an example of the eighteenth-century strain of criticism' (p. 84), that is, the view that Shakespeare compromised decorum in order to write passages that would please the less sophisticated element of his audience. I find the words 'accommodate' and 'stooped' suggestive, however.

Christ's incarnation is known as his 'condescension' or 'accommodation', in a tradition which originates with Philippians 2. 7-9:
[Christ] took upon him the form of a servant, and was made
in the likeness of men:
   And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself,
and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
   Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him

Abrams finds this tradition in a secularized form in Wordsworth, in a meeting of the poetic and
the political. Picking up on the recent commentaries, such as Lowth’s, that argued for the
poetic value of the Bible, in contrast to a neo-classical discomfort with its ‘low’ style and
characters, Wordsworth adopts a principle of ‘transvaluation’, founded on Christ’s self-
humbling (*Natural Supernaturalism*, pp. 390-99). Abrams points out, for example, that in the
*Essay, Supplementary*, the ‘document in which Wordsworth expounds in most explicit detail
the relations of his poetic mission to Scriptural values’ (p. 392), a poet must

   establish ‘that dominion over the spirits of Readers by which
they are to be humbled and humanized, in order that they may
be purified and exalted.’  (This last sentence echoes Luke 14:11 –
‘For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that
humbleth himself shall be exalted.’) (p. 397)

Bloom extends Abrams’s interpretation of secularization, to make it aggressively anti-Christian
(or anti-Milton’s Christ). As Hartman explains it in his review of *The Anxiety of Influence*:

   ‘the incarnation of the Poetic character in Satan begins when
Milton’s story truly begins, with the Incarnation of God’s Son
and Satan’s rejection of *that* incarnation’ (p. 20) … what [Bloom]
calls the ‘incarnation of the Poetic Character’ seems to imply a
counter-theology. (p. 44)\(^{43}\)

Refuting the typological hermeneutic method, Bloom achieves an ingenious revenge for its
misappropriation, founding the revisionary ratio of *kenosis* on a misreading of a text from the
‘Belated Testament’:

   I take the word [‘kenosis’] from St. Paul, where it means the
humbling or emptying-out of Jesus by himself, when he accepts
reduction from divine to human status. (*Anxiety*, p. 14)

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\(^{42}\) He acknowledges his debt to Abrams in an interview with Robert Moynihan, in *Diacritics* 13:3
(Fall 1983), pp. 57-68:

   What I did acquire from Mike Abrams, early on, was what was already
strongly present in his teaching back around 1948 when I was first his student,
which eventually became the pattern of displacement of religious models
that he studied in his book *Natural Supernaturalism*. (p. 58)

Theory of Poetry”’, in *The Fate of Reading* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1975),
pp. 41-56. Hartman suggests that Blake is neglected in *The Anxiety of Influence* because of his
relation to the Pauline ‘revision’ of the Old Testament (p. 55).
He refers to the same text, Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians, Chapter 2, which Abrams identified as the *locus classicus* of the ‘accommodation’, and consequently of Wordsworth’s secularized version of it: his early, levelling, first-shall-be-last political-poetics. Bloom not only delights in calling Christ’s incarnation a ‘reduction’, he also reworks that incarnation as an entirely sinister and scheming affair. Employing *kenosis*,

The later poet, apparently emptying himself of his own afflatus, his imaginative godhead, seems to humble himself as though he were ceasing to be a poet, but this ebbing is so performed in relation to a precursor’s poem-of-ebbing that the precursor is emptied out also … *Kenosis*, in this poetic and revisionary sense, appears to be an act of self-abnegation, yet tends to make the fathers pay for their own sins, and perhaps for those of the sons also. (pp. 14-15 & 91)

In conclusion, Abrams reveals the way in which Wordsworth mistranslated this biblical text into the terms of poetry, and Bloom (for whom ‘religion is spilled poetry’) then ironizes and internalizes this movement, reformulating it as a defence against the precursor, (usually Milton). His strategy is to misread his own critical precursor and one-time teacher, Abrams, as well as St. Paul, and Wordsworth. But if Wordsworth’s misreading of St. Paul is compared to Bloom’s, some light may be shed on Bloom’s misreading of Wordsworth. For whilst, like Bloom, Wordsworth misread it as a theory of poetry’s quasi-divine power, he still, unlike Bloom, took Christ’s sympathetic self-sacrifice at face value.

He uses the idea of accommodation in the *Essay, Supplementary*:

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.

(Il. 133-36)

Bloom may be right when he finds the false humility of *kenosis* in Wordsworth’s own unconscious approaches to his precursors, but he neglects the significance of Wordsworth’s conscious privileging of humility as a glorifying power, because it is Christianity-centred. Wordsworth defined Christianity as ‘the religion of humility’ (*Essay, Supplementary*, l. 118)

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44 Bloom’s reversal of Hulme’s definition of romanticism is in *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. 52.

45 This neglect may be related to Bloom’s defensive dismissal of allusive relations, which he consigns to the source-hunter, that ‘carrion-eater’ among critics, since the allusive tradition is related to the typological. Paul de Man diagnosed Bloom’s denial of allusion as a fear of language’s (or the text’s) priority, in his review of *The Anxiety of Influence*, reprinted in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 267-76.
and, in another instance of its central lowly-glorious paradox, he recommended, for the epitaphs of great men,

> a declaration touching that pious humility and self-abasement, which are ever most profound as minds are most susceptible of genuine exaltation. (Epitaphs I, 486-88)

His train of thought leads him on to quote Milton’s elegy on Shakespeare, ‘What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones / The labour of an age in piled stones …’

His observation that Shakespeare ‘stooped to accommodate himself to the people’ seems very different in this context. Wordsworth said of him that ‘it was well … that he gave himself to the drama. It was that which forced him to be sufficiently human’ (recorded by Aubrey de Vere, Bate, p. 80). ‘Sufficiently human’ means, I think, not a grudging ‘human enough’, but fully, absolutely human. Shakespeare, Bate argues, is seen to have the ‘capacity to “infuse” himself into his characters, to annihilate his own being’ (p. 80). His ‘impersonality’ – an ‘annihilation’ – is a self-sacrificing denial, that approaches Christ’s assumption of the burden of all of humanity’s sin. Shakespeare ‘stooped’, Wordsworth writes, which is what Milton says of Christ:

> He, sovran priest, stooping his regal head
> That dropped with odorous oil down his fair eyes,
> Poor fleshly tabernacle entered,
> His starry front low-roofed beneath the skies;
> O what a mask was there, what a disguise!
> (‘The Passion’ ll. 15-19)

For Wordsworth, in the common imagery of influence, it is the poet who has a starry front, the Christ-like poet who lowers himself in sympathy. That this is Milton’s account of Christ should alert us again to the impossibility of separating the Miltonic absolutely from the Shakespearean mode.

Whilst Newlyn considers Satan’s weeping to be influenced by Shakespeare’s ‘tears such as angels weep’, Alastair Fowler, in his edition of Paradise Lost, comments that ‘Peter is probably right in thinking that M. means to imply that angels are corporeal and therefore capable of weeping’ (I 620, note). Angels are brought closer to mankind, if in a way that falls

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46 Wordsworth also uses the word ‘stoops’, in a similarly suggestive way, in the 1815 Preface. He distinguishes ‘imagination’ from ‘fancy’ by arguing that the former pertains to the ‘eternal’ part of our nature, the latter to the ‘temporal’. Fancy ‘ambitiously aims at a rivalship with Imagination’ which, in return, ‘stoops to work with the materials of Fancy’. The immortal, that is, stoops to the mortal (ll. 388-94).

47 See Bate, pp. 84-85 for Wordsworth’s view that Shakespeare was capable of the other, Miltonic, subjective, or ‘egotistical’ mode – as demonstrated in the sonnets.
far short of Christ’s incarnation. In Book XI, by which the Wordsworths were so moved, the
flood is a universal weeping. A Biblical allusion links Noah’s salvation from the deluge to that
which Christ makes available to all. His incarnation makes baptism possible: man is saved
through Christ and through water. For Noah preaches, ‘as to souls / In prison under judgments
imminent’ (XI 724-25). The allusion, Fowler suggests in his note to these lines, is to I Peter
3. 18-21:

Christ was ‘put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:
By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;
Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering
of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing,
wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like
figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us … by the
resurrection of Jesus Christ.’

Christ was baptised, and then died as a man, as if undergoing the death-baptism of the flood.
(The sea-change of The Tempest can also be seen as a baptism, as might Adam’s weeping).
The words that Dorothy Wordsworth uses to describe her own and William’s reaction, ‘we …
also melted into tears’, echo Spenser’s ‘Hymne of Heavenly Love’ (I. 252), where the tears are
for Christ’s death. Milton weeps too, and sees his weeping, his sorrow for Christ, to be both
in accordance with Christ’s own pity for man, and with his poetry’s purpose:

For sure so well instructed are my tears,
That they would fitly fall in ordered characters.

(‘The Passion’ II. 48-49)

His tears, like Miranda’s are a compassionate poetry, a ‘suffering with’ Christ, with his
suffering, his ‘passion’. The baptismal tears of Christian-sentimental poetry are saving: those
who cry for Christ will have their tears wiped away by Him:

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48 This remembrance is considered in my discussion of the Intimations Ode. Though the echo here is
Dorothy’s, William repeats it, in The White Doe of Rylstone. It is said of Emily that ‘She melted into
tears’ (I. 1682), at a climactic moment, prompting the narrator to exclaim,

Oh, moment ever blest! O Pair!
Beloved of heaven, heaven’s choicest care!

(ll. 1685-86)

The doe has returned to her, showing a human loyalty and pity of which the significance is explained
by the extract from Francis Bacon that is used as an epigraph. Animals, under man’s influence, adopt
human feeling, turning towards the creature that is next up from them on the chain of being. This is
an example to man, who must turn towards God, elevating his immortal element above his mortal
one. The doe’s behaviour hints at a promise: Emily may ‘assur[e] herself upon Divine protection and
favour’ (‘Advertisement’ ll. 8-9). Emily’s redemption is no straightforward Christian one, but a
redemption through her own suffering (see the discussion that follows). In the version revised
between 1832 and 1836 Emily, ‘Lone Sufferer’, must ‘welcome, as a gift of grace, / The saddest
thought the Creature brings’ (ll. 1676, 1678-79). Without ‘grace’ one cannot be saved.
God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; …
and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain
(Revelation 7. 17 & 21. 4)

In *Lycidas* this action is delegated to God’s saints,

That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
(I. 180-81)

Thomson naturalizes this moment in *The Castle of Indolence*, in which the knight of Industry, discovering the wretches in the lazaret-house, promises to be to them ‘One who will wipe your Sorrow from your Eyes’ (II 647). This is the movement that Wordsworth extends. ‘Mourning and weeping in this vale of tears’, or in Othello’s ‘vale of years’ (III iii 266) becomes for Wordsworth redemptive, so that Lionel Trilling notes that though ‘it was not he who said that the world was a vale of soul-making … Keats could not have made this striking paraphrase of the Christian sentiment had not Wordsworth made it possible for him to do so.’

In the scene that follows Isabella’s appeal for ‘pity’, and her description of the angels weeping, The Duke ‘habited like a Friar’, arrives at the prison, announcing,

I come to visit the afflicted spirits
Here in the prison
(*Measure for Measure* II iii 4-5)

He, like Milton, echoes Peter’s ‘spirits in prison’, which are a symbol for all of mankind, spirits imprisoned in the mortal body. The Duke has been interpreted as a kind of Christ figure, his reappearance being like a resurrection. In the *Intimations Ode* (considered in Chapter 7), Wordsworth’s use of the neo-platonic myth, with its ‘shades of the prison-house’, elides the fate of man’s imprisoned soul with Christ’s prison-visit, his incarnation (or incarceration), so that man is his own redeemer, saving his own mortal nature by suffering as a mortal, in his own passion and compassion. Shakespeare offers Wordsworth the model of fellow-feeling, and Milton links the sympathy for man to the pity for Christ-as-man, that gives Shakespeare’s sympathy its saving significance. The elision is demonstrated in a remarkable comment that Wordsworth made about the Bible, recalled by Mrs. Davy:

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50 This line of argument was developed by G. Wilson Knight, Roy W. Battenhouse, and Nevill Coghill. See the introduction to J. W. Lever’s Arden edition (London: Methuen; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. Ivii.
of St. Paul, he said, ‘Oh, what a character that is! how well we know him! How human, yet how noble! How little outward sufferings moved him! It is not in speaking of these that he calls himself wretched; it is when he speaks of the inward conflict.

Paul and David,’ he said, ‘may be called the two Shakespearian characters in the Bible; both types, as it were, of human nature in its strength and its weakness. Moses is grand, but then it is chiefly from position, from the office he had entrusted to him. We do not know Moses as a man, as a brother man’.

(Reminiscences, p. 455)

The line of Moses is the line of Milton, their prophetic ‘office’ as prophets and leaders is that which Wordsworth hopes to inherit (see the discussion of the inheritance of the rod of authority in Chapter 3). But what they teach (Moses’ law transformed by Christ) is compassion for ‘humanity in its strength and its weakness’ for ‘brother man’, as best represented by Shakespeare. It is approached by ‘that humility of mind which is best taught in Scripture’. 51 ‘It is the habit of my mind inseparably to connect [such humility to] loftiness of imagination’, the letter explains; a connection that is Milton’s, whose ‘soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart’, whilst his ‘heart / The lowliest duties on herself did lay’.

The pedlar, who, echoing Othello and The Tempest, demonstrated Shakespearean compassion, seems to have acquired it in part, through reading. And what he has read (as well as the Bible, romance, and the Book of Nature) is not Shakespeare, but ‘the divine Milton’ (MS E Reading Text, 1. 240). It is Milton’s humility, allied with his loftiness, his divinity, that equips one with the sympathy that is best exemplified by Shakespeare, as it is Milton’s feeling for the suffering Christ that gives Shakespeare’s sympathy its redeeming significance. What Wordsworth demonstrates is not so much a combination of the Miltonic and the Shakespearean, as a synthesizing move from the former to the latter. Imagination, the influence-bearing angel, is incarnated into human form, stooping in order to save, through the redemption of human suffering.


135
CHAPTER 5: ‘NUTTING’: WORDSWORTH IN EDEN AND ARDEN

i

‘The devil, as the common people say,
Doth go a nutting on Holy-rood day;
And sure such leachery in some doth lurk,
Going a nutting do the devil’s work
(Poor Robin’s Almanac, 1709)\(^1\)

The setting and story of ‘Nutting’ are overwhelmingly literary. The lone journey (often made in disguise) through a wood or other rough terrain, to a beautiful spot where a moral temptation is faced and a lesson learned, is a plot so fundamental to European literature that the use of it casts notions of literary relation into serious difficulties. It is difficult to distinguish consciously intended analogues for Wordsworth’s poem, from archetypal parallels (Bruce Bigley suggests Sleeping Beauty and Siegfried).\(^2\) That the use of this motif inevitably brings so many other works to mind may be a part of the desired effect: ‘Nutting’ is endowed with an aura of solemnity by its ghostly associations, which also provide the suggestion that there is a depth of moral implication beneath the surface of this simple tale. A blank verse poem of fifty-four lines is related to an epic adventure, the story of a boy’s day out becomes the journey of a Romance.

But if Wordsworth depends upon an untraceable web of association to solemnize his poem, that is not to say that more specific poetic influences are not at work too, which ought not to be submerged in a generalized, hazy formulation of the voyage of discovery. In the stories of questers like Gawain, Guyon, and Adam and Eve, the elements of temptation, success rewarded and failure punished are differently imagined and variously combined, so that ‘Nutting’ has particular relations with each story. The degree to which Wordsworth was conscious of his sources need not matter. If the original context of a linguistic echo, or even of a direct quotation, provides no elucidation, if it does not enable interpretation, then there is little point in lingering over it. But if that context, brought into play, enriches or complicates our reading of the poem then it warrants examination, regardless of the conscious or unconscious process by which it was incorporated.


\(^2\) Bruce Bigley, ‘Multiple Voices in “Nutting”: The Urbane Wordsworth’, *Philological Quarterly* 70 (1991), 433-52 (p. 451).
David Chandler suggests that Spenser’s *Shepheardes Calender* influences the association of sexual energy with the vigour of nutting. In ‘December’, Colin recalls ‘Howe have I wearied, with many a stroke, / The stately Walnut tree’ (ll. 33-34), an innocent activity, but one that was replaced by frustrated passion. But Spenser did not invent the association, it is traditional:

Holyrood Day, 14 September … was associated with the custom of ‘going a-nutting’ which, like the nocturnal expeditions of May Day, provided an opportunity for the young to meet out in the open air in an atmosphere of freedom. (Laroque, p. 142)

Margaret Baker finds that ‘Devon brides were greeted by an old woman offering a fertility gift of hazelnuts’, and where there are sex and hazelnuts, there is also the devil:

at Ashmore, girls made special ‘nutting dresses’, but none dared to nut on Sunday lest the devil appear to hold her nutting bag, or, in accord with the nut-tree’s fertility associations, she go pregnant to the altar.

Thomson describes nutting as a courtship occasion:

Ye Virgins, come ...
the clustering Nuts for you
The Lover finds amid the secret Shade;
And, where they burnish on the topmost Bough,
With active Vigour crushes down the Tree
(*Autumn* (1730) ll. 614-18)

John Clare, too, was to write two poems entitled ‘Nutting’, memorializing it as a lovers’ activity, as well as a more comic courtship-celebration, ‘Nutters’.

In Wordsworth, the relation of nutting to sexual and moral transgression is particularly ambiguous. Lingering before he ravishes the bower, the boy’s ‘heart luxuriates with indifferent things, / Wasting its kindliness on stocks and stones’ (ll. 39-40). ‘Stocks’ are the infertile stumps of trees. Around the cave of Despayre, Spenser plants

old stockes and stubs of trees,
Whereon nor fruit, nor leafe was ever seene
(*Faerie Queene* I ix 34)

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‘Stocks and stones’, like Despayre himself, are false gods, whose worshippers are idolaters (one such use of the expression that Wordsworth would have known is in Milton’s sonnet, ‘On the Late Massacre in Piedmont’). This idolatry is likened in the Bible to sexual infidelity: ‘[Israel] committed adultery with stones and with stocks’ (Jeremiah 3. 9). Wordsworth’s ‘wise restraint / Voluptuous’ (ll. 21-22) (which echoes Eve’s engorging ‘without restraint’ and her fatal admiration for ‘the serpent wise, / Or not restrained as we’ (Paradise Lost IX 791 & 867-68)) seems in some sense morally lax, or unfaithful, or, ‘wasting its kindliness’, masturbatory. I find Owen Barfield’s discussion of ‘participation’, the ‘primitive’ experience whereby man ‘feels[s] the centre of energy in himself identified with the energy of which external nature is the image’, suggestive here:

in the religious aspect, original participation has always tended to express itself in cults of a phallic nature. The proper role played by the phallic emblem, as image of man’s participation in a Nature apprehended (as later also in myth and poetry) as female, may be easily conceived ... the grove is rendered more numinous by the idol in the grove ... the Jews were not only forbidden to make images; they were not only forbidden to adore or to serve them; they were enjoined to destroy them: ‘Ye shall destroy their altars, break their images and cut down their groves.’

To the language of ‘maypoles, figurative stumps of trees, and many other fertility symbols, with the phallic symbolism beloved of Freudians ... might be added the widespread customs involving hazel nuts’, argues J. H. Wilks. “‘Going-a-nutting’ is an age-old euphemism for love-making”.

The boy next destroys the grove in which he has enjoyed a simultaneously quasi-idolatrous and onanistic participation, to differentiate himself from nature. This poem has been read as an expression of a differentiating move towards independence on various levels. Psycho-analytic critics recognize ‘the psychic maturation of the boy by means of the oedipal romance’. Hartman suggests that ‘the bower, emblematically speaking, may be the bower of Romance itself’ (Wordsworth’s Poetry, p. 74), and for Bloom, too, the struggle is for poetic priority. The Spenserian allegorical overtones lend this quest for independence a further, religio-moral dimension.

The mutilation of the fertile ‘bower’ recalls Spenser’s Guyon’s destruction of the bower of bliss in Book II canto xii of The Faerie Queene, a passage that Wordsworth pronounced as ‘unrivalled in our own, or perhaps in any language’. In ‘Nutting’, however, the destruction is regrettable – the bower is not the embodiment of the temptation to sensual luxury, but the victim of it. Just as Adam eats the fruit and then transgresses against the pure sexuality symbolized by his and Eve’s bower, so in ‘Nutting’, the imagery of feasting and of sex are associated: the destruction is part of the boy’s Adam-like succumbing to temptation, rather than Guyon’s virtuous rejection of it, and shame distances him from the scene, as guilt expels Adam.

ii

he rydes
Into a forest ful dep þat ferly watz wylde, ...
þe hasel and þe hawþorne were harled al samen’
(Sir Gawain and the Green Knight ll. 740-41, 744)

Whilst the boy’s indulgence associates him with Adam, ‘Nutting’ does not open with his blissful existence in Paradise. Rather, he journeys there like a pilgrim. Bloom points out that the difficulty of approach, pathless, matted, tangled, is a feature of many myths of quest that move toward a cynosure, a bower of delight that serves as a center of centripetal vision. The rough analogy is with the human female body.

(Visionary Company, p. 129)

‘Myths of quest’ suggests Romance poets rather than Milton, but Paradise Lost itself contains a parody of such a quest – Satan’s invasion of Eden – which ‘Nutting’ echoes. The approach to Paradise is indeed like a body, with ‘hairy sides’ (IV 135), and Paradise is female, crowning the wilderness ‘with her enclosure green’ (IV 133). The first published version of ‘Nutting’ reads:

Among the woods,
And o’er the pathless rocks, I forc’d my way
Until, at length, I came to one dear nook
(ll. 12-14)

Bloom has in mind the 1836 version:

Oe’r pathless rocks
Through beds of matted fern and tangled thickets,
Forcing my way, I came to one dear nook

The new emphasis on the ‘difficulty of approach’ creates a closer association with Milton:

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*Reported by Collier, p. xxxii.*
so thick entwined,
As one continued brake, the undergrowth
Of shrubs and tangling bushes had perplexed
All path of man or beast that passed that way
(IV 174-77)

Wordsworth had already echoed 'brake' (l. 11), and his 'pathless rocks' are a little like the 'perplexed /... path' of Milton. In 1836, his 'tangled thickets' further recall Milton's 'tangling bushes', and along with the extended description comes a very Miltonic diction, 'Forcing my way', in which the disruption of the iambic metre ('Forcing') emphasizes the effort. A satanic invader, the boy is 'bless'd /... beyond all hope' (ll. 26-27) in finding the bower as, 'Beyond his hope' Satan discovers Eve alone (Paradise Lost IX 424).10

Wordsworth revises further, and still in the direction of Miltonic association, when the 'milk-white clusters' (l. 18), become 'tempting clusters'. 'Tempt' and its derivatives are crucial words in Paradise Lost, used not only with malign connotations but also, tantalisingly, with innocent ones, as when Adam recalls his first experiences of Paradise:

Each Tree
Loaden with fairest fruit that hung to the eye
Tempting, stirred in me sudden appetite
To pluck and eat
(VIII 306-09)

Wordsworth adapts this double meaning: the temptation of the hazels is innocent enough, yet it prompts a 'merciless ravage' and, implicitly, some kind of fall. One must not oversimplify the pattern of Wordsworth's revisions in relation to Milton, however, for the version sent to Coleridge in 1798 includes a noticeable Miltonism that is changed in the published versions. In Coleridge's copy, the boy's 'weary expectation' (l. 26) is a 'fruitless expectation'.11 Perhaps Wordsworth thought the pun too obvious, though Milton delights in it, as when Eve quips:

Serpent, we might have spared our coming hither,
Fruitless to me, though fruit be here to excess
(IX 647-48)

A descendent of Eve appears in the manuscript work for Wordsworth's poem. James Butler's and Karen Green's Reading Text from DC MS 15 evidences the first extended attempt at an introduction to 'Nutting'. It opens with a 'beloved Maid' attacking the bower, her presence here balancing the concluding address to the 'Maiden' which, in the published

10 That 'the part of Satan is played by the young Wordsworth' is discussed by Roberts W. French, 'Wordsworth's Paradise Lost: A Note on "Nutting"', Studies in the Humanities 5 (1976), 42-45.
11 William and Dorothy Wordsworth to Coleridge, 14 or 21 December 1798, EY, p. 242.
fragment, is rather abrupt. Critics have often assumed that the maiden in 'Nutting' is imagined as inherently gentle. F. W. Bateson argues that, '[the young Hawkshead schoolboy’s] ferocity is specifically contrasted with Dorothy’s gentle ways'. \(^{12}\) Bloom, too, comments that Wordsworth ends 'by adjuring a gentle Maiden to move among the same shades, and so restore the spirit he has driven away' (Visionary Company, p. 130). For feminist critics, 'Nutting' has demonstrated Wordsworth’s tendency to see his sister ‘not in her own right but in answer to the poet’s and the poem’s needs’. \(^{13}\) Marlon B. Ross argues that, because the maiden cannot ‘rape’ or ‘waste’, she has no opportunity for ‘self-determination’, and Diane Long Hoeveler suggests that in ‘substitut[ing] as his the idealized feminine hand and heart of Dorothy’, William attempts ‘to cannibalize the feminine and thereby (re)create himself as the divinely potent androgynous artist’. \(^{14}\) But if one takes the abandoned opening into account, the ‘Maiden’ is not by definition, ‘gentle’, but as aggressive, by nature, as the boy, and the speaker’s words are not an adjuration but a warning. They can easily be read so in the published ‘Nutting’, (indeed, having seen the introductory work it becomes difficult not to read them so, though Bateson, having just discussed the introductory material, still manages it).

In DC MS 15, the speaker makes a distinction between the serene Maid with whom he sat ‘in the cave’, who ‘didst o’erflow / With love even for the unsubstantial clouds’ (ll. 6-7) and a transfigured Maid, whom he hardly recognizes:

> But had I met thee now with that keen look
> Half cruel in its eagerness, thy cheek
> Thus rich with a tempestuous bloom, in truth
> I might have half believed that I had pass’d
> A houseless being in a human shape,
> An enemy of nature, one who comes
> From regions far beyond the Indian hills.
> (ll. 10-16)

She has become inhuman, a fraud ‘in a human shape’, so that ‘enemy of nature’ suggests an enmity to human nature, as well as to the natural world (the hazels she attacks). Forcing her way with ‘rude intercourse’, she too resembles Satan, and the curious identification of this

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\(^{13}\) Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 120.

'houseless being' as 'one who comes / From regions far beyond the Indian hills', (ll. 15-16)
echoes Milton's description of the devils' mutating forms:

they but now who seemed
In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons
Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
Throng numberless, like that pygmean race
Beyond the Indian mount
(I 777-81 my emphasis)

Wordsworth's imagined meeting with this Maid recalls Adam's encounter with the profoundly transformed Eve who 'with countenance blithe her story told',

But in her cheek distemper flushing glowed.

(IX 886-87)

In Wordsworth, too, the woman's blushing cheek betrays her:

thy cheek
Thus rich with a tempestuous bloom

(DC MS 15 ll. 11-12)

'Tempestuous' echoes Milton's 'distemper', and in DC MS 16 the echo becomes stronger, as 'rich' is changed to 'flushed', recalling Milton's 'flushing'.

There are many other verbal echoes of Paradise Lost in 'Nutting'. 'Fairy water-breaks' are twice said to 'murmur', and have a 'murmuring sound' (ll. 31, 36), as in Paradise Lost 'murmuring waters fall' (IV 260), with a 'murmuring sound / Of waters' (IV 453-54), and a 'liquid lapse of murmuring streams' (VIII 263). Wordsworth uses 'bower' three times, and 'nook' twice (both abound in Paradise Lost) and the latter is once described as 'shady' (l. 43), a word used elsewhere (l. 34), as is 'shades' (l. 52). Milton's bowers occur in phrases with 'shady' or other derivatives more often than they do not. More important are the associations which create differences and contradictions, to particularize the meaning of 'Nutting' by reference to, but beyond, its analogy to Paradise Lost. Milton's Satan and Adam are counterparts, in that each rebel and fall, and Wordsworth's boy mirrors this connection, being now a figure of the intruding Satan (like him, he comes in 'disguise' (l. 7)), now of the transgressing Adam. The hazels, however, described as 'Tall and erect' (l. 18), also recall the innocent Adam and Eve, as first seen by Satan:
the fiend
Saw undelighted all delight, all kind
Of living creatures new to sight and strange:
Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,
Godlike erect.

(IV 285-89 my emphasis)

The boy and the hazels become identified with one another. That the boy is both violator and object of (his own) violation reflects the way in which, poignantly, Adam and Eve are the victims of Satan yet must bear responsibility as authors of their own fault, and reveals that the boy's destruction of the hazels is more importantly a spoliation of his own nature. Only superficially is 'Nutting' an exhortation against the harming of nature: its more crucial message concerns the preservation of man's moral and psychological well-being.

This message is conveyed in the poem's didactic concluding address. Far from ending with the elusive tragic feel of the tale itself, the speaker makes use of the tale to advise the 'dearest Maiden'. This recalls Wordsworth's expression in The Prelude of the value of even painful feelings – fear, and the experience of 'visionary dreariness' (XI 310) – when transfigured by memory. Since comfort or insight can be gained from the experience of 'Nutting', it may be a 'fortunate fall'. Stanley Fish sees 'the whole of Paradise Lost' as the 'poet's version of what the theologian calls a “good temptation” ... “that whereby God tempts even the righteous [...] for the purpose of [...] lessening their self confidence, and reproving their weakness, that ... they themselves may become wiser by experience”'. In 'Nutting', similarly, the maiden (and the reader whose position she holds) may, by participating in the tale, experience the temptation vicariously, rendering it harmless; 'Nutting', too, may present a 'good temptation'.

Milton conducts his temptation by means of paralleling and double meanings. Harmless events foreshadow the central tragedy and, as Christopher Ricks shows, words such as 'error' are used with an innocuous denotation, yet unavoidably connote the sin that is to

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15 The description of the hazels as 'tall and erect', whilst the bower is 'a virgin scene', a puzzling mixing of genders, has interested psychoanalytic critics. Crawford comments that 'Jonathan Arac retains the maternal image in these lines through the claim that the erect hazels phallicize the mother' (p. 202). Her own conclusion is that the violent act is not an Oedipal rape of the mother, but the boy's birth of himself as poet. He leaves behind his 'vertical' relationship with both father and mother, in favour of a more beneficial 'horizontal' relationship with the sister.
come, with an irrepressible sense of inevitability. This anticipation of the central action is also found in ‘Nutting’, where it is created by the negative forms which imply their opposites:

I came to one dear nook
Unvisited, where not a broken bough
Drooped with its wither’d leaves, ungracious sign
Of devastation (ll. 14-17)

Perhaps Wordsworth wants the guilty feeling which follows the act to pervade the poem (rather than being introduced only at the end) because that guilt occasions the telling of the tale. There may be a deeper reason, however, for the inevitability of the action, to which, again, the relation to Milton gives a clue. The simplest motive for creating the sense of inevitability in Paradise Lost is that everyone knows the story’s outcome: Milton cannot hope for a surprise ending, so he is wise to maximize on pathos and irony throughout. But Fish suggests a profounder reasoning: the transgression of which Milton tells results in the fallen state of all who will read the tale, and of he who tells it. The fact of the fall pervades the poem because it cannot be escaped. To regain the state of innocence in the description of it is an impossibility. The poem’s action, Fish argues, takes place in the reader’s (and teller’s) mind so that it is inescapable, or inevitable, throughout.

The boy’s transgression is similarly inevitable, but with a crucial shift of emphasis: it is not just the reader, but the hero too, for whom, being fallen, sin is inevitable. The boy is not the prelapsarian Adam. He enters the poem, disguised, forcing his way, as the fallen Satan – or the fallen Adam. Though, on the surface, the boy need not spoil the bower, that desecration symbolizes a sin that he must commit. Wordsworth playfully suggests the immortality of days in Paradise:

It seems a day,
One of those heavenly days which cannot die
(ll. 1-2)

To take this suggestion, however, is to read the lines more literally than the conversational tone encourages. The more obvious reading is the casual, clichéd one of the ‘endless’ days of childhood summer holidays – but the boy will of course grow up. All ‘innocent’ children must pass through a ‘fall’, a rite of passage, because they are postlapsarian human beings. Indeed, boyhood was not really a Paradise at all, but ‘seems ... heavenly’ now, in retrospect. The

poetry moves into the past tense for the narrative, though the speaker tellingly picks up the present tense again when he eulogizes the bower:

– Perhaps it was a bower beneath whose leaves  
The violets of five seasons reappear  
And fade …  
Where fairy water-breaks do murmur on  
For ever (ll. 28-32)

The association of the memory with immortality (‘cannot die’, ‘for ever’) is the man’s not the boy’s. If, in Milton’s poem, ‘it is the reader in addition to Satan who is the stranger in Paradise’, (Fish, p. 101), in Wordsworth’s poem it is not only the reader but the boy himself who never was in Eden, which signals a break from Paradise Lost as analogue. If there is a fall in ‘Nutting’, it is not the Fall. Though the most obvious precursor of ‘Nutting’ (and its overflow) is Paradise Lost, the unique existence of Adam and Eve in Eden isolates Milton’s poem from all others of this pattern, in which fallen humans are tested. In this respect ‘Nutting’ bears closer relations to other poems of the journey-challenge-transformation plot.

The version published in the 1800 Lyrical Ballads shows little influence other than Milton’s, but the cancelled passages do.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{18}\) Marvell has a ghostly presence in ‘Nutting’. The boy toys with the bower:

beneath the trees I sate  
Among the flowers, and with the flowers I play’d  

(ll. 23-24)

and the lines seem to recall Little T. C.:

In the green Grass she loves to lie,  
And there with her fair Aspect tames  
The Wilder flow’rs, and gives them names:  
But only with the Roses playes  
(‘The Picture of T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers’ ll. 3-6)

The boy also (again, he plays both parts) resembles the speaker who rather voyeuristically watches T. C., as Satan watches Eve:

Eve separate he spies,  
Veiled in a cloud of fragrance, where she stood,  
Half spied, so thick the roses  

(IX 424-26)

Marvell echoes Paradise Lost again, in Upon Appleton House, replacing Milton’s roses with, coincidentally, hazels:

[I] through the Hazles thick espy  
The hatching Thristles shining Eye  

(ll. 531-32)

Marvell, like Wordsworth, luxuriates in restless indolence:

... languishing with ease, I toss  
On Pallets swoln of Velvet Moss  

(ll. 593-94)
This may be a private joke. In this version, Wordsworth has the Maid in mind from the start; most readers reasonably conjecture that she is Dorothy, since her role here is similar to that of the ‘sister’ in Tintern Abbey (l. 121). At Racedown, their first home together, William had helped Dorothy to study Italian, and Ariosto was one of their texts. Dorothy’s initials have been added to William’s on the title-page of the copy of Orlando Furioso that he took with him on his trip to the Alps, so a reference to it (and the reference is to one of the few English characters in the story) in a poem addressing Dorothy, reads most simply as a semi-private mark of affection.

But the context of this reference might have bearing on this longer ‘Nutting’ as Paradise Lost does on the shorter poem. The blowing of the horn which instils panic in all who hear it (Astolpho blows it in cantos XV (stanza 54), XX (88), XXII (20) and XXXIII (125)) does not, in any of its instances, seem to provide any clues to ‘Nutting’. It remains solely as a joke about the roughness of the Maid’s behaviour. Is it warranted to look at other parts of Astolpho’s story? In canto VI, Ruggiero ties the hippogriff on which he has been riding to a myrtle, only to hear the myrtle complain when the hippogriff kicks it (stanzas 23 & 26). The myrtle is Astolpho, transformed by the temptress Alcina, who lives, like Spenser’s Acrasia after her, in a beautiful palace and gardens. Astolpho warns Ruggiero of Alcina’s powers, and Ruggiero sets off, through rugged terrain, to meet his temptation, to which, unlike Spenser’s Guyon, he succumbs (though Bradamante brings about his rescue). Astolpho’s

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20 Wordsworth’s Reading 1770-1799, p. 7.
21 Astolpho’s transformation suggests the absolute synthesis of human and natural worlds that most vividly recalls Ovid’s Metamorphoses, and influences Paradise Lost: Satan’s appropriation of the toad’s and other animals’ forms (IV 395-408, 799-800), and of the serpent’s in Book IX is a gross parody of the harmony between Adam and Eve and their environment. This harmony is suggested even in the inanimate world by the personification of the landscape, as when, after Adam’s transgression, ‘Earth trembled … Sky loured’ (IX 1000-02). Wordsworth, who quoted from these lines in the 1815 Preface, approaches this personification at the end of his poem too, with the ‘silent trees and the intruding sky’ (l. 51). The theme of interchange between human and vegetable worlds gains a special significance in the love-plot – see note 28 below. Spenser’s importance as a poet of metamorphosis is discussed in Chapter 9.
involvement in another of these voyage-of-discovery plots suggests that his tale might help to elucidate 'Nutting'. That he and Ruggiero go through the same experience mirrors Wordsworth’s use of Dorothy, here and in Tintern Abbey, as an image, through her recreation of his earlier actions, of his former self. However, there is a problem: the roles of the characters in 'Nutting' are the reverse to that of their correspondents in Orlando Furioso. In 'Nutting', Wordsworth relates his experience to the Maid who is in danger of repeating it. But in Orlando Furioso it is Astolpho (whose horn the Maid has inherited), who has been the first to fall for Alcina. The teacher and the pupil are the wrong way round. The supposed parallel does not work.

At first sight this suggests that the attempt to bring the context of the Astolpho reference to bear on 'Nutting' is mistaken, that Orlando Furioso resides in the field of epic romances on which Wordsworth draws, and perhaps holds a special significance to him in relation to Dorothy, but that it does not have so vital a relation to 'Nutting' as does Paradise Lost. After all, Orlando Furioso is very long and very digressive, repeatedly picking up its various threads and dropping them again. The 'blowing of Astolpho’s horn' has nothing to do with his and Ruggiero’s encounter with Alcina, a quite separate story. However, Wordsworth’s revisions in DC MS 16, far from letting the Astolpho reference drop, encourage a return to its context, albeit by a rather circuitous route. Four lines describing the Maid’s serene state prior to her ‘blowing of Astolpho’s horn’ are replaced by two that ponder her nature:

Thou, Lucy, art a maiden “inland bred”,
And thou hast “known some nurture”
(ll. 6-7)  

The words are Orlando’s, from As You Like It, Act II scene vii. Douglass H. Thomson suggests that it is tempting to see a kind of subliminal verbal exchange in Wordsworth’s rapid juxtaposition of Astolpho, Orlando’s cousin and eventual saviour, and Shakespeare’s Orlando.  

Thomson strays from the immediate Astolpho reference to pause on a chapter of Astolpho’s story which may shed light on the teacher-pupil relationship:

22 That the Maid is here named as ‘Lucy’ has become a critical crux. For Bateson it clinches the case that the ‘Lucy’ of the Lucy poems is Dorothy. Since Bateson’s book sparked an indignant debate about the possible incestuous tendency of William and Dorothy’s relationship (TLS 12, 19 & 26 November 1954 and 26 October & 2 November 1956), it is surprising that he does not make more of the sexual overtones in this poem.

23 Douglass H. Thomson, ‘Wordsworth’s Lucy of “Nutting”’, SiR 18 (1979), 287-98 (p. 298, n. 17). He adds that the work preceding ‘Nutting’ in DC MS 15 is in imitation of Ariosto.
[Astolpho] is also responsible for restoring to Orlando the "wits" the latter lost in the presence of another lovely maiden, Angelica. (p. 298)

Again, it is Astolpho who is able to aid his friend. In the case of Ruggiero, this seemed a distraction, since in 'Nutting' it is Wordsworth who is advising, not being advised by, Astolpho-Lucy. But it is not so easy to exclude this instance from the argument since Ariosto's Orlando is invoked in a way that Ruggiero was not. For Astolpho did not merely suggest Shakespeare’s Orlando to Wordsworth via 'a kind of subliminal verbal exchange'. Ariosto’s Orlando is a source for Shakespeare’s, and the episode that connects them is that to which 'Nutting' is most closely related, as I will show presently.

The maiden is "inland bred", like Shakespeare’s Orlando, but, if she corresponds to Astolpho, then it is left to the speaker (or the boy, his former self) to make up the pairing as Ariosto’s Orlando. This he indeed does. Geoffrey Hartman suggests (without mentioning DC MS 16) that

the youngster is not unlike ‘the Orlando of Ariosto, the Cardenio of Cervantes, who lays waste the groves that would shelter him’.

(Wordsworth's Poetry, p. 74.)

His quotation is from Wordsworth's prefatory essay to The Borderers. There, analysing the character of Rivers (later Oswald), Wordsworth makes a reflection which could describe the boy of 'Nutting':

Power is much more easily manifested in destroying than in creating. A child, Rousseau has observed, will tear in pieces fifty toys before he will think of making one. (ll. 34-37)²⁴

Wordsworth recalls Ariosto’s Orlando as the destroyer of a bower that could have protected him. It seems more than justified, therefore, to identify Wordsworth’s own child destroyer with Orlando Furioso, in the scene that lies at the centre of his story, in the twenty-third of Ariosto’s forty-six cantos.

In the scene in question (canto XXIII) Ariosto’s Orlando, riding through a trackless wood, finds a grove and a stream where he rests (stanza 100) like the boy in ‘Nutting’, and, likewise, ends up destroying the very trees which cast a welcome shade. The cause of his

²⁴ The likeness of Rivers to the boy ceases here, however, for the boy learns from his guilt, whilst Rivers, on the contrary, experiences a cycle:

Every time we plan a fresh accumulation of our guilt, we have restored to us something like that original state of mind, that perturbed pleasure, which first made the crime attractive. (ll. 138-41)
violence (the madness that names him as 'furioso') is jealous passion: whilst resting in the
grove he sees the name of his beloved, Angelica, carved into the barks of trees along with that
of a rival, Medoro. Coming across their cave, he finds verses, spelling out Medoro's union
with Angelica, and vents his rage on the trees that bear the lovers' names. The confusion of the
grove with the lovers who inhabit it anticipates Wordsworth's description of the 'merciless
ravage' which resembles the rape of a human being. In Ariosto, too, the human and natural
sides merge: knives have carved the names into the bark, and the letters themselves become
nails, that pierce Orlando's heart (canto XXIII stanza 103), whilst confirmation that Angelica
and Medoro are lovers (acquired from a shepherd) is the 'axe' that severs his head from his
shoulders (stanza 121). The Edenic harmony of natural and human spheres is perverted by a
destruction of each in terms of the other, as Orlando tears a man's head off in his fury, as
easily as if he were plucking an apple or a flower (canto XXIV stanza 5). The hero anticipates
Milton's Satan -- envying the lovers, wreaking destruction -- and also Adam, committing an
initiatory act which will change him profoundly, imitating Satan, yet remaining as the object of
our sympathy.25

To set out, finally, the shifting relations: Dorothy or 'Lucy', admonished by the poet,
resembles Shakespeare's Orlando, who is calmed -- in the woods -- by the Duke (and tutored by
Rosalind). But Dorothy is also like Astolpho, who, though he is aggressive in the episodes here
alluded to, also has the power to cure another distracted Orlando, and to advise a fellow
adventurer, Ruggiero. When one considers Dorothy's place throughout Wordsworth's poetry
this teacher-pupil role-changing ceases to surprise. In Tintern Abbey, she follows in the steps
of her brother's experience, as she appears to do here. But in The Prelude it is Dorothy's
exhortations and care that guide her disillusioned brother:

thy breath,
Dear sister, was a kind of gentler spring
That went before my steps.
(XIII 244-46)

Thomson dwells on the 'confounding' of the schoolboy ravisher with the potentially cruel
Friend (pp. 293-94), and recalls Bateson's comment that 'William and Dorothy were
interchangeable' (Bateson, p. 153). But, whilst Wordsworth does use Dorothy as a figure of

25 Milton acknowledges his use of Ariosto ironically: the 16th line of Paradise Lost, 'Things
unattempted yet in prose or rhyme', is a translation of Orlando Furioso's tenth.
his former self, to see them as 'interchangeable' is reductive.\textsuperscript{26} Wordsworth's use of the analogues sets up contradictory correspondences (which are mirrored by the contrasting attitudes towards Dorothy in his poems), demonstrating the mutual care and comfort which they give to each other.

The inclusion of Orlando Furioso as a context distances 'Nutting' from Paradise Lost because the debased sexual act is itself the error, rather than being the outcome of it, as it is for Adam and Eve, who, when innocent, are incapable of it. For Orlando as for the boy (and Lucy), the fallen state, with its debased or dangerous sexuality, is the only one. Yet, though the context of Orlando Furioso helpfully dissociates 'Nutting' from Paradise Lost, it too threatens to distort the poem's meaning. The nutting expedition symbolizes some other, more profound journey, but, though this 'journey' is hinted at by the language of sexually implicated violence like Orlando's, it does not ask to be specifically identified as such. Ariosto's tale is of jealous love and madness, Wordsworth's is not. Rather, the destruction of the hazels is a parable for a rite of passage of which the psychological depth, or the moral nature, is signified by the intense language of sexual violence, but the actual identification of which remains unspoken. Canto XXIV of Orlando Furioso opens with a description of love as a wood ('una gran selva') in which travellers inevitably lose their way (stanza 2). Orlando has come out of the wood insane. But the boy in 'Nutting' emerges with 'a sense of pain', yet sane, relatively serene, and able to learn from the experience and advise the Maiden. Balancing the epic (and, given the actual events of the tale, it could be, rather, mock-epic,) is another tone – that of Shakespearean comedy.

\begin{quote}
iv
'Sweetest nut hath sourest rind,
Such a nut is Rosalind.
(As You Like It III ii 109-10)
\end{quote}

It is in the above considered scene from Orlando Furioso that a motive for Shakespeare's naming of his character as 'Orlando' can be found, though there is some role-reversal at

\footnote{Bateson arrives at this conclusion by seeing the 'dearest Maiden' of 'Nutting', who, to his mind, is naturally gentle (see above p. 141) as incongruous with the aggressive maid of DC MS 16. He sees the latter as, chiefly, a projection of the speaker's self: the two are 'interchangeable'. G. Kim Blank sees William and Dorothy as emotionally 'co-dependent' – a condition in which 'one individual's feelings and sense of identity are overenmeshed with someone else' – as a result of their unhappy childhood (Wordsworth and Feeling, pp. 70 & 227-28).}
work. For in *As You Like It*, though Orlando is as lovesick as his Italian namesake, he is not betrayed, and it is he who decides to hang verse on the branches and ‘carve on every tree’ (III ii 9) Rosalind’s name, so that Jacques asks him, ‘I pray you mar no more trees with writing love-songs in their barks’ (III ii 260). The texture of associations in ‘Nutting’ becomes denser still. The violence committed upon the hazels has its counterpart in *Orlando Furioso* (where hero is destroyer), but the use of the hazels as a means of expressing sexual feelings, the closer identification of the forest with the love-games that go on there (where hero is successful lover, ‘fearless of a rival’), is more like *As You Like It*. In ‘Nutting’, there is a union of the two Orlando’s experience, with fulfilment and violence, regret and, retrospectively, wise comfort.

Wordsworth alludes to the scene in which Shakespeare’s Orlando bursts in upon the Duke and his entourage as they are about to eat, and threatens them. Thomson (pp. 289-91) points out the parallels: Orlando, ‘a very conditional “enemy of nature”’ like Lucy, is dissuaded from violence and the word ‘gentle’ resounds through the ensuing dialogue, just as it does at the close of ‘Nutting’:

> Then, dearest Maiden! move along these shades In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand Touch, – for there is a Spirit in the woods. (ll. 52-54)

Thomson feels that the Shakespearean punning connotations of ‘gentle’, ‘inland’, and ‘Nurture’, are a distraction in ‘Nutting’ since Wordsworth’s use excludes one range of meaning – that implying courtly civilization. But this reduction signals the difference between the ‘banquet’ in ‘Nutting’ (l. 23), and the Duke’s meal: the former consists of the nuts alone, on the tree, the latter is a social occasion. Orlando’s ‘gentleness’ connotes civility because it is men upon whom he has drawn his sword. Lucy’s is literal gentleness of hand, because her violence is directed against the hazels.

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27 Orlando had made the transition to the theatre in Robert Greene’s drama *The Historie of Orlando Furioso*, published in 1592.

28 His comment anticipates Marvell’s witty preference for trees over women, in ‘The Garden’:

> Fond Lovers, cruel as their Flame, Cut in these Trees their Mistress name. Little, Alas, they know, or heed, How far these Beauties Hers exceed! (ll. 19-22)

He would carve only the trees’ own names upon them, and jokes that Ovid’s lovers chased nymphs so that they would turn into more lovely trees. Wordsworth more solemnly uses this motif of the exchanging of vegetable for female beauty, as his ‘ravage’ of an ambiguous female nature causes him deep moral regret.
‘Nutting’ opens with a consciousness of the generation gap, as the child ventures off from the ‘frugal Dame’, whose ‘exhortation’ may suggest the burden of her authority over him. The wood he enters could as well be Arden as Eden, and though his ‘disguise’, recalls Satan’s, the nature of it is more reminiscent of Shakespeare. Firstly, the costume is that of a ‘Beggar’, ‘more ragged than need was’ (ll. 7, 12). Celia has the idea of dressing as humble people:

I’ll put myself in poor and mean attire,
And with a kind of umber smirch my face;
The like do you

(I ii 111-13)

Like the boy, she and Rosalind are escaping from the older generation, and their disguise grants them a freedom to experiment, as does their destination – a playful version of Ariosto’s wood of error. Though the boy in ‘Nutting’ is not a Duke’s child, his ‘disguise’ nonetheless signals a similar capacity to escape imposed formalities.

Whilst the ‘disguise’ has a purpose – it is the boy’s nutting uniform – there is also a sense of dressing up. He is ‘trick’d out’ to become a ‘Figure quaint’, and his costume, beyond being that of a ‘Beggar’, could be that of a fool: he wears a ‘motley accoutrement’, and ‘motley’ is a word central to As You Like It, most notably in the episode directly preceding that from which Wordsworth quotes in the DC MS 16 beginning to ‘Nutting’. Jacques has met a ‘motley fool’ (II vii 13 & 17), and, concluding that ‘motley’s the only wear’ (l. 34), he exclaims, ‘O that I were a fool! / I am ambitious for a motley coat’ (ll. 42-43), and imagines himself as a philosopher-fool:

Invest me in my motley; give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and through
Cleanse the foul body of th’infected world,
If they will patiently receive my medicine.

(ll. 58-61)

Jacques eulogizes the ‘motley’, naming it no less than five times, only to be interrupted by Orlando’s aggressive entrance. Jacques is the figure of melancholic solitude who so prefigures, via Cowper’s ‘I was a stricken deer’, the Romantic contemplative. Wordsworth alludes to the description of him ‘as he lay along / Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out / Upon the

29 In the 10 volume Edinburgh edition of 1767 of which Wordsworth owned a copy, Jacques’s account of Touchstone is scene vii of Act II, Orlando’s entrance is scene viii, and scene ix begins with ‘All the world’s a stage’. In modern editions all three episodes go together to make up scene vii.
30 This speech is excerpted in William Enfield’s The Speaker; or, Miscellaneous Pieces, Selected from the Best English Writers (London: Johnson, 1782), a popular anthology of the day (pp. 212-15).
31 The Task Book III, 108. Compare As You Like It II i 25-43.
brook that brawls along this wood' (II i 30-32) in *An Evening Walk* (1793 II. 81-82). Here, he is excited (if ironically) by the fool's potential for vision. Like the beggar, the fool recalls Wordsworth's figures of low and rustic life.

It is now commonly thought that, in accordance with Dorothy's account in the letter to Coleridge, Wordsworth wrote 'Nutting' before he wrote the attempted openings. It is in the later writing (DC MS 16) that the direct allusion to *As You Like It* is made, which might lead one to suppose that Wordsworth only began to think of the play as an analogue for his poem at that point. However, the 'motley' costume is mentioned in the pre-expansion 'Nutting', before the quotation was made. Was *As You Like It* therefore in Wordsworth's mind from the start, or was it even a reviewing of his own use of the word which pointed out the (as yet unconscious) parallel to the poet himself? *As You Like It* is only signalled clearly by the excluded material, but once it has been, its presence is felt in 'Nutting'. (Though *Orlando Furioso* has a singular relation to the poem once it has been summoned, it is not so powerfully present as to be felt when it is not alluded to.) It is difficult to disregard a connection once it has been created: it seems reasonable to assume that Wordsworth would have seen his poem, in some sense, in relation to those works to which he momentarily alluded.

Perhaps the boy's beggar/fool 'disguise' has one further correspondence with those of *As You Like It*: as an actor's costume. Jacques's account of the fool precedes Orlando's entrance, and following it is Jacques's other, most famous account, of the seven ages of man. An awareness of the fiction of the play ('Rosalind', disguised as a boy, is paradoxically truer to 'her' existence as a male actor) is inverted as Jacques points out that life imitates art: all the world's a stage. Wordsworth's boy, dressed as a 'Figure quaint', plays the ancient role of the archetypal quester. In this consciously literary poem, Wordsworth alludes to a play which points out the likeness of life to art. Beyond the literary sense of 'play', moreover, 'Nutting' shares the playfulness of *As You Like It* or, for that matter, of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, another story of love-in-the-woods. The profundities remain unnamed, deep below the surface, to be reached through the events of the tale, but remaining somehow beyond them, whilst the story itself has a comic tone of light-hearted inconsequentiality. Such a tone has not often been attributed to Wordsworth's poetry, and the double ending to 'Nutting' is solemn (the boy's 'sense of pain') and didactic (the exhortation to the Maiden). Yet there is humour in 'Nutting':

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32 De Selincourt had thought otherwise. He describes the lines from DC MS 16 as 'written in the previous summer, when the poem was first conceived' (*PW* II, 504).
the description of the excessively ragged clothes, the fussiness of the surrogate mother. In fact, it is not hard to find this comic touch in Wordsworth’s accounts of himself as a child, as when he describes the little boy’s sense of his own, adult, dignity:

At a time
When scarcely (I was then not six years old)
My hand could hold a bridle, with proud hopes
I mounted, and we rode towards the hills:
We were a pair of horsemen – honest James
Was with me, my encourager and guide.

(Prelude XI 278-83)

This diminutive parody of the epic knight is not unlike the Quixotic Idiot Boy, whose steed is a pony and whose weapon is a holly branch (like the Green Knight’s). In ‘Nutting’, too, the boy carries only a ‘nutting crook’ (l. 5), and the ‘occasion’ (l. 8) is comically bathetic in relation to its analogues. That this tone in Wordsworth has tended to be neglected is due to the habitual association of Wordsworth with Milton rather than with Shakespeare. The balancing of the two contributes to the elusive quality of ‘Nutting’ – its negotiations between solemnity and comedy, merriment and pathos. The theme of discovery by trial and error, the melancholic ‘sense of pain’ that can, nevertheless, melt into an overridingly benign impression of human life and of a gentle, forgiving numinous world, are all of the essence of a Shakespearean comedy. In this world, no sin is so tragically ultimate that it will not be forgiven and repeated.

François Laroque finds that festivity – ‘going a-nutting’ on Holyrood Day – is a social manifestation linked with natural and seasonal cycles and rooted in a so-called archaic vision of time and the cosmos ...
The corpus of the material on festivity as a whole comprises a vast range of data – networks of imagery and symbolic systems – that provided for the Elizabethan dramatists a language of allusion, a whole panoply of rhetorical devices and a pattern of symbolic references. (pp. 3, 5)

Though Wordsworth isolates one nutting expedition as a singularly significant rite of passage, incorporating Satan’s invasion and Adam’s transgression, he also remembers it as a recurring seasonal event:

the year
Did summon us in its delightful round ...
I would record with no reluctant voice
The woods of autumn, and their hazel bowers
With milk-white clusters hung ...

(Prelude I 503-04, 510-11)
The simulation of Milton’s Aristotelean plot – the linear movement of a single tragic event – tends to exclude all subplots, all lesser relations to other works. Allusions to Shakespeare, by contrast, signal a move beyond themselves – beyond the idea of a single line of influence, the isolated Oedipal plot that can have only two protagonists – to a field of communal, commonplace experience. As festivity is the expression of the popular, so Shakespeare’s green world is inhabited by many ordinary mortals, whose lives follow very similar patterns. Their significance comes not from idiosyncrasy or pre-eminence, but from the aura of ritual, archetypal and anonymous. Bakhtin’s reflections on the carnivalesque, a branch of festivity, inspired Kristeva’s idea of intertextuality, which has become, in theories of literary relations, a more multiple, democratic, and playful alternative to the monumental structures of Bloomian influence. The literary relationships of ‘Nutting’ anticipate both models, arresting the seasonal cycle to claim Milton’s moral cataclysm as its own, yet mocking its own heroic plot, as the foolish antics of every child’s, and Shakespeare’s, play.
CHAPTER 6: RUTH: WORDSWORTH IN GEORGIA AND ENGLAND

‘What’s in a name?’
(Romeo and Juliet II ii 43)

‘Ruth’ abounds in landscape, or, rather, in two distinct landscapes: the ‘dale’ and ‘hill’ of the ‘Quantock[s]’ (ll. 5, 216), and the ‘Savannas’ of ‘Georgia’ (ll. 61, 106).¹ As so often in Wordsworth, naming is a device by which to particularize the tale. Proper names of race and place situate the events in their geographical (and historical) localities: ‘Georgia’, ‘Cherokees’, ‘Indian’, ‘English’, ‘America’, ‘Tone’, ‘Quantock’. Yet there is as much literature in Ruth as there is landscape, by which the poem is, again, located. The tale has one significance as a pretended reality, aided by details of place and circumstance taken from the world, and a second significance as a tale among tales, in that other ‘world of poesy’ (Prelude V 605). The figures that lurk in the landscape, whose names are unspoken, are poets. Shakespeare’s influential presence is unsurprising, as is Milton’s, but others feature as intertextual shadows, some nameable, others not, for they are the unknown authors of old ballads. Their precedents work against the particularizing force of the place names, refiguring them as the timeless, locationless places of myth and story: Eden, Arcadia, and the place ‘under the greenwood tree’. Reality – and Wordsworth anticipates intertextuality in this – is subsumed by textuality, which may itself determine reality. In this poem Wordsworth explores the subtle and manifold workings not only of landscape and love, but also of literature, to foster, tempt, betray and comfort mankind.

Ruth’s name is emblematic. Circling the differences and similarities between her biblical namesake and herself – low social status, bereavement, surrogate mothers (one loving, one not), foreign husbands, a happy ending and a tragic – it summons also the abstract noun that is its homonym. This word, ‘ruth’, is especially appropriate to the pastoral setting that is Ruth’s home. It is common in Spenser, whose ‘oaten pipe’ Ruth has acquired (Mason, p. 276). Milton, who uses neither ‘ruth’ nor ‘oaten’ in Paradise Lost, uses both in his pastoral, Lycidas (ll. 163 & 33). In naming his heroine so appropriately ‘Ruth’ / ‘ruth’, Wordsworth joins in the wordplay of his forebears: Milton rhymes ‘Ruth’ with ‘ruth’ in his sonnet ‘Lady, that in the prime of earliest youth,’ (ll. 5, 8), and Shakespeare brings in the related verb ‘rue’, (as the punning, secondary meaning of the word), in the garden scene of Richard II:

¹ Unless otherwise specified, references are to the Reading Text of the 1800 version of the poem, Cornell Lyrical Ballads, pp. 191-200.
Gardener: Here did she fall a tear, here in this place
I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace.
Rue, even for ruth, here shortly shall be seen,
In the remembrance of a weeping queen.
(III iv 104-07)

Rue recurs in association with two other of Shakespeare's heroines, Perdita, 'Reverend sirs, /
For you there's rosemary and rue' (The Winter’s Tale IV iv 73-74), and the mad Ophelia:

There's rue for you, and here’s some for me; we
may call it herb of grace a' Sundays. You must wear
your rue with a difference.
(Hamlet IV v 181-83)

Like the heroines of Shakespeare's late plays, Ruth is a lost child, with a metaphorical name,
the proximity of which to the 'rue' of Shakespeare's women furthers the association. Earl
Wasserman has asked of Keats's Ruth ('Ode to a Nightingale'), 'is there not a strong
suggestion that here the Biblical name serves also as a personification of "ruth" and in this
sense encompasses all mortality?'² Keats's Ruth is descended from Wordsworth's, and from
his Solitary Reaper (whose song is compared to the nightingale's). What Keats continues,
appropriately, is the sense of a sympathy that extends beyond the limits of an individual life.
Ruth is an Everywoman invoking what she denotes, pity, for humanity. For the echoes of
Ophelia which Stein sees as 'tamer and less artfully relevant' than other echoes in the poem
(p. 166) find their relevance, I think, as part of an accumulation of tragic love-analogues,
summoned by another Shakespearean allusion.³

² Quoted in Eve Walsh Stoddard, 'The Genealogy of Ruth: From Harvester to Fallen Woman in
Nineteenth-Century England', in Old Testament Women in Western Literature, ed by Raymond-Jean
³ Ruth and Ophelia are darkly differentiated from the late plays' virginal heroines. Ophelia's song
(IV v 48-55) suggests that her madness is fuelled by the shock of abandonment after sexual intimacy:
To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.

Then up he rose, and donn'd his d o 'es.
And dupp'd the chamber-door,
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.

Wordsworth's tortured women are often mothers, as in 'The Female Vagrant', 'The Affliction of
Margaret', and 'The Mad Mother' ('Her eyes are wild'). Were Ruth a mother then her place amid
literature's tragic lovers, and especially the association that she does have with the lost children of the
late plays, would be marred. But the detail of her marriage is an indicator that she does have sexual
experience before her abandonment, an experience associated with the Georgian life, and with the
potential dangers of an over-active imagination, as discussed below.
In their happiness, Ruth's lover argues, scarcely would they know that
we were in a world of woe,
On such an earth as this!
(II. 77-78)

It has been noticed that he recalls Milton's opening description of the fruit 'whose mortal taste
/Brought death into the world, and all our woe,' (Paradise Lost I 2-3), and, more precisely,
his account of 'breach / Disloyal on the part of man':

That brought into this world a world of woe
(IX 6-7, 11)

He is deluded in thinking that he might escape the 'world of woe' since, as Milton's repetition
makes clear, it is commensurate with 'this world', which Wordsworth glosses as 'such an earth
as this'. This line, placed so emphatically as the climax of the youth's vision of a life of loving
partnership, recalls the line that opens, and echoes through, the first scene of the fifth act of
The Merchant of Venice:

Lorenzo: The moon shines bright. In such a night as this ...
Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls,
And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night.

Jessica: In such a night
Did Thisby fearfully o'ertrip the dew ...

Lorenzo: In such a night
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
Upon the wild sea-banks, and waft her love
To come again to Carthage.

Jessica: In such a night
Medea gathered the enchanted herbs
That did renew old Aeson.
(V i 1, 4-7, 9-14)

The context that Shakespeare's line brings into play is so illuminating that, even allowing for a
sceptical attitude towards the detection of sources, its inclusion in this discussion may be
justified. Jessica and Lorenzo, like Ruth and her lover, are eloping, and the lovers that they
remember from ancient tales are all also chosen for their similar circumstances. Jessica is
Jewish, Lorenzo Christian. Troilus is Trojan, Cressida from Troy's antagonist, Greece.
Aeneas, though not an enemy of Carthage, has come from across the sea, and Jason, too, is a
foreigner in Medea's land. (The biblical Ruth also married a man from another country, Boaz).

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4 For Wordsworth's remembrance of Dido's willow see above, Chapter 3, and for his favourable
comments on this scene, Chapter 5. 'On such a night as this is!' is the final line of his 1802 poem,
'The sun has long been set'.

158
Just as with Ruth and her lover who ‘cross the ocean came’, the liaisons are both inspired and doomed by the clash of cultures.

Jessica teases that Lorenzo might betray her:

In such a night
Did young Lorenzo swear he lov’d her well,
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
And ne’er a true one.

(ll. 17-20)

Though history’s great love affairs breach cultural gaps, all four end tragically, three in the desertion of one lover by the other. Jason and Aeneas are the two men who abandon their lovers, and each makes his escape across the sea over which he has come, as the Georgian youth does. Telling of a paradise, and imagining a life of ‘bliss’ (l. 75) like Adam and Eve’s, the youth unwittingly gives a reminder, in his own choice of words, of the pair’s humanity, a humanity that encounters, more often than not, betrayal. It is amid this literary universe that Wordsworth’s couple find their identity as star-crossed lovers. Their significance as created characters lies more in their relations to poetry’s other lovers than in their individuality.

Wordsworth explores the psychological effects of environment upon the mind, but gives his characters little personality; each of them is curiously reminiscent, or composite.

‘Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth’
(Midsummer Night’s Dream I i 132-34)

Love is a peculiarly textual topic. Though strong feeling has often demanded ‘genuine’ expression in poetic outpourings, the words that flow are most often commonplaces. Writing of his own affair, disguised in the tale of Vaudracour and Julia, Wordsworth is overwhelmed, not by emotion, but by belatedness:

such theme
Hath by a hundred poets been set forth
In more delightful verse than skill of mine
Could fashion – chiefly by that darling bard
Who told of Juliet and her Romeo
(Prelude IX 635-39)

Barthes’s expression of this condition is suggestive of the chain of lovers that haunts Ruth:
Without the – always anterior – Book and Code, no desire, no jealousy: Pygmalion is in love with a link in the code of statuary; Paolo and Francesca love each other according to the passion of Lancelot and Guinevere (Dante, Inferno, V): itself a lost origin, writing becomes the origin of emotion. (S/Z, pp. 73-74)

Words pre-exist the feeling that grasps at them, and the textual can be caught in the act of taking priority, as writing (or reading) replaces the feeling that it feeds. Wordsworth seems to have experienced this phenomenon when writing to his wife:

I seize with eagerness this opportunity to write to my dearest
Love ... Such Letters ... seem to unite me to you person & spirit
body & soul, in the privacy of sacred retirement ...

let me turn at once to thee my love of loves and to thy dearest
of Letters which I found here, and read with a beating heart ...
how happy was I in learning that my Letter had moved thee so deeply, and thy delight in reading had if possible been more exquisite than mine in writing.

I love thee so deeply and tenderly ... that I scarcely can bring
my pen to write of anything else.5

If this is a problem for all lovers, it is more so for the poet, who lives by his pen. Wordsworth explores the textuality of love in Ruth. Not only are the created lovers determined by literary precedent — decidedly unreal though inspired by reality — but they themselves are excessively susceptible to textual temptations, finding it difficult to discern fact from fiction.

Ruth’s lover has no name. Critics have seen in Wordsworth’s picture of his weakness a criticism variously of himself (Thomas McFarland draws a parallel with Wordsworth’s treatment of Annette Vallon), of William Bartram, whose influence on the poem I will discuss shortly, and even of the Bartram-influenced Coleridge of ‘Kubla Khan’, but he has fictional, and more specifically textual, counterparts too.6 Alan Bewell studies the interesting category of ‘Idiots, Wild Children, and Savages’. Recalling the true story told to Wordsworth (by Thomas Poole) of John Walford, who murdered his idiot wife, Jenny, Bewell explains the contemporary understanding of Walford’s own psychological condition:

Poole emphasizes [Walford's] 'wildness' and – anticipating Wordsworth's description of the wild Georgian youth of 'Ruth' argues that constant exposure to the severity of nature had imparted 'a kindred impulse' ('Ruth', line 130) to Walford's mind. (p. 52)

Jenny is the 'idiot' of this tale, but the feeling is that she and Walford were alike, because Walford himself was 'wild' and 'wild children' were considered by eighteenth-century anthropologists as idiots 'by situation and lack of education, rather than by nature' (Bewell, p. 61). Like Walford, both Ruth and her fatally mismatched 'wild' lover were schooled in the landscape, and have psychological states akin to idiocy. Bewell points out that 'as a wild child ... the idiot was every bit a textual creature, a product of empirical theorizing, even as the interest in this figure was sponsored by the desire to go beyond texts' (p. 62). Wordsworth's use of his own textual creations to theorize about humanity seems justified to the extent that the intersection of literature with life is itself part of his exploration. His attitude to this category of people was more imaginatively sympathetic than most. In a letter to John Wilson that discusses Ruth, and touches also on several issues related to that poem, Wordsworth noted that the Swiss, and also people 'in several parts of the East', have a reverence for idiots, having commented that, 'I have often applied to Idiots, in my own mind, that sublime expression of scripture that, "their life is hidden with God"'. In May of the same year he had described Coleridge's 'face divine of heaven-born ideotcy'.

It is to the other world, in several of its imagined forms, that the Georgian youth is connected. His relation to the idiot links him with another, more explicitly other-worldly being: the changeling. For the changeling is used to explain idiocy, as in Drayton's Nimphidia:

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7 Letter to John Wilson, 7 June, 1802, EY, p. 357.
8 MS version of Stanzas Written in my Pocket-Copy of Thomson's 'Castle of Indolence' (I. 43), Cornell Poems, in Two Volumes, p. 582.
9 Wordsworth parodied this poem. Drayton's poets love fairies:

No Tales of them their thirst can slake,  
So much delight therein they take  
(Nimphidia ll. 13-14)

Wordsworth loves nature:

But now my own delights I make, –  
My thirst at every rill can slake  
(‘To the Daisy’ (‘In youth from rock to rock I went’) ll. 5-6)
These when a Childe haps to be gott,
Which after prooves an Ideott,
When Folke perceive it thriveth not,
    The fault therein to smother:
Some silly doting brainlesse Calfe,
    That understands things by the halfe,
Say that the Fayrie left this Aulfe,
    And tooke away the other.

(II. 73-80)

In Shakespeare it is the stolen child, not the idiot-fairy replacement, that is the changeling.

Titania's attendant, over which she argues with Oberon, is

A lovely boy stolen from an Indian king;
She never had so sweet a changeling

(A Midsummer Night's Dream II i 22-23)

Wordsworth's 'lovely youth', transported to England from 'among the Indians' (ll. 31, 37), recalls Titania's lovely Indian boy, and the first section of Ruth contains a cluster of echoes of this scene of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Ruth, 'an Infant of the woods', 'wandering over dale and hill'(ll. 12, 5), resembles Shakespeare's Fairy:

Over hill, over dale ...
I do wander every where

(II i 2 & 6)

Both live 'upon the green' (Ruth l. 10, Midsummer Night's Dream l. 9), Ruth's bower recalls Titania's own. The conjuring of this play's presence adds more figures to the shadowy gallery of famous lovers that surrounds Ruth. Titania has created love-intrigues between Theseus and various women, Oberon has loved Hippolyta. Many fleeting affairs, and three marriages, are to follow, as well as the performance of Pyramus' and Thisbe's tragedy, already brought into Ruth's field of contexts by the echo of The Merchant of Venice. But the

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10 Harold F. Brooks, editing the Arden edition (London: Methuen, 1979), suggests that the confusion may have arisen in Shakespeare's mind because of Spenser's ambiguous phrasing (p. 27). The Red Cross Knight was stolen by a fairy:

From thence a Faerie thee unweeting reft,
    There as thou slepst in tender swadling band,
    And her base Elfin brood there for thee left
Such men do Chaungelings call, so chaunged by Faeries theft.

(Faerie Queene I x 65)

11 'Indian' in Wordsworth often connotes a wild excess, or emotional imbalance, as for the 'Mad Mother', who plans to 'build an Indian bower' (l. 55) (see also the Lucy of 'Nutting').

12 'Upon the green' indicates a fairy presence in Shakespeare: his Venus proposes 'like a fairy' to 'trip upon the green,' ('Venus and Adonis' l. 146).
association of Wordsworth’s characters with changelings and fairies has a particular significance. On the one hand their fictionality is foregrounded, and on the other they, as quasi-idiot lovers, are related to another other-worldly creature.

‘The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact’, Shakespeare’s Theseus says (Midsummer Night’s Dream V i 7-8) in a speech ‘from which’, asserts Bate, ‘it is impossible to escape when considering eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writings on the imagination’ (p. 58). Wordsworth was interested in idiots, lunatics, fairies and wild children, because he felt them to have an affinity with the poet. Titania accuses Oberon of playing the pastoral persuader:

I know
When thou hast stolen away from fairy land,
And in the shape of Corin sat all day,
Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love,
To amorous Phililda.
(II i 64-68)

Ruth, too, is persuaded by a poem:

“How sweet it were
A fisher or a hunter there,
A gardener in the shade,
Still wandering with an easy mind
To build a household fire and find
A home in every glade.

What days and what sweet years! Ah me
Our life were life indeed, with thee
So pass’d in quiet bliss,
And all the while” said he “to know
That we were in a world of woe,
On such an earth as this! ... 

Sweet Ruth! and could you go with me
My helpmate in the woods to be,
Our shed at night to rear,
Or run, my own adopted bride,
A sylvan huntress at my side
And drive the flying deer ...”
(ll. 67-78, 85-90)

The lover’s direct speech is framed like a lyric poem within the longer narrative, as Volpone’s appeal ‘Come, my Celia’ stands as a ‘Song’ in rhyming tetrameter amid the blank verse of Jonson’s play (Volpone III vii 165-82). Jonson’s song was modelled on Catullus’s ‘Carmina V’, which Wordsworth had himself translated during the 1790s (‘My Lesbia, let us love and
live'). The youth shapes his "invitation to love", in the images of Marlowe's Passionate Shepherd, whose landscape is 'vallies, groves, or hills and fields' and the 'steepy mountain'.

Donne's shepherd (a continuation of Marlowe's) invites his love to fish, in 'The Baite', though in truth his own poetry is the bait for the 'fish' that the woman resembles, as Raleigh's nymph would have recognized. It is she who, noting that 'flowers do fade' (l. 9), as the Georgian flowers are 'fading, faded' as soon as they are 'budding' (l. 52), describes the 'wayward winter' that supersedes the summer of love ('The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd' l. 10), as it does, indeed, for Ruth (l. 199). The presence of Marlowe's shepherd has been noticed elsewhere in the Lyrical Ballads, as Duncan Wu records:

The editors of the Longman Wordsworth find that The Thorn 67, 'But thou wilt live with me in love', echoes Marlowe...1, 'Come live with me and be my love'.

(Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799, p. 94)

'I have not been able to discover where Wordsworth encountered this poem', Wu continues, to which an answer is that it is in both Percy's Reliques and Knox's Elegant Extracts, each time followed by Raleigh's 'Nymph's Reply'. The dependence of the youth's appeal upon this...

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13 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' (ll. 3-4).
14 Thomas Percy, Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Ballads, Songs, and other Pieces of Our Earlier Poets, Together with some Few of Later Date, 4th edn, 3 vols (London: Rivington, 1794), I, 232-36; Vicesimus Knox, Elegant Extracts; or, Useful and Entertaining Pieces of Poetry, 3rd edn (Dublin, 1789), appendix. The Marlowe text above is Knox's. Percy's is quite different, with 'hills and vallies, dale and field', and 'craggy mountains'. Donne's poem is mentioned, and the first three lines quoted, in Percy's introductory note to Marlowe's poem. Wordsworth is known to have had easy access to both these anthologies: whilst at Alfoxden he could have used Coleridge's copy of Percy, and Dorothy records buying their own in Germany (The Hamburgh Journal, 1 October 1798, p. 31). In 1810 Wordsworth described Knox as 'constitut[ing] at this day the poetical library of our Schools' (Wordsworth's Reading 1770-1799, pp. 110-11, 82). Both contain 'The Children in the Wood', which echoes through the Lyrical Ballads. 'Zall identifies Knox as the source for the text of "The Babes in the Woods" as quoted in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads' notes Wu, (Percy's text differs slightly in the quoted stanza - see P. M. Zall, 'The Cool World of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Vicesimus Knox, Elegant Activist', WC 10 (1979), 345-47), but which text had informed the line from the earlier 'Anecdote for Fathers' - 'His limbs are cast in beauty's mould' (l. 3) - it is impossible to say. Percy has 'fram'd in beauty es molde' ('The Children in the Wood' l. 20), and Knox 'made in beauty's mould'. Either could be the source, likewise, for 'Lucy Gray' l. 30, 'she wandered up and down' ('These pretty babes, with hand in hand, / Went wandering up and downe'), phrasing that brings us back to Ruth (and the fairy of A Midsummer Night's Dream):

The slighted Child at her own will
Went wandering over dale and hill
(ll. 4-5)
tradition becomes most clear when his description of the ‘sylvan’ (l. 89) landscape is compared to the picture of Georgia that has already been presented by the narrator as an exotic paradise. Replacing it with the woodland glades of an Anglicized pastoral, the youth’s persuasion poem signals as conscious a change of poetic models, as of scenery.

iii
‘tongues in trees, books in the running brooks’
(As You Like It II i 16)
The youth is a story-teller:

with him many tales he brought
Of pleasure and of fear,
Such tales as told to any Maid
By such a Youth in the green shade
Were perilous to hear.
(ll. 38-42)

Stein notices a resemblance to Othello (I iii 128-70), ‘to show Ruth’s captivation by the apparently heroic qualities of the Indian-fighter as he tells Ruth tales of his combats’ (p. 166). Another famed tragic couple enters, as one more shadowy counterpart to the story. ‘Tales ... of fear’ sound like narratives of epic event and, in the 1802 text, the youth tells ‘of march and ambush, siege and fight’ (1802, l. 61), recalling Othello’s ‘battles, sieges’ (I iii 130). But in 1800 the ‘tales’ by which Ruth is seduced are descriptions of a landscape to which, directly rather than in story-form, the youth has already succumbed.

This seductive landscape is, in another sense, a landscape of seduction. The ‘tropic’ climate and ‘scarlet’ flora suggest the hot-bloodedness that they seem to engender. Moral laxity that allows licentious behaviour is suggested by the flowers that are ‘budding, fading, faded’, all in one line (l. 52), as it is by the girls’ strawberry-gathering, drawn from a passage in Bartram’s Travels:

15 Despite the 1802 expansion of the youth’s repertoire, this stanza goes on to confirm him as most affectingly a teller of more personal tales:

Wild histories they were, and dear:
But ’twas a thing of heaven to hear
When of himself he spake!
(1802, ll. 64-66)

This tendency likens the youth, already identified as a poet-type ‘with hues of genius on his cheek’ (1802, l. 31) more nearly to the Wordsworth of the Prelude and other autobiographical poems.
companies of young, innocent Cherokee virgins, some busily gathering the rich fragrant fruit, others having already filled their baskets, lay reclined under the shade of floriferous and fragrant native bowers of Magnolia ... disclosing their beauties to the fluttering breeze ... whilst other parties ... were yet collecting strawberries or wantonly chasing their companions, tantalizing them, staining their lips and cheeks with the rich fruit.¹⁶

Distant and exotic, the suggestion of Paradise hints that the easy sensuousness might be, not moral laxity, but shameless innocence. Yet paradise was the location of the first seduction, or pair of seductions, which themselves brought death (by which, associatively, the flowers ‘fade’) and sin, sexual and otherwise, into the world. Paradisal sensuousness suggests sexual temptation irresistibly, notwithstanding the idea that life in Paradise was once pure; hence, the deceptive earthly paradises of romance. Paradise, to fallen man, involves luxury, idleness, indulgence: Paradise becomes the temptation itself.

Stein points out that English literature’s most famous description of Paradise has just Bartram’s / Wordsworth’s abundance: ‘nature boon / Poured forth profuse on hill and dale and plain’ (Paradise Lost IV 242-43). ‘In the epic’, writes Stein, this quality ‘is linked with those urges that separate Eve from Adam and lead her to dare the forbidden’ (p. 166), and he notes that Bartram shares details with Milton, such as ‘Flowers of all hue’ (Paradise Lost IV 256 – compare Ruth II. 49-51). Bartram acts on one level as a route to Milton. Discussing Bartram’s ‘psychological animadversions’, Stein describes Wordsworth as ‘drawing in a tonal way on his original but not confronting it allusively’ (p. 167). Perhaps this is because Bartram’s description finds its moral significance only through association with Milton. Milton presents the crisis of how fallen man might understand, let alone regain, Eden, and so it is Milton whom Wordsworth engages, as in the ‘world of woe’ allusion, and again, Mason notes (p. 278), when the ‘flowers’

stand the wonder of the bowers
From morn to evening dews.
(II. 53-54)

Though these dews sound pleasant enough, their context is demonic, for it was Milton’s Mulciber who ‘fell’

¹⁶ The fullest account of Bartram’s influence on Wordsworth is in N. Bryllion Fagin’s William Bartram: Interpreter of the American Landscape (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1933), pp. 149-76. This quotation is taken from p. 153.
from morn
To noon ... from noon to dewy eve,
A summer's day; and with the setting sun
Dropped from the zenith like a falling star
(1742-45)

Yet Wordsworth does confront and problematize Bartram, or Bartram in conjunction with
Milton, though more broadly than by ironic verbal allusion. For it is crucial to Wordsworth’s
use of Bartram that his work is not fiction, but a travel book, a description of real landscapes.
The youth’s ‘tale’ of the landscape captivates Ruth, as Bartram’s had Wordsworth, and as
Wordsworth’s, no doubt, is intended to captivate the reader. But the fact that the landscape is a
real one, that it is the experience, not the tale, of Georgia that has entranced the youth, allows
Wordsworth to posit the similarity between the effects of landscape and of story (or poetry, or
the description of landscape) upon character.

In the letter to Wilson, Wordsworth discusses the influence of landscape upon the
Georgian youth’s character, which is contrasted by McFarland to Wordsworth’s own
experience:

the savannah landscape is beautiful, yes; but after its appearance
one realizes that it lacks the features that both in the Romantic
imagination and in Wordsworth’s own symbolism bespeak strength
and grandeur of soul. Specifically, the savannah lacks mountains,
cataracts, and other criteria of the sublime

(McFarland, p. 53)

The landscape of seduction operates upon the youth in a malign version of the nurturing that
Wordsworth had received. But what of the secondary seduction, that of Ruth by the youth’s
words? In Book V of The Prelude we seem to enter the literal landscape, only to find ourselves
in the literary, as Wordsworth recalls ‘wandering as we did / Through heights and hollows and
bye-spots of tales’ (V 234-35). Though ‘the speaking face of earth and heaven’ (l. 12) is man’s
‘prime teacher’ (l. 13), man, too, ‘hast wrought, / For commerce of thy nature with itself’
(l. 17-18). ‘Books’ (as Book V is headed), are ‘things that teach as Nature teaches’ (l. 231),
and hence are described as a landscape like nature’s. ‘Books ... / Are a substantial world’
(‘Personal Talk’ ll. 33-34), which Wordsworth had described even in the early Vale of
Esthwaite:
How sweet in life’s tear-glistening morn
While fancy’s rays the hills adorn,
To rove as through an Eden vale
The sad maze of some tender tale
(ll. 176-79)

As Wordsworth was ‘fostered alike by beauty and by fear’ in nature’s landscape (Prelude I 306), Ruth, in the landscape of story, is brought ‘tales ... / Of pleasure and of fear’ (ll. 38-39), and, just as the youth’s fostering by nature is not so benign as Wordsworth’s, so the influence of tales ‘that teach as Nature teaches’ upon Ruth, is ‘perilous’ (l. 42). A ‘simply fashioned tale’, Wordsworth admits, could, when he was young, ‘bewitch me’ (Prelude V 177, 179).

It is tempting to draw a contrast between the ill effects of the Georgian landscape (both directly and in the accounts of outlandish travellers’ tales and the false paradises of romance) and the English landscape that fostered Wordsworth and surrounds Ruth. The ‘green shade’ of Marvell’s (English) ‘Garden’, one could argue, is not ‘perilous’ in its own right, but only because it does not prepare a ‘Maid’ for the tropics of exotic stories. Ruth’s green English landscape is Shakespearean, in its echoing of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and also of As You Like It, as I will discuss shortly. The youth’s, on the other hand, is Miltonic. In the terms of influence theory, the contrast could be read as a commentary on the feelings engendered by the two great precursors.

According to Bate’s image of benign influence, the English Romantics might ‘establish their “Lineal Right” by allowing Shakespeare to guide them through the desolate and bewildered mazes of their own lives’ (Bate, p. 21). A ‘child … of the woods’ (ll. 4, 12) whose tunes, ‘sounds of winds and floods’ played on ‘a pipes of straw’ (ll. 9, 7), are natural, Ruth herself resembles the Romantic image of Shakespeare as ‘fancy’s child’, warbling ‘his native wood-notes wild’. Nature’s music is Ruth’s solace in her late madness, as in her early solitude, though in an embittered form: the remembered ‘wild brook’ that ‘did o’er the pebbles play’ is a ‘cheerful knell’ (ll. 179-80), and Ruth ‘plays’ too:

That oaten pipe of hers is mute
Or thrown away, but with a flute
Her loneliness she cheers;
[A] flute made of a hemlock stalk
(ll. 211-14)

Ruth finds consolation in her ‘native wood notes’, equivalent to the ‘consolation of influence’ which, Bate argues, Shakespeare could afford to the Romantics (p. 247).
But Ruth's relationship to the landscape – and to the literature of it – is more complicated than this. As noted above, the youth's "persuasion poem" speech departs from the Bartramesque / Miltonic Paradisal landscape to the Anglo-Arcadian, from the images of romance and epic to the language of pastoral love poetry. And this landscape / literature has already worked its powers on Ruth, before her lover's arrival. The youth had a childhood sensitive to nature, like Wordsworth's:

- While he was yet a Boy
  The moon, the glory of the sun,
  And streams that murmur as they run
  Had been his dearest joy.

(R. 27-30)

Ruth's has been equivalent: her 'brook' for his 'streams', her music-making for the 'finest tones' in which he 'could speak'. A life in the landscape has encouraged in Ruth 'thoughtless freedom bold' (l. 6), a solitariness emphasized in a stanza added in the 1805 edition:

Beneath her Father's roof, alone
She seemed to live; her thoughts her own;
Herself her own delight:
Pleased with herself, nor sad nor gay,
She passed her time; and in this way
Grew up to Woman's height.

(1805, ll. 12 ff)

The bold repetition of this stanza – 'her ... alone ... she ... her ... her own ... herself ... she ... her' – tells of a Romantic solipsism. Again, Ruth's experience is an unhappy version of Wordsworth's own; the landscape – the story was 'suggested by an account I had of a wanderer in Somersetshire' (Fenwick Notes, p. 14) – like the Georgian savannah, lacks those features that 'bespeak strength and grandeur of soul' (McFarland, p. 53). Wordsworth considers his literary expeditions, like his literal ones, to have been integral to his development as an artist. 'Oh, where had been the man, the poet where' he asks (Prelude V 232), had poetic ramblings been unavailable. In the next verse-paragraph he tells of the mother who so skilfully measured her children's freedom, but died, like Ruth's (when Dorothy, incidentally, was 'not seven years old' (Ruth l. 3)). 'She left us destitute' (V 259), as Ruth was 'left half desolate' (l. 1), and the freedom that made Wordsworth a poet is the same that proves tragic to Ruth. Any landscape can have the ill effect of a false Paradise, any literature can 'bewitch' (Prelude V 179).
‘The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously – that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion – while separating it sharply from reality’. Ruth’s pipe-playing is her childhood play, her creativity is her ‘fantasy’, but neither are held distinct from reality. The confusion of her play and the landscape, the ‘real world’, is shown in her music for which nature provides the physical material as well as the form. The landscape itself resembles Shakespeare’s green world which ‘has analogies, not only to the fertile world of ritual, but to the dream world that we create out of our own desires’. Fantasy and reality are inextricable, recalling again the doubleness of Bartram’s Travels: for Bartram, they were an experience, for Wordsworth a book, telling of a landscape as fabulous as Paradise. The ‘facts’ of the (invented) youth’s life become for Ruth ‘tales ... / Of pleasure and of fear’, as they were for the (real) poet. The notion of ‘travellers’ tales’ – supposed to be factual, like Bartram’s book, travel-books being a favourite of Wordsworth’s – yet also a euphemism for lies, captures this confusion of reality and art. The youth tells tales to Ruth in two ways.

The figure of the lover stands between Shakespeare’s lunatic and poet, a mediator that Wordsworth uses to express the fear that too much imagination, too much unreality, can end in insanity:

We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.
(Resolution and Independence ll. 48-49)

A life in poetry is an already-written story, idealized accounts of Chatterton’s and Burns’s lives providing fearful precedents for Wordsworth’s own, real life. The poverty he dreads is very real, but the context in which he considers it is already sliding into fiction. Wordsworth plays upon that fearful confusion of fact and fiction by fictionalizing the real, dissolving the boundary between life and literature, context and text.

19 Several of Wordsworth’s afflicted women verge on the madness that is explicit in Ruth and the mad mother. The connection between them and the habitual ‘madness’ of the poet that Wordsworth fears in ‘Resolution and Independence’ is made in ‘Vaudracour and Julia’ where the male lover, a poet-type, ends up ‘an imbecile mind!’ (Prelude version, IX 935). The poem follows those of the distressed women in ‘Poems Founded on the Affections’. Ruth was classed here too in 1815, but moved to ‘Imagination’ in 1827.
iv

'Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude'  
(As You Like It II vii 174-76)

Yet the vision of the landscape consoles Ruth in her prison as it cheers Poor Susan in the city, and she finds comfort in returning to the land:

The vernal leaves, she loved them still,  
Nor ever tax'd them with the ill  
Which had been done to her.  
(Il. 196-98)

These lines recall Lear's words:

I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;  
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children  
(III ii 16-17)

Summoned too by 'Under the greenwood tree' (I. 192), is the second act of As You Like It, with its discussion of 'the penalty of Adam': 'the seasons' difference', whose 'icy fang' is found to be less painful than man's deceitful flattery (II i 5-6). Wordsworth's treatment of the theme is more ambivalent. In 1805, Ruth's physical suffering is re-emphasized:

Sore aches she needs must have! but less  
Of mind, than body's wretchedness,  
From damp, and rain, and cold.  
(1805, stanza added at I. 204 ff)

There is a note of protest, at the neglect of Ruth's most urgent suffering, her poverty, which could be alleviated. But there is also a sense that bodily pain is a distraction, for mental pain – or hurt inflicted by humans – is worse, which is why Amiens is grateful that 'Under the greenwood tree',

Here shall he see  
No enemy  
But winter and rough weather.  
(As You Like It II v 6-8)

Still, it is here that Wordsworth most clearly expresses the part that this very landscape that now consoles played in Ruth's fall. 'Rocks and pools' were 'The engines of her grief, the tools / That shap'd her sorrow' (II. 193-94).

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20 Bate traces a network of allusion to these lines, a version of which Wordsworth quotes in the 1815 Preface, and to the theme of ingratitude in Lear generally, in Michael and 'Simon Lee', pp. 100-02.
Wordsworth’s ambivalence to the ‘sweet are the uses of adversity’ theme indicates an analogous ambivalence towards Shakespeare, and literature in general. Though a life of literature can encourage excessive fantasizing, a disconnection from reality, literature can also console, delight, and even protect: the beneficent equivalent to its seductiveness. After all, we would not have Othello’s tales ‘of moving accidents by flood and field’ (I iii 135) fail to captivate Desdemona. Wordsworth alludes to this speech in *The Ruined Cottage*, as discussed in Chapter 4, in ‘Hart-leap Well’ (l. 97), and in the two-part *Prelude* of 1799, in which the Lake District is home to ‘numerous accidents in flood or field’ including a man’s drowning (1799, II 258-87). This passage was transferred to Book V of the 1805 *Prelude*, on which I have been drawing, but the passage containing the allusion was removed. What replaces it is an assertion that the sight of the dead man did not frighten the boy:

> for my inner eye had seen  
> Such sights before among the shining streams  
> Of fairyland, the forests of romance –  
> (1805 V 475-77)

Reading ‘the Arabian Tales’ (l. 484) has prepared Wordsworth for exceptional, potentially disturbing events. Fantasy affords him some protection from reality, from the truth that can be stranger than fiction. The Arab-Quixote describes his shell (poetry) as a ‘consolation’ (V 109), whilst the verse that once ‘bewitched’ the poet ‘soothes me now’ (l. 179). Peter Manning discerns an effort of will, not entirely convincing, in the *Prelude* revisions:

> The excision of Othello and the ‘distresses and disasters, tragic facts of rural history’ from the episode of the Drowned Man is one sign of Wordsworth’s determination to make over those stories of suffering and loss upon which his imagination turned.  
> (p. 111)

Othello, Manning argues, is ‘a figure in whom death and the power of story are inextricably joined.’ But Wordsworth, who named *Othello* as one of the three most ‘pathetic’ literary compositions that he knew, did not necessarily find that death straightforwardly dark. Celebrating the happiness provided by poems, Wordsworth named as ‘pre-eminently dear’:

> The gentle Lady married to the Moor;  
> And heavenly Una with her milk-white Lamb.  
> (‘Personal Talk’ II. 40-42)

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21 Entitled ‘Othello’s apology’, this is the first piece of Shakespeare in Enfield’s *Speaker* (p. 59), which also includes Lear’s ‘Blow winds’, and Duke Senior’s ‘penalty of Adam’ speeches (pp. 370-71 & 210-12). Wordsworth glances at it again in the letter to Wilson, speaking of ‘moral accidents’ that contribute to character formation.
Spenser's story maintained its consolatory power. In the 1815 'Dedication' to *The White Doe of Rylstone* Wordsworth describes a period, following the deaths of two of their children, when he and his wife felt unable to read it, but after a time, their feelings changed, and

It soothed us – it beguiled us – then, to hear
Once more of troubles wrought by magic spell …
This tragic Story cheered us; for it speaks
Of female patience winning firm repose
(ll. 33-34 & 49-50)

To what extent his fondness for *Othello*, in which female patience does not win, likewise survived these personal tragedies it is impossible to know, but it seems that in the earlier period at least, Wordsworth found tragedy in some sense consoling. The *Prelude* revision replaces the allusion to *Othello*, but does not necessarily contradict or deny the feelings surrounding it.²²

It is 'under the greenwood tree' that Ruth finds her home, and this phrase is that which most links – or confuses – landscape and literature in this closing section of the poem. Wordsworth has maintained the sense of topical actuality throughout the poem, by means of local detail, the place-names especially. Even here, he insists on the known truth of the story, as authorized – though as a 'tale' – by witnesses:

(And in this tale we all agree)
She sleeps beneath the greenwood tree,
And other home hath none.
(ll. 202-04)

Yet 'under the greenwood tree' is so memorably a phrase from *As You Like It* that to find Ruth there is to find her in the world of story, or, more precisely, in the world of song. Several of this poem’s familial texts have song qualities, like Catullus’s ‘Carmina’ and Jonson’s ‘Song’. Shakespeare’s fairy’s speech has the shorter, tetrametric lines of a ditty (and a various rhyme scheme) in contrast to the heroic couplets that follow. When Titania recalls Oberon ‘in the shape of Corin … / Playing on pipes of corn (II i 66-67), she makes the connection between pastoral and music-making (like Ruth’s), which Shakespeare plays on in his own ‘Song’ that ends *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, ‘When shepherds pipe on oaten straws’ (V ii 903). ‘Under the greenwood tree’ itself is one of Amiens’s songs. Knox groups it with Marlowe’s ‘Passionate Shepherd’, Raleigh’s ‘Nymph’s Reply’, and ‘The Children in the Wood’ in his ‘Songs,

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²² Hagstrum’s idea that, in ‘Personal Talk’, Desdemona is representative of Annette (p. 92) is suggestive in relation to McFarland’s reading of *Ruth* as the story of Wordsworth’s abandonment of her.
Ballads, etc.' section, which is part of the Appendix (p. 642 – most of Knox’s Shakespeare is in his third Book).

From Knox’s and Percy’s ballads one learns that ‘under the greenwood tree’ is not a line of Shakespeare’s making. Mason points out that the greenwood ‘has connotations of outlawry’ (pp. 284, 173). Insane and outcast, Ruth is in a sense outlawed. Hence, in ‘The Not-browne Mayd’, the maid’s lover, claiming that he has committed a crime, repeats, as his refrain, that

I must to the grene wode go,  
Alone, a banished man.  

(ll. 59-60 – other stanzas have slight variations)²³

Robin Hood – whom Frye links to wild children, characters representing ‘partly the moral neutrality of the intermediate world of nature and partly a world of mystery’ (Anatomy of Criticism, p. 196) – is to be found ‘under the greenwood tree’ (l. 108) in ‘Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne’. ‘Under the green-wode tre’ too are ‘Adam Bell, Clym of the Clough, and William of Cloudefly’ (part III l. 1); Wordsworth defended ‘Clym of the Clough’ in the letter to Wilson. It is no coincidence, then, that Shakespeare uses this line in a song – it being an habitual line, a ‘filler-in’ perhaps for minstrels performing without scripts, in such ballads.

Ruth was a ‘Lyrical Ballad’, written in a well-used variant of the ballad form. Ballads dealing with amorous liaisons, fidelity and infidelity, add to the crowd of precedents for the plot of Wordsworth’s poem. Their titles bear the names of their ordinary characters: ‘Fair Margaret and Sweet William’, ‘Barbara Allen’s Cruelty’, ‘Lucy and Colin’. The Georgian youth’s appeal, ‘Sweet Ruth! and could you go with me’ (l. 85), is one in a long line of such entreaties:

O Nancy! wilt thou go with me  
(Thomas Percy, ‘Song’ l. 1)²⁴

‘I do love thee; therefore go with me’ Titania says to Bottom (III i 156), having rejected Oberon’s more compromising offer, ‘Give me that boy, and I will go with thee’ (II i 143). Ruth is by no means the first to whom it has been said, ‘Come live with me, and be my love’ (‘The

²³ The lover, who is testing the maid’s strength of feeling, advises her not to accompany him to the harsh, greenwood life, with another instance of ‘ruth’ wordplay:  
For it were ruthie, that, for your truthe,  
Ye sholde have cause to rewe.  
(ll. 319-20)

²⁴ The texts of these ballads are Percy’s with the exception of Percy’s own ‘Song’, which is in Knox.
Passionate Shepherd’ l. 1), nor the first to have been betrayed, and this is at the root of literature’s power to console. ‘In tragedy’, says Laroque, ‘the function of festivity is quite simply reversed: it is no longer beneficent but harmful, no longer an antidote to the forces of darkness but their accomplice’ (p. 196). But in Wordsworth genres are mixed, and festivity is ambiguous. In ‘Nutting’, as in Ruth, its cycle alleviates the linear narrative of tragedy. Precedent, repetition, and continuity are all soothing powers in Wordsworth. The seasons’ round passes over the temporary sufferings of individuals, incorporating such minutiae into its greater scheme. Some have found this hard to take, as in the case of Margaret in ‘The Ruined Cottage’, whose miserable demise is philosophized away by the pedlar. He recalls that the weeds that had overgrown the cottage ‘looked so beautiful’,

That what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
The passing shews of being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream that could not live
Where meditation was. I turned away
And walked along my road in happiness.

(MS D Reading Text ll. 518, 520-25)

The story of Ruth may be another ‘idle dream’, from which Wordsworth would have a reader turn ‘in happiness’. For the stream of literature’s tragic lovers is like that of nature’s dying and returning flowers. Ruth’s tale is striking, as is each of literature’s monumental love affairs, when it is read in isolation. Considered collectively, the very number of them diminishes their significance. Each of Shakespeare’s characters may be convincing, but his plays’ plots and situations are so often alike. In ballads it is the ordinariness that is emphasized, as the characters, like Wordsworth’s, have unremarkable names, and no place in the official history of event. Barbara Gates suggests that it was the sense of a ‘staying power beyond the bounds of personal mortality’ that drove Wordsworth towards oral history, and she quotes A. L. Rowse:

The life of the individual breaks its barriers and becomes coterminous with humanity. Bound as our lives are to the tyranny of time, it is through what we know of history that we are delivered from our bonds.²⁵

That the Barbaras and Colins are timeless shows that their experiences have been and will be lived many times over. This universal quality is in line with the genre: popular ballads, communal songs that have no named author, but are the possession of everyone’s memory, as

children's rhymes still are today. *Ruth*’s relation to song is part of the poem’s strange message of consolation. Song, like the Solitary Reaper’s, which may tell of ‘some natural sorrow, loss, or pain, / That has been, and may be again’ (ll. 23-24), is the form that survives mortality, perhaps because it is immaterial, but it is also the most ephemeral, as is the fame of its anonymous authors.

The landscape that fosters and shapes Ruth, to tragic ends, receives her again, housing her in her decline and more completely so when, in death, ‘in hallow’d mold / [Her] corpse shall buried be’ (ll. 224-25). As in the case of Lucy, ‘Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course / With rocks, and stones, and trees’, there is both a comfort and a heartlessness: pain is brought to an end, but also disregarded – ‘forgotten’ in two senses. Likewise, the legendary precedents which heroized the tale of an ordinary country girl work also to alleviate the acuteness of the tragedy, which is deadened in the endless round of similar stories. Countering the self-absorption that a poetic life can encourage, Wordsworth finds that to look outwards at others’ lives can be an unburdening. This is what happens in *Resolution and Independence*, in which the poet at first finds it hard to attend to the leech-gatherer’s words, so involved is he in his own unhappy self-contemplation. To the degree that a story is a writer’s projection of his own fears, it is beneficial to place it amid the mass of other stories, to counteract the self-concern, as *Ruth* is placed doubly in perspective by the summoning of precedents. This double movement illustrates two contrasting strands of literary-relations theory, Bloom’s tragic influence, wherein the great poet’s textual life is heroized, and intertextuality, in which no protagonists are so foregrounded against the all-encompassing panorama of words.
PART IV: ALLUSION AND INTERTEXTUALITY
CHAPTER 7: MULTIPLE RELATIONS

Overdetermination

'To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'
(Ode ll. 205-06)

'Wordsworth's celebrated lines are intertextually the most overdetermined of any I have found in the canon' writes Stein. The Ode itself has so many possible literary relations that the progress of analysis is in danger of grinding to a halt. How is one to discern which of the claimed ancestors are genuine, and what, in so tangled a genealogy, are the degrees of their relationship? 'It is impossible to point to any single source as the determining one', says Stein of that last couplet. Gene Ruoff, who takes issue with the consequences of Bloom's naming of Lycidas as the Ode's 'precursor', to the exclusion of 'other resonances, perhaps equally or more meaningful, from other powerful writers of the past', concludes that 'no other major lyric

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1 He offers us Wither's 'meanest object's sight' ('Eclogue IV' of The Shepheard's Hunting ll. 369-70), and 'thoughts too deep to be expressed / And too strong to be suppressed' (Fair Virtue ll. 1189-91), Thomson's 'every bud that blows' (Spring l. 473), Cowper's 'meanest things that are' (Task VI 584), and Gray's 'meanest flowret of the vale' ('Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude' l. 45), and suggests that in the background is Shakespeare's Sonnet 65, with its meditation on 'sad mortality': 'How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea, / Whose action is no stronger than a flower?' In the foreground is Anne of Winchilsea: 'But silent musings urge the mind to seek / Something too high for syllables to speak' ('A Nocturnal Reverie' 41-42; quoted in Poems and Extracts 11). And though its sense is opposite, the phrase 'Too foolish for a tear' at the end of Coleridge's 'Ode to Tranquillity' (first published in The Morning Post, 4 December 1801) is echoically suggestive (the poem has motifs in common with the Intimations Ode, especially in its third stanza). (Stein, p. 189 & p. 242, n. 34)

It is, however, Herrick and Langhorne who happen to share Wordsworth's exact phrase, 'the meanest flower', in 'To a Bed of Tulips'(l. 8), and 'The Tulip and the Myrtle' (l. 32).

2 Direct relationships - all along the scale from superficial verbal borrowing to deep indebtedness - have been claimed (sometimes tentatively), on behalf of Pindar's odes, Virgil's fourth eclogue, Genesis, Judges (possibly), and various other bits of the Bible, Chaucer's Manciple's Tale and Troilus and Criseyde, Clanvowe's (though Wordsworth thought it was Chaucer's) 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale', Spenser's Epithalamion, Prothalamion, Hymne in Honour of Love, Hymne of Heavenly Love, 'Maye Aeclogue', and Book I of The Faerie Queene, Daniel's Musophilus, Shakespeare's As You Like It, various poems of Jonson, Wither's Fair Virtue and Shepheard's Hunting, Herbert's 'Man's Medley', Milton's Lycidas, Paradise Lost III, XI & XII and, possibly, Samson Agonistes, Marvell's Horatian Ode, any number of Vaughan's poems, but especially 'The Retreate', Thomas Burnet's Sacred Theory of the Earth and other writings, Gray's 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College', Goldsmith's Traveller, James Graeme, John Scott, John Langhorne, Michael Bruce and Robert Fergusson as a kind of collective of spring elegists, Coleridge, and an unknown 'W. C.'s' Address to Silence, which appeared in the Weekly Entertainer 29 (6 March 1797). The claimants will be named as their cases arise.
of Wordsworth's has generated such ranging speculation on sources and analogues. Ruoff argues that 'while the possible individual influences on the Ode are fascinating, what is most intriguing is the class of poems from which they come' (p. 45), and discusses the part of the poem that was written in 1802 (the first four stanzas), in terms of its relation to a tradition: the erotic spring-time pastoral. But the pastoral lover's complaint, 'however conventional' may nevertheless be 'presented as wholly personal, singular to the point of idiosyncrasy ... because the cardinal privilege of erotic lamentation is to believe itself unique' (Ruoff, p. 229). It is the poet's analogous task to convince a reader that his poem is 'unique', or 'original'.

Stein differentiates between two classes of relationship:

Because they are minor talents, contributors to rather than fashioners of poetic traditions, whom Wordsworth could transcend or revise without an internal struggle, poets like Wither, Cotton, Anne of Winchelsea, and the host of later-eighteenth-century second fiddles could remain at the back of his poetic consciousness as a free field for casual, mood-inspired plunder. The case is different with Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and, at key junctures, Coleridge. His relation to these poets is most often front to front, for they were writers against whom he was impelled to define himself. (pp. 189-90)

'Front to front' suggests a one-on-one combat, but where more than one of these greater figures is present, more complicated manoeuvres may be performed, different again from the relation to 'tradition' as a whole. Not only ought the *Ode* to be considered in relation both to other poems and to the 'tradition' of which these poems are a part, but that tension between the individuality of certain crucial works and their place in a vast pastoral corpus may itself have a bearing on Wordsworth's own poem. Just as it is difficult to discern which poems ought to be privileged as individuals from amongst the masses of a genre, so specific allusion (or relation of another kind) shades uneasily into 'generic allusion' or coincidental resemblance: sources and analogues are hard to distinguish. Both kinds of relationship are at work: the relationship of individual to individual, and to the society of poetry. Wordsworth's poem attempts to be not just another member of a class, but an individual, by differentiating itself both from its everyday relations, and from its influential role models. In the pastoral society, this may be an especially arduous task, since the pastoral is so conventional.

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3 Gene W. Ruoff, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Making of the Major Lyrics 1802-1804* (London etc.: Harvester, 1989), p.15. Unless otherwise indicated, further references to Ruoff are to this work. Whilst considering many of the possible sources and analogues, Ruoff centres his discussion on the poetic symbiosis of Wordsworth and Coleridge in this period. The *Ode* 's creation is intimately bound up with, in particular, Coleridge's *Dejection* poems. This interchange, or conversation, is a very different kind of relationship from that of Wordsworth and his more ancient precursors.
Sources and Analogues

In the notes to her edition of the 1807 Poems, Helen Darbishire remarks on the close resemblance between Wordsworth's Ode and the thought of Thomas Traherne, though Traherne's works, unpublished until the twentieth century, cannot have been known to Wordsworth. She also directs us to 'Vaughan's Retreate for an interesting parallel in thought' to lines 58-76, and writes that 'Wordsworth's library included a copy of the rare first edition of Vaughan's Silex Scintillans, 1650.' The parallel is indeed remarkable:

The Retreate
Happy those early dayes! when I
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white, Celestiall thought,
When yet I had not walkt above
A mile, or two, from my first love,
And looking back (at that short space,)
Could see a glimpse of his bright-face;
When on some gilded Cloud, or flowre
My gazing soul would dwell an houre,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;
Before I taught my tongue to wound
My Conscience with a sinfull sound,
Or had the black art to dispence
A sev'ral sinne to ev'ry sence,
But felt through all this fleshly dresse
Bright shootes of everlastingnesse.
O how I long to travell back
And tread again that ancient track!
That I might once more reach that plaine,
Where first I left my glorious traine,
From whence th' Inlightned spirit sees
That shady City of Palme trees;
But (ah!) my soul with too much stay
Is drunk, and staggers in the way.
Some men a forward motion love,
But I by backward steps would move,
And when this dust falls to the urn
In that state I came return.

Other critics have been less reticent than Darbishire in claiming that Vaughan directly influenced Wordsworth. More recent scholarship, however, discredits the claim that Wordsworth owned a copy of Vaughan and finds that he ‘(and other Romantic poets) would have found it difficult to come by Vaughan’s poetry’. Vaughan, according to our present knowledge, bears the same relation to Wordsworth as does Traherne: he is not an influence, and so (unless, like Virgil in the messianic fourth eclogue, Sibylline dicta inspired him to anticipate Wordsworth’s coming) he has no direct relationship with him at all.

This case might well act as a cautionary tale for critics who take an interest in finding out relations. Though Darbishire believed Wordsworth did know Vaughan’s works, her careful description only of a ‘parallel’, and her readiness to ponder Traherne, irrefutably not an influence, just for interest’s sake, render her notes still valid. Others have not been so cautious, and several of the Ode’s moments have been linked contradictorily to several different ‘sources’. What frequently happens is that one fairly persuasive connection brings in its wake a cluster of further possible echoes. For example, Paul McNally begins with the phrase ‘celestial light’, which seems certainly to be an allusion to the invocation with which Book III of Paradise Lost begins, especially since, as McNally notes, Wordsworth uses the phrase again, along with quotations from Paradise Lost, in ‘Latitudinarianism’. Other critics have nevertheless included ‘celestial’ in the precipitation of that secondary clustering of resemblances which are introduced to bolster up different primary claims of allusion. Potts mentions the ‘celestial’ of Spenser’s Epithalamion, l. 200 (she might as well bring in that of An Hymne in Honour of Love, l. 186, which is within the passage that she shows to be relevant to Wordsworth), whilst George Meyer believes that ‘the conclusion that Wordsworth found [in

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6 John T. Shawcross, ‘Kidnapping the Poets: The Romantics and Henry Vaughan’, in Low and Harding, pp. 185-203 (p. 186). He explains that the claim that Wordsworth had (and annotated) a copy was made by Richard C. Trench in 1870, and that the refutation came from Helen N. McMaster in 1935. Vaughan was not included in Anderson’s British Poets, and when Wordsworth wrote to Anderson to suggest further inclusions, Vaughan was not amongst his suggestions.

the works of Thomas Burnet] the celestial light imagery which serves as a framework for his poem’ is ‘irresistible’.  

McNally, meanwhile, proceeds to Milton’s ‘rose’, and the succession of day and night (Paradise Lost III 41-42), and thence to the ‘fruits of joy and love,’ Uninterrupted joy, unrivalled love’ of lines 67-68, commenting that “joy” and “love” sound a leitmotif through the Ode’ (p. 31). But Wordsworth’s repetition of images so common as the rose and the diurnal cycle can add little weight to the argument that his ‘celestial light’ bears a precise relationship to Milton’s. Milton complains that he cannot see the returning day, but for Wordsworth the day and night are not, themselves, what he ‘now can see no more’ (l. 9). Rather the ‘Moon’ and ‘sunshine’ of the second stanza are mere elements of the landscape, and their succession does not become significant until the rising and setting star image of stanza five. McNally links this, too, to Milton, expanding the allusion to Paradise Lost into a relationship with the poet himself. Milton, he suggests, could be the model for philosophic courage, since his ‘soul was like a Star’ (‘London, 1802’ l. 9). I have discussed the significance of this sonnet in Chapter 4, but to link its star-soul to that of the Ode, which Wordsworth employs for an entirely different purpose, is to force a connection. Milton’s soul is star-like because it ‘dwelt apart’, superior to most. Man’s soul, in general, is ‘our life’s star’ in that it traces a path, from rising to setting. Wordsworth describes several poets as stars in the 1815 Essay and Potts notes that he addresses Chaucer (whose Troilus laments a lost ‘star’, which once issued from a ‘palace’), as ‘great Precursor, genuine morning Star,’ (Ecclesiastical Sonnets II 31 12). This image of life as a stellar cycle is employed, not in Book III of Paradise Lost, but in, for example, Epithalamion, which Potts offers as a source for the pastoral pipe, tabor, birds and shouting boys.

To call the ‘joy’ and ‘love’ a ‘leitmotif’ is not quite accurate; the two are not paired so clearly or so simply as in Milton’s line and a half. Rather, the ‘joy’ that does sound, though sometimes falsely, throughout the Ode, is at first paired, troublingly, with the lost ‘glory’. (There are nine ‘joy’ words, though one, in line 101, is satirical, and eight ‘glory’ words.)

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9 Potts, Wordsworth’s Prelude, pp. 287-90.
10 She also suggests Chaucer’s Manciple’s Tale, ‘Phoebus and the crow’ as Dorothy called it (Journals, 2 December 1801 – William began modernizing it that day), as yet another source for the day and night motif: ‘through earthly adventures celestial radiance grows dim. Is this not the pattern in brief of the Ode …?’ (Wordsworth’s Prelude, p. 284).
Birds and children are joyous, but when the poet says ‘with joy I hear’ (l. 50), we do not believe him, because as yet the loss of the glory shuts him off from joy. He learns, later, to replace glory with ‘love’, but the word itself receives hardly any emphasis. In one instance, it refers not to this mature, philosophic love but to the child’s imitative play (l. 98). In the other two instances (and three hardly make for a ‘leitmotif’), both in the final stanza, it is used in forms that do not recall Milton’s singular noun. ‘Our loves’ (l. 191) is an archaism that is to be found, for example, in Wither’s first ‘Eclogue’. In the fourth, where Stein finds one of those overdetermining ‘meanest object[s]’ (see above, note 1), the shepherds, likewise, ‘chant their loves’, in lines that might well have influenced Wordsworth:

Though I misse the flowry Fields,
With those sweets the Spring-tyde yeelds,
Though I may not see those Groves,
Where the Shepheards chant their Loves
(no line-numbers)\(^\text{11}\)

The Ode’s final ‘love’ (l. 195) is a verb. Having learnt to love, the poet gives thanks for the heart’s ‘joys’, but in conjunction, now, with its ‘tenderness’ and its ‘fears’ (l. 204). This is the closest that ‘love’ and ‘joy’ come to co-existing, and occurs only when the poet accepts that he can no longer participate in that joy in the unthinking way that birds and children do. ‘Joy’ and ‘love’ are not close enough in the Ode to convince me that Wordsworth had Milton’s, admittedly memorable, use of them in mind. A far more likely model seems, again, to be Epithalamion. ‘Joy’ resounds relentlessly through that poem, with a peculiar repetitiveness even, as in the three instances where Spenser uses two ‘joy’ derivations in just two lines (ll. 115-16, 245-46, 293-94). This is the springtime joy that Wordsworth tries, with painful self-consciousness, to feel again.

Yet though Wordsworth does not, I feel, echo Milton’s ‘joy and love’, even unconsciously (because ‘joy’ finds a source much more obviously in Epithalamion, and ‘love’ is not especially emphasized, nor appears as a noun to be coupled or compared with ‘joy’), his poem performs nonetheless a most meaningful revision of that coupling. The time of unthinking participation in the ‘joy’ – the time of the ‘glory’ – is analogous to man’s prelapsarian state. That Wordsworth cannot regain that most perfect ‘joy and love’, but has to

\(^{11}\) Part of Wither’s poem, including these lines, features in Wordsworth’s selection, Poems and Extracts (pp. 33-37). In 1815 he used thirteen lines from the eclogue as the epigraph for ‘To the Daisy’ (‘In youth from rock to rock I went’), another poem of 1802. The lines include the ‘meanest object’ and provide, Stein argues, ‘pharsing for some famous lines of “The Tables Turned”’ (p. 189).
find an alternative (the adequacy of which I shall discuss later), a ‘love’ that joins the joy ‘in thought’ (l. 174), by means of ‘the philosophic mind’, illustrates precisely that he is not like the unfallen Adam. The difference between Milton’s phrase and Wordsworth’s supposed leitmotif is an affecting one, and Wordsworth’s compensating love does have its Miltonic precedent, since the ‘strength’ and ‘soothing thoughts’ through which it operates are said to ‘spring / Out of human suffering’ in precisely the same way, as Potts points out (‘Spenserian and Miltonic Influences’, p. 613), that Adam and Eve find

Strength added from above, new hope to spring
Out of despair, joy, but with fear yet linked
(Paradise Lost XI 138-39)

Here, too, is the revised, or muted ‘joy’ – so different from that of Book III, of Epithalamion, and of Wordsworth’s spring scene – the ‘joys, and fears’ of the Ode’s closing meditation.

What I hope to be showing is the way in which initial, almost certainly direct relations suggest possible further direct relations, which, upon closer scrutiny, seem unlikely to be direct, and yet which still enrich our reading, in a specific way, with a revisionary, or ‘allusive’ point. This happens because of the clustering of conventional imagery and language within genres or subject-matters. Margaret Atwood wishes there were fifty-two names for love. If there were, we might be able to understand more precisely which feeling a poet were describing at a particular time, but we would lose the discussion, or drama, that is created by the changing meaning of a single word – ‘love’, or, as here, ‘joy’ – across a long text like Paradise Lost, or between texts that share concerns. Wordsworth probably recalls (perhaps unconsciously) the ‘joy’ of Book XI, and possibly recalls (McNally thinks so, I don’t) the ‘joy’ of Book III. Whatever the case, both kinds feature in the Ode, the difference between them is one of the main points, and Milton’s pre- and postlapsarian ‘joys’ are as relevant as analogues as they would be as sources. Wordsworth’s Ode enters easily into such dialogue with a great number of texts, causing havoc amongst the source-hunting community, because its concerns are amongst poetry’s most common, and its language and imagery are those of the conventional, imitative, and densely-populated genre of pastoral.

This conflict between source claims occurs again and again in criticism of the Ode. The ‘sullen care’ of Spenser’s discontented poet in Prothalamion reappears in Wordsworth’s

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'Oh evil day! If I were sullen', Potts tells us. But 'sullen' appears also in Wither's ubiquitous 'Eclogue IV', and in Daniel's Musophilus, from the introductory sonnet of which Wordsworth quotes the phrase 'humorous stage' in the seventh stanza of the Ode. These three poems share a common theme: the disconsolate, or potentially disconsolate poet. 'Each poem', as Samuel E. Schulman says of Prothalamion and the Ode, 'begins with the poet not only unhappy, but deprived of something wonderful that he believes he deserves to have'. Many critics have dismissed the idea that the Ode is 'about' being a poet. Lionel Trilling famously argued that, 'it is not about poetry, it is about life'. But it is notable that three of Wordsworth's models, these three that are united by that echoing 'sullen', all have poet-figures for narrators. Amongst the anxieties of Wordsworth's narrator, then, those of the committed poet should figure. Indeed, that very word 'sullen' links the Ode to Resolution and Independence, in which Wordsworth worries more specifically about the difficulties of a poetic career; not only the mental, but the financial strain. It is such practicalities that trouble Spenser, Daniel, and Wither. Spenser's poet bemoans his decline from favour, but then rejoices in the wedding scene that he witnesses. Musophilus defends learning in general, and poetry in particular, to a challenger, Philocosmus, who points out all the hardships that poetry can bring. Philarete, in Wither's poem, celebrates his muse, who has given him comfort whilst he is in prison, even though it was his satires ('hunting' in the allegory), that got him there in the first place.

That prison will be the last of my examples of conflicting source-claims. Wither's prison (a literal one, both within and without the poem, which is subtitled 'Being certaine Eglogues written during the time of the Authors Imprisonment in the Marshalsey') has not been mentioned, so far as I can find, by critics. For Edward Proffitt, the prison, in conjunction with blindness and the fulfilment of philosophy, is suggested by the story of

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13 'Spenserian and Miltonic Influences', p. 607. Prothalamion is most notable, Potts explains, for the rhymes that it lends to the Ode. In stanzas 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, and 11, only 11 of the 42 rhymes are not from Prothalamion. Fifteen of Prothalamion's rhymes are not used as rhymes in the Ode, but seven of those words are used.
16 Trilling evidences this recurrence of 'sullen' in each of Wordsworth's poems to suggest that Resolution and Independence is the Ode's 'timely utterance' (p. 132).
Samson, whether in Judges 16. 25 ('prison house') or in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*.¹⁸ For Meyer, 'the source ... for the “prison-house” image' is Burnet ('I call this body a prison') (pp. 38-39), and Potts offers, variously and with more caution, Spenser's *Hymne in Honour of Love* (though this could be only a verbal echo: the ‘prison’ is ‘Chaos’ (l. 58), not earthly existence), Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination* ('earth's dim prison' II 111), and Milton's 'souls / In prison under judgments imminent' (*Paradise Lost* XI 724-25).¹⁹ But as well as these specific relations, Potts submits that

To be sure, shades of the prison house and reversals in fortune must be finally referred to their literary source in classical and biblical tradition: the myth of the Cave, the devices of pastoral lament, the imagery of the Psalms, and the diction of Virgil. Doubtless all had their influence upon the *Ode*.  

(Wordsworth's *Prelude*, p. 289)

The prison as a metaphor for the body and/or the physical world is exceptionally common. Plato's *Phaedo* supplies the precedent for Wither's literal setting since, like Boethius after him, Socrates is in prison when he explains that philosophy – compare Wordsworth's 'philosophic mind' – can liberate the incarcerated soul. (The prison of Wither's Philarete is described throughout as a 'cave', giving the reader an extra hint that a Platonic interpretation is required.) Wordsworth cannot be said to be alluding to any single use of the metaphor, but some of the poetry in which he encountered the idea was that which he knew most intimately, rated most highly, and felt that he must 'equal if [he] could'.²⁰ The image of the prison-house, therefore, like many others, would be present to Wordsworth’s mind (however consciously or unconsciously) both as a commonplace and in certain of its most striking instances. It is not sufficient, then, to collapse the multiple possible sources, because they seem to conflict, into the generality of “tradition” or “conventional commonplace”. Rather, Wordsworth’s poem

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²⁰ *Reminiscences*, pp. 459-60.
conducts, not a dialogue, but a conversation, using the same terms of debate (images, ideas, themes) as the most important speakers who have proceeded him, drawing on several of them at once. Wordsworth's *Ode* might best be approached then, not through its 'front to front' engagements with single poems, or poets, but by considering several individual relationships as they exist in the context of the traditions and conventions within which they are performed.

iii
elegiac and erotic

‘Wordsworth's poem is written directly in the shadow of Milton, and may be called a misprision or powerful misreading of *Lycidas*.'

(Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, p. 144)

Ruoff, like Trilling, protests that 'the Ode of 1802 was about neither the death of song nor the decline of the imagination. And the poem will never take up these topics, however often commentators assume that it does' (p. 99). For Bloom, however, the poet does not have to 'take up' this issue: a central profundity of his theory is that the ephebe's poem is not only always unconsciously engaged in a struggle with the precursor poem, but is, fundamentally, about that very struggle. The *Ode* — the first poem mentioned in *The Anxiety of Influence* — not only attempts to better *Lycidas*, but is about the hopelessness of that attempt. I agree that the poet's distress in the *Ode* includes, as an element, the distress of being a poet, though my position is that this is only one element. Milton's work, which Wordsworth seeks to match, is implicated in his distress, but there is more of a world beyond the poetry in my view than there is in Bloom's. In other words, it is not just the greatness of Milton's poetry as poetry, that Wordsworth emulates, but also the impact of his vision upon life outside of poetry. And the work which embodies Milton's power, poetically but also extra-poetically, is not *Lycidas*, but *Paradise Lost*.

Wordsworth called his poem an 'ode' (Dorothy calls it that even on the day on which it was begun, *Journals*, 27 March 1802), yet Bloom, for whom conscious designations will not matter, pairs it with Milton's elegy. This may initially surprise — we are more likely to think of *Adonais* as the great Romantic emulation of *Lycidas*. Yet the elegiac qualities of the *Ode* are patent. 'The first part begins with images of absence, the realm of: “There was a time”', says Bloom (*Map*, p. 145), implicitly noting that 'there was a time' is an extremely common phrase

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21 The attempt is always hopeless because the ephebe is not reborn as a strong poet until he is found by his own subsequent ephebe 'who retrospectively will beget him upon the Muse' (*Anxiety of Influence*, p. 61, and see p. 37 for further explanation). For Bloom, too, 'the child is father of the man'.
Wordsworth’s elegy is for himself: it is his bold move to dispense with the dead fellow poet, for whom elegists purport to mourn, whilst more deeply troubled with themselves. Yet whilst this twist (no real twist, given elegy’s self-concern) is clear enough, the removal of the ‘dead friend’ motif renders the poet’s loss free to be associated with, and shaped by, the tradition of a different kind of loss, that of the scornful beloved. Ruoff’s discussion of the 1802 part of the *Ode* as a transformation of the erotic pastoral was prompted by William Heath:

> the spring elegy [is] a form Wordsworth had encountered repeatedly in the work of Bruce, Graeme, Langhorne, John Scott and Ferguson [sic] … a young man, at first exulting in spring, feels suddenly and painfully a sense of his distance from the mood of the season. Usually the speaker is a rejected lover, like the one in Bruce’s ‘Elegy – Written in Spring,’ who finds that

> Now Spring returns; but not to me returns
> The vernal joy my better years have known

In another essay, discussing *Michael*, Ruoff comments that ‘Wordsworth’s invocation of the pastoral calls forth two traditions in English verse which coexist as uneasily as they did in Theocritus, who is widely blamed for having started it all: the erotic and the elegiac’. The ‘erotic pastoral’ includes not only elegies for lost loves, but celebrations for continuing ones, such as Spenser’s *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion*, those poems to which Wordsworth’s *Ode* seems also to be related. Clanvowe’s poem, ‘The Cuckoo and the Nightingale’ (which Wordsworth modernized), is an eclogue, in the particular sense of a

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22 Levinson (p. 85) suggests that the opening may recall Coleridge’s *Religious Musings*: ‘This is the time’ (1794), which may itself recall Milton’s ‘This is the month’ (the opening phrase of *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity*), but ‘there was a time’, like ‘once upon a time’, is a standard introduction to a flight of nostalgia, and is frequently an opening, either to a stanza or to the poem itself. (Wither and Drayton both use the phrase, and Cowper begins ‘Heroism’ and Greville *A Treatise of Monarchy* with it).

23 Bloom expresses this sense, with a use of ‘anxiety’ that need not be involved with influence: ‘The great pastoral elegies, indeed all major elegies for poets, do not express grief but center upon their composers’ own creative anxieties’ (*Anxiety*, p. 151).


dialogue, on the joys and griefs of love. Wordsworth is not the first to translate the poet-wounded-by-love into the poet-wounded-by-poetry. It may even be a mistake to say 'translate', since 'the lover and the poet' have for so long been figures for one another. Both Daniel’s and Wither’s poems, we saw, are ‘eclogues’, not on love, but on poetry, and Spenser’s ‘Maye Aeclogue’, which Schulman suggests as a ‘go-between’ for the *Ode* and *Prothalamion*, is the same, though the poets there are allegorized as priests, in another of this chain of pastoral metamorphoses, to which I shall return. Celeste Schenck finds that ‘the Ode oscillates between [the elegiac and the epithalamic] … more completely then any other poem of [her] study.’

The three elegiac strains are fused – or, rather, each is subsumed into a greater, more significant loss. The poet mourns neither lost lover, nor dead fellow poet, nor, explicitly, is he suffering for his art like the out-of-favour Spenser and the imprisoned Wither. The nature of the loss itself is greater, so that these three traditional instances contribute, harmoniously, to that greater grief.

iv

**Incarnation**

‘*Heaven* lies about us in our *infancy!*’

‘Or who alive can perfectly declare,
The wondrous cradle of thine *infancia*?…
And yet a chylde, renewing still thy yeares;
And yet the eldest of the *heavenly* Peares.’

‘Say *heavenly* Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
Afford a present to the *infant* God?’

‘He who with all *heaven’s* heraldry whilere
Entered the world, now bleeds to give us ease;
Alas, how soon our sin
Sore doth begin
His *infancy* to seize!’

‘Erewhile of music, and ethereal mirth,
Wherewith the stage of air and earth did ring,
And joyous news of *heavenly infant’s* birth,
My muse with angels did divide to sing;
But headlong joy is ever on the wing,
In wintry solstice like the shortened light
Soon swallowed up in dark and long out-living night.’


The loss of the celestial light is platonized into the soul’s descent into the darkness of the physical body and the material world, which is compared by Wordsworth himself to the Fall of man, in his note recorded by Isabella Fenwick. The twentieth century, in turn, might choose to psychologize this phenomenon into the child’s emergence into self-consciousness. But somewhere between the biblical and the psychoanalytical representations of this ‘true myth’ comes Wordsworth’s. His use of the Platonic myth in this poem is uncharacteristic, and it brings him into a nearer association to Spenser, via his poetry of Platonic allegory, than is usual in his work; but it is an association that is complicated by the simultaneous presence of Milton.

Ruoff notes Potts’s tracing of the connection between the Ode and Spenser’s two wedding songs. But he does not cite her further demonstration of Wordsworth’s indebtedness to Spenser’s Hymne in Honour of Love and Hymne of Heavenly Love. The former has a significance more striking than are the Ode’s resemblances to the wedding songs, providing the image of the glorious child, who in Spenser is the infant Love. Some serious and fascinating inversion is at work here, as Wordsworth’s child enjoys ‘untam’d pleasures’ (l. 125), whilst Spenser’s can ‘tame’ lions and tigers (l. 46) and Wordsworth’s child becomes entrapped by ‘shades of the prison house’ (l. 67), whilst Spenser’s creates the world out of ‘Chaos ugly prison’ (l. 58). He passes through ‘the world that was not till he did it make’ (l. 75), as Wordsworth’s child was once ‘moving about in worlds not realiz’d’ (l. 148). As Potts notes, Spenser’s child is blind, and his course is described in terms of the sun. Most noticeably of all, we find ‘the paradox of the infant Love’ (‘Spenserian and Miltonic Influences’, p. 611), ‘yet a chyld, renewing still thy yeares, / And yet the eldest of the heavenly Peares’ (ll. 55-56), anticipating Wordsworth’s child who, as the lines used as an epigraph from 1815 onwards tell us, ‘is father of the man’.

In Spenser’s next hymn, Heavenly Love, the poet regrets his earlier poetical ‘follies’, his ‘lewd layes’ (ll. 12, 8), and turns his thoughts to the true ‘god of Love, high heavens king’ (l. 7), transforming pagan Eros into Christ. Born as an infant human, Christ too is paradoxical, being (even at the same time as he is not, according to the Trinity) ‘Our Father’. Spenser not only platonizes Love into Christ, but transforms also the myth of the soul’s birth into physical form and the material world, in a microcosmic representation of a major cultural development. As Wordsworth would have read in Beausobre’s Introduction to the Reading of the Holy Scriptures, which he studied at Cambridge:
the Jews began to hellenize ... they also embraced some of
the opinions of the Greek philosophers, as the transmigration
of souls ... we find some steps of this notion even in the New
Testament, as in St. Luke xvi. 23 ... and in St. John iv. 2. where
we find an allusion to the praeeistence, and transmigation
of souls. (p. 14)

But Christianity also appropriated the notion of pre-existence more radically. Its new form was
the incarnation of Christ, who, 'being of one substance with the father', pre-existed that human
incarnation.

Potts draws a parallel between 'the life of the Heavenly Child from cratch to cross'
and Wordsworth's human child who 'goes from cradle to grave' ('Spenserian and Miltonic
Influences', p. 612), but this is really just to say that each poem is concerned with a life span,
for it is the difference between the conclusions with which she is concerned: 'whereas in the
earlier poem the crucifixion arouses the penitential tears and thought, the meanest flower that
blows gives the later poet thoughts that are too deep for tears'. But these tears, as Potts herself
explains (see below, p. 197), are themselves inherited from Spenser, and Spenser's child
becomes Wordsworth's by means of a Spenserian process.

Ruoff notes in his discussion of Resolution and Independence that 'when we speak of
metamorphic figuration, Spenser is the English poet whose example comes to mind' (p. 150).
In the Ode, Wordsworth's use of the Platonic myth - the idea of the soul's pre-existence - is
accompanied by a metaphoricity, that is itself a transformation of Spenser's. Wordsworth's
metamorphic process is an inverted allegory, a kind of backwards platonizing of the
supernatural - of the Christian religion that has itself been influenced by Platonism - into the
natural, so that the heavenly child becomes human again. Wordsworth engages with a whole
series of ideas that have blended into one another, and tries to adjust them once more: 'the birth
of the god which Wordsworth celebrates is his, and anyman's, rather than the birth of Christ ...
Wordsworth's ecstasy of contemplation traces the descent to earth of the god who is man'.

Milton's three poems, On the Morning of Christ's Nativity (the opening of which
Levinson thought the Ode might, at one remove, echo - see note 22 above), 'Upon the
Circumcision', and 'The Passion', mark the stages from birth to death as Spenser's and
Wordsworth's poems do, each repeating the 'heavenly infant' motif (see the heading to this
section). At his birth, Milton says, Christ

28 Frances Ferguson, Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit (New Haven & London: Yale
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.
(Nativity ll. 13-14)

Here again we find analogues for Wordsworth's 'imperial palace' and 'prison-house', not coincidentally, but because the incarnation borrows the images of the platonic myth. Stanza five of the Ode describes the infant's earliest birth, and though it is the start of the descent into the prison-house it is still glorious. The child sets out, 'from the East', attended by his 'Star', which 'cometh from afar'. In his travelling, he resembles the magi who come 'star-led' 'from far upon the eastern road' (Nativity ll. 23, 22). Milton rejoices that the child 'laid aside' 'that glorious form' (ll. 12, 8), though in 'The Circumcision' his joy is more pensive, as he reflects that Christ:

Emptied his glory, even to nakedness
(ll. 20)

Wordsworth's child comes too from 'glory' to 'nakedness' (ll. 64, 63), and he 'travel[s]' as 'Nature's Priest', on a journey that is at once like the magi's, and that of Christ, that 'sovrain priest', who 'poor fleshly tabernacle entered' ('The Passion' ll. 15, 17). Milton's poet compares himself (competes with) the magi, hastening to present the gift of his song before the magi arrive at Bethlehem. Wordsworth's child is like the magi too, marveling at the child's arrival, the soul's incarnation. But that child is himself, the soul is his own: he is at once a type of the magi - 'star-led' from the East - and of Christ, for whom the star shone.

To complete the nativity scene we should dwell for a moment on the shepherds. So conventional is their metamorphosis into priests and poets - Lycidas, for one, is all three - that 'shepherd' is almost a dead metaphor for 'poet'. The nativity elides the pastoral and the Christian. 'In the Angels Song to Shepheards at our Saviours Nativitie Pastorall Poesie seems consecrated', wrote Michael Drayton to 'the Reader of his Pastorals' (1619). Everywhere in the early English pastoralists the nature of the relationship between classical and Christian pastoral is a critical point. Drayton, for example, reveres Virgil's Bucolicks (from the fourth eclogue of which Wordsworth borrowed the epigraph for his Ode, 'Paulo maiora cananmus'):

the Blessing which came in them to the testimonal Majestie
of the Christian Name, out of SIBYLS Moniments, cited before
Christ's Birth, must ever make VIRGIL venerable with me.

29 Drayton here praises Spenser as 'the prime Pastoralist of England', and is obviously influenced by him. Wither admired Drayton, as did Milton, who has been found to echo him (see Joseph A. Berthelot, Michael Drayton (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 144). Wordsworth read Drayton in Anderson's British Poets, III.
When Christian pastoral replaces pagan, striking the oracles dumb, it may be because pagan mythology was misguided or evil – as some of its deities, in Paradise Lost, are ‘really’ fallen angels – or because that mythology is a benevolent, obscure revelation of Christianity, which supersedes, rather than denies it. “E. K.’s” gloss to Spenser’s Shepheard’s Calender troubles over precisely this point, as concerns the god Pan. In the commentary to the ‘Maye Aeclogue’ (introduced into this discussion by Schulman (see above p. 189)), a story is told of one Thamus, who was instructed to cry out that Pan was dead, at the moment that Christ died. ‘Pan,’ says E. K., is understood by some to be:

the great Satanas, whose kingdome at that time was by Christ conquered, the gates of hell broken up, and death by death delivered to eternall death, (for at that time, as he sayth, all Oracles surceased, and enchaunted spirits, that were wont to delude the people, thenceforth held theyr peace).

But he himself prefers to think that Pan’s death was not caused by, but is to be identified as, Christ’s, since Pan

is Christ, the very God of all shepheards, which calleth himselfe the greate and good shepherd. The name is most rightly (me thinkes) applyed to him, for Pan signifieth all or omnipotent, which is onely the Lord Jesus.

Milton, who banishes many of the pagan gods mercilessly in On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity, makes a kind of fond exception for Pan, adopting instead the association:

Full little thought [the shepherds] then,  
That the mighty Pan  
Was kindly come to live with them below  
(ll. 88-90)

Wordsworth’s ‘happy Shepherd Boy’ (I. 35) is replaced by the child of stanza 7, a very real child who plays at being an adult, a grotesque ‘pigmy’, yet is at the same time a ‘philosopher’. The shepherd is at once prophet (seer), priest and poet, the heavenly infant who is the child Eros, a newly embodied soul, or Christ incarnate: Wordsworth’s naturalizing and subjectivizing process embraces this chain of allegorical identifications, and makes them all the image of himself, ‘Wordsworth is ... writing a nativity ode upon himself” (Ferguson, p. 103).

This is not the only poem in which Wordsworth performs an apotheosis of the self. In The Prelude, Robin Jarvis shows, Wordsworth applies to himself phrases which in Milton are descriptive of the deity (Jarvis, pp. 152-53 & 173-74). Most notably, the poem ends with a declaration that Wordsworth and Coleridge, ‘Prophets of Nature’ (XIII 442), inspired by truth,
will teach their fellow men, alluding to Michael's description of the messiah (Paradise Lost XII 485-90). As Stuart Peterfreund explains, 'The speaker of Book XIII of The Prelude may be Adam seeing the visions conjured up by Michael in Books XI-XII of Paradise Lost, but he is also Christ regaining Paradise for Adam "and his chosen sons"' ('Wordsworth, Milton, and the End of Adam's Dream', p. 17). Jarvis presents this in Bloomian terms: 'This large metalepsis gives Wordsworth priority over Milton by representing him as the "one greater man" of whom Milton sings: not only was he around before Milton, but he comes to fulfil Milton's prophecy' (pp. 152-53). But Wordsworth might only allude to Milton because his is the most important poetic representation of Christ; Wordsworth's two later, explicit descriptions of Christ are both Miltonic, though neither is suggestive of a battle with Milton. In 'Thanksgiving After Childbirth' (Ecclesiastical Sonnets III 27) Christ is

\[
\text{the Power who left His throne on high,}
\text{And deigned to wear the robe of flesh we wear}
\text{(ll. 1-2)}
\]

In 'Ejaculation' (Ecclesiastical Sonnets III 46) the same 'Power ... came'

\[
\text{In filial duty, clothed with love divine,}
\text{That made His human tabernacle shine}
\text{(ll. 1-3)}
\]

It is difficult to say whether, in 1804 and 1805, Wordsworth illustrates primarily a desire to outshine the Milton who is identified with his own redeemer (as Wordsworth appeals, 'Oh! raise us up, return to us again' ('London, 1802')), or whether he demonstrates what Fairchild, as I discussed in Chapter 3, calls 'the highest romantic aspiration: removal of all boundaries and limits which distinguish man from God', an impulse towards 'self-deification' (p. 167). Lisa Low sees Milton to be more subtly implicated in this phenomenon:

Because he has no choice, the Romantic poet substitutes his mind for God. Both Milton and Marvell foreshadow this substitution, Milton when he asks the 'Celestial Light' to 'Shine inward' ... and Marvell when he calls for the annihilation of 'all that's made' to the preferable 'green Thought in a green shade'.

Perhaps Wordsworth's attribution of the angelic 'Godlike power' of Paradise Lost VI 301 to 'the immortal soul' (Prelude IV 156) is as much an expression of his need – whilst still

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30 Lisa Low, 'Marvell through Keats and Stevens: The Early Modern Meditation Poem', in Low & Harding, pp. 241-57 (p. 244).
resistant to conventional religion – for a transcendent solution, as it is a challenge to Milton.\textsuperscript{31} Batho argues that, in line with his High-Church upbringing, Wordsworth 'turned instinctively to that doctrine which sees in the Incarnation rather than in the Crucifixion the essence of the Atonement'.\textsuperscript{32} The Platonic tradition makes it easy to interpret that incarnation as the human soul's. Schenck relates the two father figures, Milton and God, in a particularly interesting way, seeing the Ode as both careerist and self-mythologizing: the ritual death of the imagination 'earns' an epithalamic / nativity celebration. Wordsworth 'borrowed as well from ... [Milton] the watery context of incarnation, the baptismal sea-change which the dying god suffers and experiences' (p. 134).

\textit{v}

\textbf{marriage and salvation}

'A wedding or a festival, 
A mourning or a funeral'

\textit{(Ode ll. 93-94)}

'Within Spenser's wedding-songs Wordsworth has discovered the type of his own spiritual destiny' argues Potts, noting Wordsworth's use of Spenser's term 'spousal verse' in the 'Prospectus' to \textit{The Excursion} ('Spenserian and Miltonic Influences', p. 608). Christ is the bridegroom of celestial Jerusalem; Wordsworth's mind, of Nature. In \textit{Epithalamion} the poet celebrates his own marriage, and in \textit{Prothalamion} the sight of another rouses him from despondency. The latter is what Wordsworth attempts in stanza 4 of the \textit{Ode}, as he tries unsuccessfully to sympathize with a scene of flower-gathering, like Spenser's. The former, the joy of his own 'marriage', is what is attempted at the end, and what Wordsworth says he has achieved, introducing the language of love:

\begin{quote}
And oh ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,  
Think not of any severing of our loves!  
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might …

I love the Brooks which down their channels fret  
\textit{(ll. 190-92, 195)}
\end{quote}

Each of the three elegiac subjects – the beloved, the miseries of a poetic vocation, and the dead

\textsuperscript{31} A convincing account of such a change in Wordsworth's philosophical / theological position between 1802 and 1804 is Alan Grob's, 'Wordsworth's \textit{Immortality Ode} and the Search for Identity', \textit{ELH} 32 (1965), 32-61.

friend – has a celebratory equivalent, the first of which is successful love, and marriage. Wordsworth’s conclusion, ‘Thanks to the human heart by which we live’ (l. 203), suggests a thoroughgoing humanization of the mythical elements, including the Christian. But Wordsworth cannot stop here. Spenser’s wedding songs close comfortably enough in celebration because they are occasional pieces, with specific interests. But Wordsworth’s Ode is not a spousal verse, but a transformation of erotic elegy, as of the other two kinds of pastoral. Were Spenser’s wedding poems to turn to wider reflection, the love which they celebrate would need to be sublimated into spiritual love, as it is in the second of the hymns to love, or (implicitly) in the Song of Songs, a model for Spenser. Spiritual love brings the promise of salvation, a rite of passage, for the soul, to set alongside the birth, marriage and death that are the subjects of Spenser’s and Milton’s poems, and all of which are named in the Ode. Wordsworth’s more-than-spousal verse must find its own salvation.

Allusion to Spenser’s Hymnes, furthermore, links the Ode to Milton’s three poems on Christ’s life. It is impossible to determine the nature of this link. It might be contingent – Milton’s poems come chronologically between Spenser’s and Wordsworth’s – or more ‘definite’, in a general way, since Milton was so thoroughly known to Wordsworth, closer to him in thought and style, and must often have been involved as a kind of mediator for, or route from, Spenser. The relation might even have been apparent to Wordsworth’s mind. It seems unnecessary to wonder whether Milton’s presence was ‘intentional’ since, given the intimacy of Spenser’s and Milton’s poems, and the way in which they become inextricable when these huge issues and conventions are engaged with, that presence is ultimately unavoidable. It remains for Wordsworth to find a conclusion equivalent to that which follows the Fall and the incarnation.

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33 The second is the comfort that poetry itself offers to the suffering poet, as discussed by Daniel’s Musophilus and Wither’s Philarete. Just as the three elegiac losses are figures of one another, so this consolation often metamorphoses into the quasi-erotic delights of the muse, or the ‘fame’ that constitutes a kind of immortality. Heath remarks similarly of the eighteenth-century spring elegists that ‘more than once in such poems the moment of [the rejected lover’s] despair is extended into a metaphor for the fate of man’ (p. 124).

34 And alluded to, curiously, by Wordsworth in ‘Written in March: while resting on the bridge at the foot of brother’s water’: ‘The rain is over and gone’ (l. 20). The Ode was begun on 27 March; this poem was written on 16 April 1802.
Fairchild argues that

Wordsworth ignores the Christian scheme of redemption so pointedly that one may as well say that he denies it. Having broken the chain of natural piety, man in a sense has fallen; but he can regain paradise simply by recognizing his position as part of the universal goodness. There is no room for the Cross. (p. 170)

As I showed in Chapter 4 however, whatever Wordsworth's religious beliefs, he did not neglect the place of redemption in the scheme which is his philosophical model, but attributed positive spiritual power to human suffering. In the Ode, Potts argues that 'Wordsworth's "thoughts . . . too deep for tears" recall Spenser's line "Melt into teares, and grone in grieved thought"' (An Hymne of Heavenly Love l. 252). Dorothy Wordsworth echoed this line when she wrote that, reading Book XI of Paradise Lost, she and William too 'melted into tears' (Journals, 2 February 1802). Potts suggests that Wordsworth likewise conflates the two poems:

it seems to me probable that when Wordsworth modifies Spenser's 'tears' and 'thought' ... he has observed Adam's demeanour at the vision of fratricide or lazard-house ... compassion quelled

His best of Man, and gave him up to tears
A space, till firmer thoughts restrained excess

The phrase applied by Dorothy to the experience of Paradise Lost, 'melted into tears', appears twice in Wordsworth's poetry, and both times its Spenserian context – Christ's redemptive passion – is brought into play. I discussed its occurrence in The White Doe of Rylstone in Chapter 4. The earlier instance is in Peter Bell, where Peter, tortured by memories of his past wickedness, hears the methodist preacher crying 'Repent, repent' (ll. 1196, 1210). Redemption, most often effected through a person's own suffering, has an important place in Wordsworth's conception of human experience.

In his most famous lyric, the daffodil, traditionally an emblem of mortality as in two poems by Herrick, becomes an emblem of a kind of immortality. Lacking the faith in an afterlife that would conquer time future, Wordsworth instead redeems time past, finding that it

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35 'Spenserian and Miltonic Influences', pp. 614-15. The lines from Paradise Lost are XI 496-98. Stein (see above, note 1) found Wither's Fair Virtue, Anne of Winchilsea's 'Nocturnal Reverie' and Coleridge's 'Ode to Tranquillity', to be plausible sources for Wordsworth's final line, as well.
36 References are to the Reading Text of the 1799 MSS in Peter Bell, ed by John E. Jordan (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985). See Bewell, pp. 119-41, for an elucidation of this poem's multi-faceted biblical references.
37 This is discussed in Chapter 8.
is not lost, but lives ever-present in the memory. The Ode's 'meanest flower', similarly, is a
startling revision of Herrick's reflection:

Your Sister-hoods may stay,
And smile here for your houre;
But dye ye must away:
Even as the meanest Flower.

(To a Bed of Tulips' II. 5-8)

Wordsworth intends memory to be the agent of salvation, to complete the drama of Fall and
incarnation, and provide the triumphant consolation for this elegiac ode. He argues that the
memory provides a source of strength, from which, joined with the 'soothing thoughts' and
'philosophic mind' that come with maturity, he achieves the marriage (of the 'human heart' to
nature). Engaging with spiritual as well as temporal pastoral - through Lycidas, Paradise
Lost, An Hymne of Heavenly Love - Wordsworth naturalizes it: the Fall and the incarnation
are no more than a human child's progress. This naturalizing, a Platonism in reverse, renders
heavenly love human again, so that a marriage of mind and nature, like the marriages of
Spenser's wedding songs, is a recompense. The funereal severing is compensated by a greater
union, that will not be severed.

But this is a very limited kind of redemption. The memory's gift precedes, indeed
makes possible, the marriage, redeeming time in that it saves enough - a memory of a memory
- for a consolation (not a salvation) to be built upon. And even here, in this sophisticated
combination of the memory's redemption of time and man's marriage to Nature, Wordsworth
remains unsatisfied, because at the same time as he naturalizes, he uncharacteristically
employs the mythic in its own terms, and the myth demands a resolution on the supernatural
level. It is in the attempt to satisfy this demand, to synthesize the worldly and the other-
worldly, the temporal and the eternal, that Wordsworth falsifies his own, humanized,
redemptive scheme.

Wordsworth's poem is related to the whole story of man's Fall and redemption, by its
allusions to the last two books of Paradise Lost. Those to Book XI were noted above, but,
most importantly of all, as Anne Williams notes, the phrase 'Seer blest' comes from Book XII

38 Wordsworth remembers that he has forgotten. Ruoff notes that 'St Augustine's Confessions is the
locus classicus for the paradox of memory' (p. 264), and backs him up with Freud, who said,
similarly, that forgetting is an active process. St. Augustine is interesting also for his approach to
Christianity by means of Platonism. Wordsworth's Ode takes the same course: from the myth,
through Milton's telling of the Christian drama, and on to an attempted naturalized resolution.
Williams argues that ‘once it is recognized, the Ode’s pervasive undertone of Miltonic allusion transforms our sense of the Ode’s coherence’ and, engaging with the dispute over whether the Ode offers a sufficient consolation or not, she proposes that ‘the Ode’s order and unity are more than merely adequate’ (p. 1). Wordsworth retells, not just the story of the Fall, but the story of the Fortunate Fall. Certainly, this is what Wordsworth is attempting, but I must raise the same objection to Williams’s argument that Helen Vendler raises to Trilling’s famous essay. Trilling finds the conclusion sufficient, but Vendler questions the logic of his doing so, arguing that Trilling too easily accepts Wordsworth’s assertions at face value: ‘Trilling deprives us of any reason to believe in [the poem’s] assertions. Surely, even in poetry, perhaps especially in poetry, we do not believe assertions because they are asserted’. That Wordsworth patterns his argument after Milton’s, or, rather, after this element of Milton’s, is what renders it ultimately unconvincing. Wordsworth’s is not a fortunate fall, because he attempts to achieve what can for him be only the wrong recompense. He is constrained to do this by his too-explicit use of the myth, and by the overwhelming presence of Milton and the Bible.

There are three distinct attitudes that one might take to Milton’s version of Adam’s Fall, all of which Milton himself seems to have felt at moments – all, one might say, are ‘in’ the poem, though the ages have neglected or sustained them differently over time. The first attitude is the melancholic pastoral feeling that the loss of Eden is irrevocably tragic. This is Adam’s and Eve’s first response – though in them it is mingled with anger – but its melancholy note sounds frequently:

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40 Helen Vendler, ‘Lionel Trilling and the Immortality Ode’, Salmagundi 41 (1978), 66-86 (p. 69). Yet Vendler actually agrees that the consolation is sufficient. She demonstrates the way in which Wordsworth makes it so by patterning the language and imagery in a series of ‘wounds’ and ‘cures’ (p. 79). Each point of loss is answered, by a superior gain. Trilling erred, she argues, by treating the aesthetic as secondary and ‘truth’ (philosophic argument) as primary (p. 85). But one could argue that the ‘aesthetic’ – the poet’s way of making a point other than (or even running contrary to) logical, linear argument – is no more necessarily convincing than is the ‘systematic thought’ in which Vendler refuses to put her faith. The poet’s art might as easily be thought of as a form of specious rhetoric – convincing us of something by means of its ingenuity – as is philosophic deduction. Ruoff agrees that ‘there is nothing naturally curative or restorative in linguistic arts of analogy’ (p. 276), and yet he too finds that Wordsworth’s resolution – which he sees as a consciously-made choice – is convincing. Both he and Vendler suggest, however, that there is room for readers to take sides on this issue. For some, ‘the pulls of pastoral and myth remain too strong’ (Ruoff, p. 287), whilst others ‘who prefer the stoic and reparatory adult tone of the ending may agree with Trilling in rebuking the elegiac partisans’ (Vendler, p. 81).
O much deceived, much failing, hapless Eve,
Of thy presumed return! Event perverse!
Thou never from that hour in Paradise
Found'st either sweet repast, or sound repose
(IX 404-07)

It might be emblematized by the rose garland that fades and drops from Adam’s hand when Eve returns to him, fallen.

It is to this attitude that one regresses if neither of the alternatives are embraced. These are two variants of a faith that the Fall was fortunate, prompting the redemption which restores immortality, but in a superior form, as in the image of a circle that ends where it began, but on a higher plane. The first is the doctrinal reasoning of the official ‘felix culpa’: the magnanimity of Christ’s sacrifice is a glory which we ought not wish to be without. In the second interpretation of the Fall’s fortuity, the restoration of Paradise will be a perfection greater than Edenic innocence, since it will be won by means of, rather than through the exclusion of, experience. Though this can be seen as just the second element of the Fortunate Fall, it can also, as in an age that does not believe in Christ (and is not fearful of the fires of hell), be seen as the Fortunate Fall. Experience is valued for its own sake, as superior to innocence, even if no redemption is to follow.

Both these strains are in Milton. The first is taught to Adam by Michael, in his vision of Christ in Book XII. But the second is there too, in the excitement of Adam’s and Eve’s departure, and may be inferred from other works of Milton’s such as Areopagitica, in which man is encouraged to test his own virtues at risk of error, and censorship – analogous to God’s forbidding of the fruit – becomes itself a kind of evil. It can be argued that the rules for fallen man are different to those for Adam and Eve, since they were ‘sufficient’, not needing to seek out the scattered limbs of Osiris (or truth), for perfection was then intact. But the impossibility of comprehending the prelapsarian state has always overshadowed Milton’s creation, threatening its argument that Eden was perfect and sustainable, and it is this contention, that the Fall was inevitable, even desirable, in its own terms, that has captured

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41 The precise interpretation of ‘felix culpa’ (the phrase originates in the ‘Exsultet’, part of the Liturgy for Holy Saturday, in the Roman Missal) has itself always been contentious. The Fall is either fortunate in an absolute sense, our redeemed state being superior to our original, unfallen state, or else it is fortunate in a more limited sense: God’s contingency plan isn’t necessarily better than his original plan. For an account of the early history of this idea, and the different interpretations of it, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, ‘Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall’, ELH 4 (1937), 161-79.
centuries of readers and writers. Hence Johnson's Abyssinian Paradise was ultimately boring for the restless Rasselas. Perhaps it was no true Paradise, but then Paradise is unknowable, other than in a state of potential, irresistible, desirable dissolution. Death was always in Arcadia, or, if it wasn't, then Arcadia was stifling.

Psychology recreated Eden as the unselfconscious state of childhood and Paradise's inevitable transformation was explained. Stasis is unnatural and undesirable, because the Fall is the growth into self-consciousness. Eden is the *hortus conclusus* that is the mother, God the overpowering father whose protection is a jealous guarding, a chaining of Prometheus - who attempted to further man's independence - to the rock. The father's tyrannical side must be thwarted, his kinder parenthood coaxed into action. It was this recognition that prompted Empson's indignant complaint, which knowingly imitates the tone of a justifiably petulant child:

if God is good, that is, if he is the kind of teacher who wants to produce an independent-minded student, then he will love [Eve] for eating the apple.

This is the modern attitude, in which there is no redemption, but no hellfires either and to regret the fall into experience is to succumb to nostalgia, melancholy, and regression. This is the attitude which will take worldly consolations - the delight of the marriage celebration - for what they are worth.

This is the only sense in which Wordsworth might find the Fall fortunate, and Williams believes that he does so:

The philosophic mind, the supreme Wordsworthian reward, has, unlike the child's mind, the capacity to grow and to change, to accommodate external realities ... The epistemological revolution, the rise of empiricism manifest in the Romantic ethos, now finds most convincing a truth that is grounded in human experience rather than being the testimony of divine revelation. (pp. 4, 7)

Such is Wordsworth's naturalized resolution, the marriage inspired by Spenser, performed in the realm of temporal, human pastoral. But it does not satisfy the transcendental reachings of

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42 Milton's entertaining of the idea that the expulsion from Eden was necessary and good might be considered an anachronism, but Lovejoy notes that 'the view that the primeval state was not that in which man was intended to remain, but merely a phase of immaturity to be transcended, had ancient and respectable supporters' (p. 163, n. 2). Besides which, if the biblical story is a true myth, a metaphor for human growth, then there is every likelihood that Milton, however orthodox his chosen theological position, would, as a person, feel the virtues of 'leaving Eden' even as he regretted 'the Fall'. Most people's regressive impulses are balanced by a sense that it is good to have grown up.

Ruoff argues that the ending's 'dismissing gesture ... places [the] great myth in its proper perspective. The myth is reduced to a speculative instrument which has helped to uncover a truth more fundamental that the teleological certitudes it announced' (p. 262). But I do not find this dismissal to be so happily performed. The weight of so many sources and analogues promising salvation, eternal life, Paradise regained, and Wordsworth's careful reworking of them up to this apocalyptic moment, will not allow such a dismissal. Rather, the resolution is compromised by its uncomfortable coupling with the myth of immortality. The sense that the soul came 'from afar', from beyond this world, leads Wordsworth to claim a 'faith that looks through death' (I. 188). This faith is not accounted for by the human argument of memory and maturity, the belief that it is here, 'in the very world which is the world / Of all of us' that 'we find our happiness, or not at all' (Prelude X 725-27). Its inclusion betrays Wordsworth's dissatisfaction with his own conclusions thus far. It is this faith, effectively a second, and contradictory ending, that prompts the 1815 title, 'Intimations of Immortality...', and it is at the crisis of that use of Milton's phrase, 'seer blest', by means of which Wordsworth attempts to synthesize his two endings, that 'the poem is fractured'.

Williams amalgamates Wordsworth's reference to Adam's vision – the vision of Book XII, which culminates in the second coming – with this valuing of experience, growth and change for its own sake, granting the triumphant conclusion of the latter to the method of the former. This is the amalgamation that Wordsworth attempts, but it fails, because the Miltonic model seeks redemption, salvation, and a restoration of the paradisal state (transformed into something even better) whilst the modern attitude is to accept the loss, and not seek to return to

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44 The dense paralleling to Spenser's *Hymnes*, Milton's poems on Christ's life, and *Paradise Lost* are supplemented by biblical references, in the case of two motifs in particular. For the privileged child, Woodring points to Isaiah 11. 6, Genesis 42. 22 and Mark 10. 14: 'a little child shall lead them', 'do not sin against the child', 'for of such is the kingdom of God' (p. 90). The 'clouds of glory', secondly, suggest those, for example, of Numbers 11. 25 and Mark 9. 7 (God talking to Moses and to some of the disciples), by which God's too-powerful brightness is veiled from man's sight.

45 This phrase is Florence G. Marsh's ('Wordsworth's 'Ode': Obstinate Questionings', in *Wordsworth: The 1807 Poems. A Casebook*, ed by Alun R. Jones (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 173-85 (first published in *SIR* 5 (1965-66), 219-30). She reaches this conclusion by arguing that Wordsworth 'reconciles himself to private, unique loss by an argument based on loss of a different sort' (pp. 180-81), seeing the explicit use of the myth (and, I would say, the relations to those influential works which exemplify that myth) as an insurmountable problem.

46 Just a few lines before Adam addresses Michael as 'seer blest', the angel describes how Christ will appear 'in the clouds ... / In glory ... to dissolve / Satan' (II. 545-47), and initiate the millennium. These are 'clouds of glory' with which Wordsworth cannot compete.
Eden. The Ode's attempt to value experience is hampered by a regressive yearning after what has been lost. Ruoff argues that, unlike Vaughan, Wordsworth does not desire 'to travell back / And tread again that ancient track' (p. 256). But the desired journey to the shore of 'that immortal sea' (l. 166) is a backward one. Though Ruoff suggests that 'the best gloss for stanza X of the Ode is Book XII of Paradise Lost' (p. 269), he does not note the 'seer blest' allusion in stanza 8. Adam's and Eve's stoic optimism comes only after they have been promised salvation. Ruoff praises Wordsworth for achieving it without a revelation, quoting Peter Manning: 'the poem exploits the resonances of Christian faith without committing itself to belief, to the conviction that would lessen its human uncertainty' (p. 275). But Wordsworth does not relinquish that faith, or the need for it, and commit himself to human uncertainty, so willingly as Ruoff suggests. He audaciously tries to elide the two, to uphold and dismiss the myth at one and the same time, to present 'human uncertainty' as 'the faith that looks through death' – the 'intimations of immortality' that are revealed by a 'seer blest', but he has no restoration to promise.

Wordsworth attempts to revise the invocation to Book III of Paradise Lost, to reach a secularized, but analogous, conclusion. But his humanized scheme finds no equivalent to the closed circle of Christian myth with its perfect restoration. Whilst Milton's 'celestial light' amply compensates for his blindness, 'Wordsworth may be said to know the illumination of celestial light only and precisely because he has lost it' (McNally, p. 32). Trying, but failing, to create a naturalized redemption, and refusing to give Eden up for a better fallen state, Wordsworth cannot find his happiness other than by looking backwards, and regresses to a longing for childhood. He argues that experience is the better state, but he feels that the Fall was not fortunate, but tragic. This is why in the end the Ode's most intimate relation, though it is one that Wordsworth may be loath to admit to, is Lycidas after all. The flight into 'bardic voice' (Williams, p. 7), with its grand myth, and its confident first person plural, is a bid to

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47 Wordsworth's use of the paradox of the blind child-prophet implies a conclusion that several critics explicate: the adult is in a sense happier than the child because the child was unaware of his own bliss. 'The child is enthralled by his own immortality' (McNally, p. 30); 'if the child were able to answer, he would no longer know the answer' (Ruoff, p. 250). The child has no self-consciousness, 'his “heaven-born freedom” is not realized until lost' (McNally, p. 30). But 'what the child cannot do, the poet can do' (Vendler, p. 69), that is, know happiness, even though it is known only by its absence. If nothing exists for man until it is known by him, then Paradise (unconscious innocence) did not exist until it was lost. This argument seems to be anticipated in the description of the child's enslavement by his own immortality (stanza 8), but this is in the despairing section of the poem, just before its nadir at line 131; Wordsworth never draws this conclusion.
escape elegy completely, but 'the ode plangently also awakens into failure, and into the 
creative mind's protest against time's tyranny' (Anxiety, p. 9), not because it is overshadowed,
as a poem, by Milton, but because it cannot match Milton's metaphysics in its own, human,
scheme.
CHAPTER 8: WORDSWORTH IN THE GARDEN OF POETRY

Wordsworth's flower poems are amongst his most intertextual, and complicate the study of his allusiveness in several, contrasting ways. On the one hand, floral metaphors have been used so often that images of flowers bring with them connotations that cannot be escaped. In the first part of this chapter I will consider a flower poem in which such metaphorical meanings seem intertextually to insinuate themselves. Questions of intention, conscious or unconscious, are outweighed by the mass of cultural accretion, as literary relationships multiply themselves. But poets have often been aware of this phenomenon, and have sought to manipulate it, so that those very metaphorical suggestions which are so common as to be inescapably present, come simultaneously to be used with extra awareness. I will demonstrate in the second section, Wordsworth's self-reflexive use of flower allusions, particularly in the 'Fancy' poems, and the model of literary relations towards which they tend. Thirdly this model has implications beyond its own world of literary relations. In poems of the 'Imagination', and in Wordsworth's exploration of the epitaph, his allusions to his precursors' flower poems contribute to his wider philosophical explorations.

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‘Look at the fate of summer flowers,
Which blow at daybreak, droop ere even-song;
And, grieved for their brief date, confess that ours, ...
Is not so long!’
(‘To —’ ll. 1-3, 6)

In 'Foresight' (1802) the catalogue of flowers, which so often prompts delicate observation or elegiac reflection, is made trite by the tone of petty didacticism. David Ferry's quip that the moral of 'Nutting' is "keep off the grass" seems almost true of 'Foresight'. Classed, from 1815, in the 'Childhood' section, this might be a poem for children, pompously teaching them a little lesson about how to behave in the garden, rather in the way that 'Struwwel Peter' was to teach Victorian children not to suck their thumbs, if by a threat rather than a 'promise' (l. 32). Indeed, the full title and subtitle, 'Foresight, Or the Charge of a Child to his younger Companion', suggests a staid and pretty piece of Victoriana, but in fact the subtitle was removed in the edition of 1836, the year before Victoria's accession, and the Wordsworth who

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1 Quoted by Thomson in 'Wordsworth's Lucy of “Nutting”', p. 295.
2 Heinrich Hoffmann's Struwwel Peter: Cautionary Tales in Verse was published anonymously in an English translation in 1848 (German edition, 1845).
wrote it was far from his Victorian incarnation, nor was he a father, other than of a daughter he had not yet met. Perhaps then, as with 'Nutting', "keep off the grass" is a metaphorical moral.

There was no new subtitle, but the poem had, in Wordsworth’s private circle, a kind of informal alternative title, 'Children gathering flowers', as used by Dorothy in her journal entry for 28 April 1802. Seven years later, when Wordsworth sketched a plan for the classification of his poems in a letter to Coleridge, he outlined 'Poems relating to childhood':

The class would begin with the simplest dawn of the affections or faculties, as the Foresight, or Children gathering flowers ...

By the time of this letter the poem had already been published, in the *Poems, in Two Volumes* of 1807, with the cautionary-tale-style subtitle, yet Wordsworth favours the alternative here, repeating, 'this class would contain Gathering Flowers, Pet Lamb, Alice Fell, Lucy Gray'.

In 'gathering flowers' I hear an echo of Marvell:

But O young beauty of the Woods,
Whom Nature courts with fruits and flow’rs,
Gather the Flow’rs, but spare the Buds;
('A Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers' ll. 33-35)

‘Gathering flowers’ is an unremarkable phrase, and only an imprecise echo of Marvell. It is an exact repetition not of T. C., but of Proserpina, of whom more later. But the second half of Marvell’s line is remembered in ‘Foresight’ too, three times:

Strawberry blossoms, one and all,
We must spare them …
Only spare the strawberry-blossom! …
And for that promise spare the flower!
(ll. 3-4, 16, 32)4

Marvell begins by describing T. C. to a third party, ‘see with what simplicity / This nimph begins her golden daies!’ but gradually moves to address the girl herself, as Anne is addressed, and finally exhorts the child, 'spare the Buds' (l. 35).

The speakers have, on the surface, utterly dissimilar motives behind their advice. Wordsworth advises that strawberry-flowers, left growing, become a far greater reward – fruit. Marvell fears that T. C. (like her sister of the same name) might be ‘gathered’ like the flowers that she gathers, making use of an age-old and ubiquitous metaphor: 'All flesh is grass, and all

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4 In the 1807 three-stanza version, the second and third stanzas both ended 'Only spare the strawberry-blossom'.
the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass' (Isaiah 40. 6-7). Is Wordsworth too brooding on the likeness of spring flowers to short-lived humans? Could he have avoided doing so in a poem about flowers, given the powerful precedent of tradition, and, even if he could — intent on the little scenario at hand, unaware of his own echoes of Marvell — do not the connotations of flowers in so much poetry attach themselves to this poem regardless of the poet’s intentions?

Wordsworth does meditate on infant-death in another poem influenced by Marvell, 'To H. C. Six Years Old'. This poem, though its 'H. C.' seems to recall 'T. C.', is more often noted for its recollection of 'On a Drop of Dew' (as discussed in Chapter 2) since H. C., like 'the soul' in Marvell, is 'a dew-drop, which the morn brings forth, / Ill fitted to sustain unkindly shocks' (ll. 27-28). Wordsworth extraordinarily finds solace in the thought that, sooner than suffer life’s pain and grief, H. C. would 'slip in a moment out of life’. Echoing the title of one of Marvell’s poems and borrowing the central image of another, Wordsworth fuses their concerns, but transforms infant death into something desirably benign.

The emotional substance of ‘T. C.’ is reworked in ‘H. C.’, the prospect of flowers left, with a pretty and petty new moral, to ‘Foresight’. Perhaps, though, this division has not been and cannot be so neatly made. The shared relation to ‘T. C.’ brings ‘Foresight’ and ‘H. C.’ together. In ‘H. C.’ the dew-drop, equally beautiful and transitory, takes the place of flowers.

With the mention of the violets that wither, death creeps into ‘Foresight’, but is dispelled:

Daisies leave no fruit behind
When the pretty flowerets die;
Pluck them, and another year
As many will be blowing here.
(ll. 21-24)

It is only the death of flowers that is at issue, inconsequential because replacements will spring up. But this reassurance suggests the contrast, that Wordsworth leaves undrawn, to the death of Anne, who could not be so easily replaced.

Poetry’s floral emblems of mortality are innumerable. The most famous funereal flower list is perhaps that of Lycidas, where the primrose, violet and ‘daffodillies’ are all found. Wordsworth’s particular combination of flowers is well preceded. In Hamlet, as in ‘Foresight’, the ‘violets’ have ‘wither’d’ (IV v 184-85), whilst in Cymbeline Belarius comments on the bodies of Cloten and ‘Fidele’, ‘You were as flow’rs, now wither’d’
(IV ii 286). (In ‘Personal Talk’ which in the 1807 volumes was positioned two poems after ‘Foresight’, Wordsworth refers to ‘maidens withering on the stalk’ (l. 6), recalling Comus ll. 743-44, ‘like a neglected rose / It withers on the stalk’, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, i i 76-77, ‘the rose … / withering on the virgin thorn’). Cymbeline’s evil Queen, her flower-gathering entrance a perversion of the heroine’s motif (Marina’s first appearance is ‘with a basket of flowers’, to strew on her nurse Lychorida’s grave (Pericles IV i)), makes malignant use of ‘violets, cowslips, and … primroses’ (I v 83). The primrose, sharing the utmost frailty with the violet (in Lycidas it is the ‘primrose that forsaken dies’ (l. 142) and in The Winter’s Tale ‘pale primroses / … die unmarried’ (IV iv 122-23)) is very often paired with it, as in Wordsworth’s own favouring of a less famous flower, composed just two or three days after ‘Foresight’:

Primroses will have their glory;
Long as there are violets,
They will have a place in story
(‘To the Small Celandine’ ll. 4-6)

‘A place in story’ acknowledges the literariness of these flowers, which points to the incongruity between the supposed simple speech of the child of ‘Foresight’ and the literary experience lying behind his chosen examples, a gap which is that of the double child- and adult- meanings that make up the allegory. Called for only silently, this contrast is the more effective for its indirection, since the child would not make the comparison, and to frame his words with a wiser narration would be dully didactic. Perhaps, then, this metaphorical reading was at the forefront of the poet’s mind. Wordsworth’s children, as in ‘We Are Seven’ and ‘Anecdote for Fathers’, are seldom univocal, but speak a double language, in one sense simple and mistaken and in another profound and true. The child here is not mistaken but his simplicity might be consciously intended to have a solemn underside. On the other hand, if infant-death casts a shadow in ‘Foresight’, does it prompt a mixture of dread and hope as in ‘To H. C.’, and if so, is this feeling similarly or more dubiously motivated? Perhaps the indirection was unconsciously employed, a desire for Anne’s death compromising the more expected and reasonable dread, censoring the admission of it.

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5 For less famous analogues see Shawcross, John Milton and Influence, pp. 23-24.
Dorothy was directly involved in the writing of 'Foresight':

Wm. was in the orchard – I went to him – he worked away at his poem ['The Tinker'], though he was ill & tired – I happened to say that when I was a Child I would not have pulled a strawberry blossom. I left him, & wrote out the Manciple's Tale. At dinnertime he came in with the poem of 'Children gathering Flowers'.

(Journals, 28 April 1802)

This connection links 'Foresight' to the two preceding poems in 'Childhood': 'To a Butterfly' and 'The Sparrow's Nest'. The Dorothy who would not pull a strawberry-blossom is the Emmeline who 'feared to brush / The dust from off [the butterfly's] wings' and who was 'dreading, tho' wishing, to be near' the nest. Jared Curtis sums up 'Foresight', in its three-stanza version, as 'an attempt to recapture childhood responses to natural objects'. But even without the 'final eight lines, rather heavily moralistic in tone', this description is not so apt as it is for the butterfly and sparrow’s nest poems, which may be why, in 1807, 'Foresight' was in 'The Blind Highland Boy; With Other Poems' whilst the other two were both in 'Moods of my own Mind'. An equivalent poem would depict a girl who instinctively left the strawberry-blossoms, but, even though this was the very child that Dorothy professes to have been, 'Foresight' replaces this Emmeline with Anne who, about to pick the blossoms, is warned off by her elder brother. Curtis’s description of 'Foresight' as 'a poem linked to the lyrical ballads "We are Seven" and "Lucy Gray"' (p. 43) is more suggestive, but he leaves it unexplored. Dorothy’s relation to ‘Foresight’ is hazier than is her relation to the Emmeline poems. She is transfigured in a way closer to that of ‘Lucy’ in the unpublished opening of ‘Nutting’, the scenario of which is diminutively paralleled in ‘Foresight’. This poem is more interestingly concerned with immaturity and maturity, premature death and fruition, of a human kind: concerns not of childhood but of the adult.

Wordsworth fears that H. C. will be 'trailed along the soiling earth', but then trusts that 'at the touch of wrong', he will slip away. That 'touch' of 'soiling earth' is what the slumbering poet trusts that 'she' also cannot feel: 'the touch of earthly years'. The faith that opens 'A Slumber' is like that which comes as a comfort in 'To H. C.' But powerful impulses

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7 Wordsworth writes, in the 1809 letter to Coleridge quoted above, 'I am doubtful whether I should place the Butterfly and Sparrow’s nest [in 'Childhood'] or elsewhere', and considers beginning the 'Affections' section with them.

8 Until the subtitle – which Curtis tells us was added in 1804 (p. 74) – identified the speaker as male, the older child could just as well have been a girl, and this possibility is revived after 1836.
meet in the Lucy poems, the addition of sexual feeling (which also has a precedent in Marvell's poem), complicating both the fear of, and the desire for, the female beloved's death. Sexual feelings have deep associations with death: fear that the desired object will be taken by death, deathly fear of the desired one – that the sex-drive is a drive towards death. The desire for a beloved's death might indicate several things: a masochistic pleasure in grief, or a preparation for a grief that must one day come, by enacting the very event that is dreaded.

Flower poems enact the connection of death and sex. Milton's first draft of Lycidas's primrose line read, 'Bring the rathe primrose that unwedded dies / Colouring the pale cheek of unenjoyed love', and John Carey notes that

\[
\text{H. H. Adams \ldots thinks that the changes M. made in his draft of the flower-passage were intended partly to conceal his debt to Winter's Tale \ldots and partly to remove erotic elements which would be out of place in a funeral elegy. (p. 250)}
\]

In The Winter's Tale, Perdita will 'strew' her lover, 'Not like a corpse; or if – not to be buried, / But quick and in mine arms' (IV iv 131-32). Here, the combination of the funereal and the erotic does not suggest that they are involved. Florizel merely points out wittily that strewing flowers is a funeral activity as well as one of courtship. But these two rites of passage for which flowers are emblems do not remain distinct for long, and that they do share that emblem argues for their intimate association at a deep psychological level. Sex and death meet so often – as in Renaissance poets' sexual use of 'dying' – that there must be more going on than irresponsible, accidental linguistic play. The two metaphors of the flower, as sexuality and as mortality, were joined from the start. Sex is a reminder of death, whether for the reasons suggested above, or because it focuses on youth and beauty which are known to be transient, or because it is the creation of life, which is partnered by death.

The deeply known connection of sex and death precipitates the confusion of images of each with the other, acting as a catalyst to language's burgeoning play. Because this play happens over time, the critic who pursues it without historical reference – considering the whole diachrony of language's development rather than the synchronic moment of the poet's own place in time, with the meanings, or usages, of that time only – will produce readings that

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9 Carey notes further suggestions of influence: Jonson's 'Pan's Anniversary' and Spenser's 'April' in The Shepheardes Calender.

10 But Perdita herself is an emblem of winter's death and spring's return. Unlike T. C. and Anne, she magically dies as a baby girl – so it seems to her parents – yet also grows to fruitful maturity, like the child of 'Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower'.
really are the possession of language, independent of the poet. Though this may be a dubious practice, at least under the banner of literary criticism, the fact that it can be done is useful evidence of the way that language does accumulate connotation. The language of sex, or words that can have a sexual suggestiveness (like the word ‘suggestive’) is a fine example. David Ellis considers the danger of reading sex into *The Prelude*:

> the case for a sexual reading of the borrowed-boat episode depends very heavily on [Wordsworth’s] use of ‘lustily’. Although the dictionary refuses to allow this word sexual connotations (Wordsworth does not say that he dipped his oars into the lake lustfully), it is easy to see why it should have been felt to have them. Each critic makes of it what he will, but confidence in its reliability as a sexual indicator is weakened by Dorothy Wordsworth’s cheerful reference to her brother’s wife in 1810 as growing ‘fat and lusty’ (especially to anyone at all familiar with the two parties).  

‘Lusty’ may not ordinarily have meant to the Wordsworths what it means to us, but Wordsworth’s ‘lustily’ is not therefore necessarily innocent. Comparing Wordsworth’s poetic use to Dorothy’s use in her journal does not determine a simple set of connotations, identical in each writer’s practice. The physicality of the rowing episode, and the sense of it as a critical moment in the boy’s development, tie it to its related ‘lust’. That it did not mean ‘lustful’ does not mean that the relation would not have been felt, for, as Hagstrum says, ‘there is simply no intellectually honest way of excluding [sexuality] from so comprehensive a sensationalism as Wordsworth’s own literary and political criticism establishes’ (p. 82).

Added to the evidence of Wordsworth’s own sensual philosophy is his sensitivity to language. In their intuitive use of words, poets may anticipate meanings which, at a later stage, those words come more widely to adopt. Someone has to initiate this process, after all, and a poet seems a likely candidate. The mutation of meaning is a process in which the poet is involved, so that it is no easy task to determine the place of a poet’s use in the history of changing meaning; it has no fixed point. The poet is intimately involved in the nuances of his language’s meaning. Though neither sex nor death might be explicit in ‘Foresight’, both are

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12 George Steiner begins *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 2nd edn (Oxford & New York: OUP, 1992), with a consideration of this kind. In *Cymbeline*, Posthumus describes Iachimo as ‘yellow’. Though yellowness as cowardice was not a meaning ‘so far as we can tell, available to Shakespeare’, Steiner suggests that the poet ‘at times seems to “hear” inside a word or phrase the history of its future echoes’ (p. 4). I find this highly plausible, and it is a far more dramatic instance than Wordsworth’s ‘lustily’ which is at least etymologically related to words denoting lasciviousness.
implied in the language, with which the poet is involved. In 'Nutting', the admonition against ravaging the hazels is metaphorical. The ravishment of the strawberry-blossoms is equally so. But whilst the sexualized description of nutting is mysteriously symbolic, the poem’s deepest concern not being sex, but a moral or spiritual sense, the profundity of which is conveyed by the language of sexual violence but which is itself indefinable, the act of violation in 'Foresight' seems more straightforwardly translatable into other terms, more like an allegory, even though allegory is not often thought of as less-than-consciously intended.

Marvell’s elegiacism is erotic. Picturing T. C.’s womanhood, fearful of her imminent sexual power, he pleads

Let me be laid,
Where I may see thy Glories from some shade.

(ll. 23-24)

This touch of paedophiliac voyeurism is a confession which seems to allow the final protective wish, the fear of possible premature death, to remain uncomplicated, whilst in 'Foresight', where the allegorization of the flowers is never stated, but left to suggest itself, this is not so. An overt statement like Marvell’s would belie the ambivalence of the feeling. An overt statement of the ambivalence – supposing it to be consciously recognised by the poet himself – would be neither easy, nor perhaps acceptable, to make. Wordsworth’s subject has implications, fixed by the example of the poetic tradition, that are deep-seated enough to have been unavoidable to the poet’s mind, if not to the conscious part of it. The sex that goes hand-in-hand with death, through association that is deeper than the poet’s personal desires and fears, keeps the overt mention of death out of the poem, lest an unwanted sexual connection should unavoidably follow. The allusions to Marvell provide access to otherwise inexpressible nuances of feeling.

In Shakespeare’s funeral scenes, the flowers represent the women who strew them – Marina, Ophelia – as much as they do the deaths that are the occasion. Belarius’s words, ‘You were as flowers’, seem scarcely appropriate for the vicious (and now decapitated) Cloten, and far more so in Fidele’s case even, for we who know that ‘he’ is really Imogen. Anne too has a closer affinity to the flowers she picks than do Charles and their brother, since only she will make her bed and bower, fill her lap and bosom (ll. 14-15), and so it is Anne who, like T. C., is in danger of death. The primrose and violet, funereal in two of their most famous instances, *Lycidas* and *The Winter’s Tale*, are elsewhere not funereal, but bridal. Three days before
'Foresight' was composed, William and Dorothy, as her journal records, read Spenser's *Prothalamion*. There, nymphs gather flowers, in honour of 'the Brydale day':

- the Violet pallid blew,
- The little Dazie, that at evening closes,
- The virgin Lillie, and the Primrose trew,
- With store of vermeil Roses

(l. 30-33)

Violets, daisies, primroses: all are in 'Foresight'. In fact, Spenser's list has the closest resemblance to Wordsworth's, for in an early draft of 'Foresight', we find not 'pansies', but 'lilies'.

Spenser's flowers are strewn around the pair of swans. Another pair appears in *Home at Grasmere*, considering which Hagstrum asks:

Could swan-imagery for Wordsworth be entirely free of uxorial if not sexual content? Keats used swans in his poetry with overt sexual meaning — a poetic habit sanctioned by Jove who turned himself into one to woo Leda, and by Spenser, who introduced them into his *Prothalamion* ... Wordsworth, in the *Salisbury Plain* poem ... had made his swans erotic, with heaving bosoms 'soft and white'. (p. 102)

The swans are to go to 'your lovers blisful bower', one in the long line of bowers of bliss.

Anne's 'bower' is paired with her 'bed', and J. H. P. Pafford points out in a note to Perdita's speech that 'there was a custom of strewing the bridal bed with flowers as well as the grave', and compares Gertrude's words to the dead Ophelia:

- I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.
- I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
- And not have strew'd thy grave.

(V i 244-46)

Whilst bride-beds become beds of flowers, graves can be flower-beds. Wordsworth brings all three together in 'To a Sexton', pointing out the gardener to the grave-digger and exclaiming, 'Thou ... art the Warden / Of a far superior garden' (ll. 23-24). The flowers grow 'side by side, / Violets in families', just as the dead lie together, and the likeness of a shared grave to the marital bed — as in the monuments of aristocratic couples — is touched on at the end:

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13 See the notes to the Reading Text in the Cornell *Poems, in Two Volumes*, pp. 251-52.  
And should I live through sun and rain
Seven widowed years without my Jane,
O Sexton, do not then remove her,
Let one grave hold the Loved and Lover!
(II. 29-32)

With Anne’s bed, bower and bosom the erotic element enters ‘Foresight’. “Do not walk on the grass” might be rephrased as “do not carpe florem”, for here we find a negation of that motif, in which the flower is sexual experience. But Anne is asked to spare only the strawberry-flower. This is because the symbol of the flower occupies an ambiguous position between innocence and experience. In Marvell’s poem, the flower is mature enough to be picked – it is the ‘buds’ that are too young, whether for sex or for death. Though violets and the other flowers in Wordsworth are likewise not sexually mature, they are incapable of maturation, like Perdita’s primroses which ‘die unmarried’ – perpetual virgins. But the strawberry-blossom, like Marvell’s buds, will mature. That flowers have this double existence – symbols of virginity but also of mature eroticism, with confusion over buds and flowers, picked and unpicked – is everywhere apparent, the most vibrant instance being that of the rose. The singer in the bower where Acrasia lies ‘Upon a bed of Roses’ (Faerie Queene II xii 77 – ‘many a Ladie’, like Anne, has ‘both bed and bowre’ (stanza 75)), instructs his audience, ‘Ah see the Virgin Rose’. ‘Bashfull’ at first,

Lo see soone after, how more bold and free
Her bared bosome she doth broad display
(stanza 74)

It is at this moment that we should

Gather therefore the Rose, whilst yet is prime,
For soone comes age, that will her pride deflowre:
Gather the Rose of love, whilst yet is time
(75 II. 6-8)

In Herrick’s imitation of Catullus’s ‘Carmina V’, ‘To the Virgins’, however, it is ‘Rose-buds’ that are to be gathered. The contradiction arises because the roses signify both abstracted ‘virginity’ and ‘maturity’, and also the females themselves, so that in one representation the girl-rose blossoms naturally, and is ready for sexual experience, whilst in another it is her first experience – her ‘gathering’ – that is her blossoming. Herrick uses the second scheme – though since the virgins are the gatherers the rosebuds are prevented from being too directly and cruelly their own virginities. Spenser, Marvell and Wordsworth use the first. In time, the plant will be ready to be picked. Until then, ‘Do not touch it!’ (I. 7).
In 'Foresight' the strawberry replaces the rose, to great effect.\textsuperscript{15} The bud / flower-virginity confusion is avoided. Instead, there are two sorts of flowers: violets are 'a barren kind', inviting the punning contrast with the fruitfulness of strawberry-blossoms. (Spenser bemoans his figurative 'fruitlesse stay / In Princes Court' in *Prothalamion*, but can rejoice at the hope of the more literally 'fruitfull issue' of the brides' beds (ll. 6-7, 104)). The strawberries in *Ruth* draw on an especially titillating Georgian scene from Bartram's *Travels*, which makes Dorothy's poetic discussion of strawberries seem repressive:

And you may love the strawberry-flower,
And love the strawberry in its bower;
But when the fruit, so often praised
For beauty, to your lip is raised,
Say not you *love* the delicate treat,
But *like* it, enjoy it, and thankfully eat.

('Loving and Liking' ll. 33-38)

Strawberries' edibility adds to their eroticism, but here there is no sign of the 'Cherokee virgins' 'collecting strawberries or wantonly chasing their companions, tantalizing them, staining their lips and cheeks with the rich fruit' (Fagin, p. 153).

Herrick's erotic strawberries, too, compete with his rosebuds:

Have ye beheld (with much delight)
A red-Rose peeping through a white?
Or else a Cherrie (double grac't)
Within a Lillies Center plac't?
Or ever mark't the pretty beam,
A Strawberry shewes halfe drown'd in Creame? ...
So like to this, nay all the rest,
Is each neate Niplet of her breast.

('Upon the Nipples of *Julia's* Breast' ll. 1-6, 9-10)

Lilies are the traditional emblem of the lady's whiteness, mingled, more usually, with the redness of the rose. One reason for, or consequence of, Wordsworth's revision of his 'lilies' to 'pansies' is that the significance of whiteness is reserved for the strawberry-flower: its virginal white contrasts with the fruit's red, the Ruddiness of the strong, healthy woman, and especially the colour of her blood, the sign of her maturity.

\textsuperscript{15} Though women have more often been likened to flowers, there are many fruit precedents too. Cristina Bacchilega finds fruit symbolism in Italian folktales concerning the female's initiation into childbirth, and also in advice books for pregnant women, in 'The Fruit of the Womb: Creative Uses of a Naturalizing Tradition in Folktales', in *Creativity and Tradition in Folklore: New Directions*, ed by Simon J. Bronner (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1992), pp. 153-66.
Far profounder than Herrick's use of the strawberry is Shakespeare's. Emblem books, Lawrence Ross shows, followed Virgil in illustrating the proverb "there is a snake in the grass" ('Eclogue III' 1.93) with strawberries. As symbols of dangerous delight, they were sometimes images of women, or of the seeming beauties of love itself, though they also, confusingly, stood for the truly good person, and the fruits of a virtuous life. Ross believes that Desdemona's handkerchief 'spotted with strawberries' (III iii 435), thus points towards Othello's distorted image of her 'as the adulterous and hypocritical fair woman' (p. 239). Julia B. Holloway suggests a negative paralleling of the handkerchief with Desdemona's wedding sheets, which, like her own skin, 'whiter ... than Snow' (V ii 4), Othello will not stain with her blood. Holloway follows others in tracing the play's time, with its two interrupted nights, to argue that the marriage is unconsummated. In smothering his wife, Othello preserves those sheets which ought to have been stained, but with hymeneal blood, in a macabre doubling of bride-bed as death-bed.

Holloway links Othello to another tale of forbidden love, that of Pyramus and Thisbe, likening Desdemona's 'spotted' handkerchief to Thisbe's blooded veil, and the former's strawberries to the mulberry tree of Ovid's story (its berries, naturally white, stained red by the blood). 'In Ovid's version', she argues, 'the tale is transparently concerned with the loss of virginity, the wall of the hymen as obstacle being removed in sexual consummation and the consequent bleeding' (p. 128). The blood of life — that demonstrates, in fact, the ability to procreate — is somehow displaced as the blood of death. Shakespeare mentions Pyramus and Thisbe in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Titus Andronicus, and The Merchant of Venice. Holloway considers them as analogous to Othello and Desdemona, quoting Leslie Fiedler's opinion, 'it is a myth which obsessed Shakespeare throughout the early part of his career', and noting his reading of the main plot of Romeo and Juliet as the 'Ovidian myth with little changed except the names' (p. 126). Pyramus and Thisbe extend their influence to Wordsworth too, casting the faintest of shadows on Ruth, in which, as I showed in Chapter 6, Wordsworth echoes The Merchant of Venice, Othello and A Midsummer Night's Dream, all plays with

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forbidden-love plots of varying centrality, relatives of the Pyramus and Thisbe tale. Bartram’s
Georgian strawberries, emblem of the exotic and erotic, appear as another correspondence, a
remembrance of Ovid’s mulberries, whether directly or by way of Desdemona’s handkerchief.
The strawberries of ‘Foresight’ are also Bartram’s, though they pretend to be Dorothy’s.

The poet (or the brother) advises Anne not to pick the strawberry-blossoms, fearing
lest she dies like a barren violet, never growing up to fruitful womanhood. But the interest in
this is unsettlingly close to an interest in her as a sexual creature, an interest that is taboo. In
the observation of her, the adult’s blameless charmed delight in the child’s innocent activities,
begins to verge on the voyeurism of Marvell. Ricardo J. Quinones, discussing the carpe florem
motif in general, and the Faerie Queene in particular, draws a distinction between the Bower
of Bliss and the Garden of Adonis. In the latter, the interest in sexual fruitfulness is justified
as an investment in needful procreation, in family, in continuity (a topic close to Wordsworth’s
heart). But in the bower it is a more dubious lechery. ‘English writers’, Quinones notes, tend to
present the carpe diem argument as ‘coming from unreliable spokesmen (or women)’ (p. 257).

Further,

there is the suggestion that even the sex of the Bower is not
thoroughly satisfying; it has much of the peep-show about it,
and the young man seems more the victim of an experience
manqué than the enjoyer of any virile sexuality. (p. 257-58)

This is the peep-show of which little T. C. is the star. Satan ‘spies’ in a similarly distasteful
way at Eve, (Paradise Lost IX 424-26), and, as I mentioned in my account of the Satan-like
intruders of ‘Nutting’, Wordsworth and Milton meet curiously in a line of Marvell’s from
Upon Appleton House, which, it happens, follows on from some sensuous strawberries:

Then as I carless on the Bed
Of gelid Straw-berryes do tread
And through the Hazles thick espy
The hatching Thrustles shining Eye ...
(ll. 529-32)¹⁹

Wordsworth’s distanced observation slides into voyeurism as the boy’s words, the poet’s own

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¹⁸ Ricardo J. Quinones, The Renaissance Discovery of Time (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University
¹⁹ See Chapter 5, n. 18. I find this section of Upon Appleton House to recur in Wordsworth. The two
stanzas preceding this one compare the songs of the nightingale and the stock-dove, favouring the
latter, a comparison and conclusion that Wordsworth reproduces in his two-stanza poem
‘O Nightingale! thou surely art!...’
utterance, betray a concern with the girl's sexual nature.

The girl's virgin death is contrasted to her life, growth, and sexual maturation, but those poles, death and sex, become synthesized. The picked flowers are dead, with no cause for regret because they were barren, but what of the plucked strawberries which are eaten and enjoyed? In the garden, the plucking is much like the picking. Dying and being initiated into sex are different, but analogous. 'Gathering flowers' recalls, more precisely than Marvell, a scene from *Paradise Lost*:

\[
\text{that fair field} \\
\text{Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers} \\
\text{Her self a fairer flower by gloomy Dis} \\
\text{Was gathered} \\
\text{(IV 268-71)}
\]

Here, sex and death are consummately confused. Dis is god of the Underworld, so that Proserpine's abduction is her death, her partial rescue a resurrection, as the dead earth is reborn every spring. But it is also a rape: she becomes Pluto's wife, Queen of Hades. Her eating of the pomegranate, a fruit, where previously she was concerned only with flowers (distinguishing her from her bountiful mother), seems more suggestive of her sexual initiation than of her death.

The picking of a flower is death; the 'deflowering' of a virgin, her initiation into sex. But this initiation becomes confused with death because, a rite of passage, it marks a stage in the passing of life towards death. There are two contrary ideas of death: as a single event, the picking of a flower, and as a gradual process, the progression from youth to age, so that all our living is a dying. It is this second sense that Wordsworth touches on in *Ruth*, where flowers are 'budding, fading, faded', and which Herrick portrays:

\[
\text{The glorious Lamp of Heaven, the Sun,} \\
\text{The higher he's a getting;} \\
\text{The sooner will his Race be run,} \\
\text{And neerer he's to Setting.} \\
\text{('To the Virgins' ll. 5-8)}
\]

In this scheme, the rose-bud gathering is an act of defiance, against death, yet that gathering is as easily death itself.

In protecting H. C. from the violet's sudden death, the poet commits her to the strawberry's more complicated kind. In H. C. this proved intolerable, and the poet's fear
became his wish. For Anne, this wish may be still more vehement, but harder to confess. For whilst life for H. C. would mean being 'trailed along the soiling earth' – the life that is a gradual dying – for Anne it would be not only this, but also the plucking of the strawberry, gradual and sudden, slowly soiling, and swiftly violent. Hagstrum discovers a strange treatment of death and sexual initiation in 'Three years she grew'. As the girl, who is described as a 'flower' (l. 2), grows,

vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell.
(ll. 31-33)

But this happens after Nature has 'taken' her (as Dis takes Proserpine): 'climactically, the dead but imaginatively resurrected girl becomes a mature sexual being ... Lucy's death is thus swallowed up in victory through the myth of a sexually vital nature' (p. 99). Whether the poet desires, consciously or unconsciously, a similar solution for Anne, it is impossible to say. Thoughts of sex and of death gather around the prospect of flowers, in an irresistible clustering of linguistic associations that is effected by intertextual relations, with or without the poet's intention.

ii
'Now, gentle Muses, your assistance grant,
While I this flower transplant
Into a garden stored with Poesy'
(Artegal and Elidure l. 61-63)

In the 1807 note accompanying 'To the Daisy' ('In youth from rock to rock I went'), Wordsworth pointed out that he had written his poem in 1802, to prevent an accusation of having plagiarized 'a Poem (lately published) of Mr. Montgomery entitled A Field Flower'. The only relation is of fellowship, 'in service of the Flour', as Wordsworth quotes from Chaucer. But the poem has several direct relations: its first stanza parodies Drayton's Nimphidia, the violets' 'secret mews' is borrowed from Spenser, and in 1815 it was given an epigraph from Wither's 'Eclogue IV'. De Selincourt repeats Hutchinson's suggestion that the metre is imitated from the first song of Jonson's Eupheme.²⁰ But this is far from certain –

²⁰ All these relations are detailed in PW II, 490-91.
Herbert’s ‘Vertue’, for one, has the same metre as Jonson’s song. Wordsworth replaces the fairy-tales for which Drayton’s poets thirst, with the daisy, which suggests that he favours nature over literature. But the daisy, as the poem’s intertextual nature demonstrates, is seen through the spectacles of books: ‘see, in Chaucer and elder Poets’, Wordsworth recommends in another note (1815), ‘the honours formerly paid to this flower’.

Stein argues that ‘there is really no purposive engagement of Drayton’s themes’: Wordsworth is ‘establishing a generic intertext’, whilst catching Drayton’s ‘spirit of fancifulness’ (p. 150). But Wordsworth’s engagement is not only ‘generic’, but self-referential too. Hazlitt playfully complains that

many people suppose that poetry is something to be found only in books, contained in lines of ten syllables, with like endings: but wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, as in the motion of a wave of the sea, in the growth of a flower that ‘spreads its sweet leaves to the air, and dedicates its beauty to the sun,’ – there is poetry, in its birth.

Hazlitt narrows the gap between that which is poetry and that which is not, ostensibly by describing poetry as an essence found in nature, and complementarily by describing nature in the words of already-written poetry: ‘a wave of the sea’ is Shakespeare’s description of Perdita (The Winter’s Tale IV iii 141), borrowed, as it happens, by Wordsworth in ‘The Two April Mornings’ and in ‘To a Highland Girl’, whilst the misquotation is from Romeo and Juliet (I i 152-53), in which this bud (‘bit with an envious worm’) is used as a simile for the melancholy Romeo. ‘The shepherd-boy’, Hazlitt continues ‘is a poet, when he first crowns his mistress with a garland of flowers’ (p. 2) – when, that is, he pays her pastoral’s poetic tribute.

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21 It is difficult to establish the point at which Wordsworth became familiar with Herbert. The definite evidence dates from a later period: in ‘Seathwaite Chapel’, probably composed in 1818, Wordsworth commends ‘the heaven-taught skill of Herbert’ (l. 13), and he echoes ‘Vertue’ in The Excursion VII (1809-12), ‘On a bright day – so calm and bright’ (l. 695). He recommended to Robert Anderson that he include Herbert in a new edition of British Poets, in a letter of 17 September 1814 (MY II, 151-55) and Izaak Walton’s Life of Herbert was the third of his three ‘most pathetic of human compositions’ (Reminiscences, p. 468). G. C. Moore Smith, however, cites F. Haverfield’s suggestion that the 1802 part of the Intimations Ode echoes Herbert’s ‘Man’s Medley’, and himself suggests a resemblance between Herbert’s ‘Prayer I’ and Wordsworth’s daisy poem, ‘With little here to do or see’ (Wordsworth’s Experiments, p. 67).

22 Introduction to Lectures on the Poets, in Howe V, 1.
Wordsworth's garlands have the same quality of testing doubleness. The boys in 'Beggars' have decorated their hats with yellow flowers and, most suggestively, with laurel, but Dorothy's journal (account of 27 May written on 10 June 1800) testifies that this detail is taken from life, and Wordsworth insisted, in his note to Isabella Fenwick (p. 5), that the similar floral hat-trimming in 'The Idle Shepherd-Boys' was naturalistic, not ornamental, part of a real-life 'pastoral', as the poem was named. Nevertheless, the poem explores the relation of that real life to poetry, as the poet and the shepherd-boys execute one another's tasks, and floral garlands, if not hat-trimmings, are more often the poet's decoration:

The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
   Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
   His visionary brow
   ('Scorn not the Sonnet' ll. 7-9)

In other sonnets, Imagination binds wreaths of 'the amaranthine flower / Of Faith' ('Weak is the will of Man' ll. 10-13), whilst Calvert is thanked for helping Wordsworth to 'array / My temples with the Muse's diadem' ('To the Memory of Raisley Calvert' ll. 7-8). In 'To the Poet, John Dyer', Wordsworth regrets that 'hasty Fame hath many a chaplet culled / For worthless brows' (ll. 7-8). His sonnet is intended as an analogous tribute to the neglected Dyer. A particularly labyrinthine discussion of poetic garlands is in the Fenwick note to 'Poor Robin'. Finding that 'Chatterton says of freedom, "Upon her head wild weeds were spread"', Wordsworth conjectures that 'if "the marvellous boy" had undertaken to give Flora a garland, he would have preferred what we are apt to call weeds to garden-flowers' (p. 75). To what extent is this imagined 'garland' Chatterton's (imagined) poem itself, rather than the chaplet that would be described in it?

The daisy is 'the Poet's darling' ('In youth from rock to rock I went' l. 32), and in the 1802 poems Wordsworth emphasizes that other flowers, too, are the possession of poets. In the first poem 'To the Small Celandine', Wordsworth trusts that 'pansies, lilies, kingcups, daisies', primroses, and violets always 'will have a place in story' (ll. 1-6), and in the second, 'To the Same Flower' ('Pleasures newly found are sweet') he conjectures that

Thou must needs, I think, have had,
   Celandine! and long ago,
   Praise of which I nothing know.
   (ll. 6-8)

Known as much through poetry as in reality, and representing qualities that are the same as poetry's, one aspect of Wordsworth's flowers, even as he celebrates nature, is as a metaphor
for poetry. In ‘A Farewell’ (1802) the garden becomes a story-teller, whose ‘tales’ are of the
primrose covered rock and of the sparrow’s nest, ‘Of which I sang one song that will not die’
(ll. 49-56). The garden refers to the poem as much as vice versa: it is an anthology
metaphorically as well as literally (etymologically).

Flowers often prompt in Wordsworth this awareness of artifice paralleling nature. The
Female Vagrant, whose greatest pleasure is in books (ll. 16-18), tells her ‘artless story’ (l. 2)
amid a most literary setting, a flower catalogue, with ‘rose and lilly for the sabbath morn’
(l. 21). The flowers in ‘Foresight’ are conventionally combined, and others point indubitably
to single precursors: Wordsworth’s lilies which ‘face the March-winds in full blow’ (‘Poor
Robin’ 1. 2) are descended from Shakespeare’s daffodils, which ‘take / The winds of March
with beauty’ (The Winter’s Tale IV iv 119-20). Wordsworth’s allusions to other men’s flowers
play on their own allusiveness, since the borrowed image is the image of a poem.

Hollander discusses the trope of souls as dead leaves, which echoes through Isaiah,
Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton, finding it to be ‘metaleptic, rather than merely metaphoric’
because ‘its allusiveness has been brought into the range of its subject’ (Hollander, p. 122).
Bloom (who had himself considered the topos in A Map of Misreading, pp. 135-37) extends
Hollander’s discussion in The Breaking of the Vessels, Chapter 3, ‘Transumption’. Metaleptic
or ‘transumptive’ allusions, he shows, which not only seem aware of their own allusiveness but
allude also to an image of it, or of their own textuality, add a further level of self-
consciousness, as when Shelley’s use of the dead ‘leaves’, in Ode to the West Wind, includes
the sense of a book’s pages (p. 98). Jarvis makes his contribution to the ‘literary mulch’ in a
discussion of Wordsworth’s contribution, namely, his poem ‘At Vallombrosa’, in which
‘Milton and his own precursors ... strew the poem, “thick as autumnal leaves”’ (Jarvis, p. 92).

Wordsworth’s ‘leaves’ are borrowed in other poems, too, as in ‘Stray Pleasures’
(1806), in which,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{If the wind do but stir for his proper delight,} \\
\text{Each leaf, that and this, his neighbour will kiss} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(ll. 33-34)

\footnote{References are to The Female Vagrant in the Cornell edition of Lyrical Ballads.}
He is recalling the sixth ‘Nimphall’ of Drayton’s Muses Elizium:

The Winde had no more strength than this,
That leasurely it blew,
To make one leafe the next to kisse,
That closly by it grew.

(II. 4-7)

In Wordsworth the kissing leaves become, additionally, an image of affectionately given and gratefully received influence. The daisy imparts a ‘genial influence’ (‘In youth from rock to rock I went’ l. 70) as might ‘the works of the old English dramatists’, part of ‘the bright Elizabethan constellation’, which Wordsworth described as ‘the gardens of our language’. As a metaphor for poetry, the flower is related to the star, and the two are often images of one another. Primroses in ‘A Farewell’ glitter ‘like a starry sky’ (l. 54), and the daffodils in ‘I wandered lonely as a cloud’ are ‘continuous as the stars that shine’ (1815 version, l. 7) as Milton’s God, conversely, ‘sowed with stars the heaven thick as a field’ (Paradise Lost VII 358). Yet flowers and stars are not interchangeable for Wordsworth, but are treated differently, suggesting two models of poetry, and of literary relations.

I discussed Wordsworth’s stars in Chapter 4. The star is most often single, (like Milton’s soul in ‘London, 1802’), pre-eminent and ‘ambitious’ (‘It is no Spirit who from heaven hath flown’ l. 9). It represents the poet whose name has become immortal, and whose personality, identified with his art, as the angel is identified with the sphere he moves, sheds influence. The highest aspiration of the living poet is to achieve the stellification of fame. Stars feature most often in Wordsworth’s ‘Poems of the Imagination’. Flowers, contrastingly, are associated more frequently with the fancy. Two celandine poems (‘Pansies, lilies’ and ‘Pleasures newly found’) were ‘Poems of the Fancy’, as were three daisy poems, ‘In youth from rock to rock I went’, ‘With little here to do or see’, and ‘Bright Flower’, though the last was moved in 1836 to ‘Poems of Sentiment and Reflection’. Also in ‘Fancy’ were ‘Stray Pleasures’, ‘Who fancied what a pretty sight’, and ‘Love Lies Bleeding’, in which flowers are seen as the realm of ‘Fancy’ (l. 10), as they are in the sonnet ‘How sweet it is when mother Fancy rocks / The wayward brain’.

The imagination is that faculty which communicates intimations of eternity, glimpsed in flight or on mountain peaks where influence-bearing angels alight. The fancy’s communications are more modest. The daisy, though ‘like a star’ is still an ‘unassuming

24 Essay, Supplementary, l. 648; Reminiscences, p. 461.
Common-place’ with a ‘meek nature’ (‘With little here’ ll. 37, 5, 48), enjoying ‘concord with humanity’ (‘Bright Flower’ l. 6). The celandine, too, though a ‘prophet’, is ‘little, humble’ (‘Pansies, lilies’ ll. 57, 56), as ‘Poor Robin’ is a ‘child of Nature’s own humility’ (l. 32). In their humility these flowers resemble the slight, personal lyrics that Wordsworth offered to the public in the 1807 volumes. Abrams describes ‘the gravity, the reverence, the extraordinary pathos with which [Wordsworth] charges terms that, in both social and aesthetic discourse, had earlier been used mainly to derogate or contemn: “low”, “humble”, “common”, “ordinary”, “everyday”, “trivial”, “vulgar”, “mean”’ (p. 391), and Frye argues that ‘what Blake and Wordsworth also did was to set up a new series of literary echoes: keep-sake poems, broadside ballads, moralizing tales for children, were suddenly shown to have an undreamed-of potentiality in their trite formulas’ (‘Nature and Homer’, p. 48). With reference to cheaply-sold ballads and histories, Wordsworth ‘wished that I had talents to produce songs, poems, and little histories, that might circulate among other good things in this way, supplanting partly the bad; flowers and useful herbs to take place of weeds’. In ‘To the Daisy’ (‘Bright Flower’), the flower’s ‘function apostolical’, is to ‘teach’ (ll. 23, 13); Wordsworth wrote, with reference to the 1807 volumes, ‘I wish either to be considered as a Teacher, or as nothing’.

Brought together, the star’s brilliance and the flower’s lowliness achieve the ideal exemplified by Milton, ‘thy soul was like a star ... and yet thy heart / The lowliest duties on herself did lay’ (‘London, 1802’ ll. 9, 13-14), by the skylark, ‘true to the kindred points of Heaven and Home’ (‘Ethereal minstrel’ l. 12), and by ideal poet in ‘If thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven’ with which, from 1845, Wordsworth prefaced his complete poems:

The stars pre-eminent in magnitude,
And they that from the zenith dart their beams,
(Visible though they be to half the earth,
Though half a sphere be conscious of their brightness)
Are yet of no diviner origin,
No purer essence, than the one that burns,
Like an untended watch-fire, on the ridge
Of some dark mountain; or than those which seem
Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
Among the branches of the leafless trees;
(ll. 4-13)

But fancy’s flowers, like the star of the imagination, also have significances of their own.

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25 Letter to Francis Wrangham, 5 June 1808, MY I, 248.
Flowers represent poems, rather than poets, their unassuming humility tending towards anonymity. Their appeal is that of the feminine beautiful, rather than of the masculine sublime. In their literal form, they are aspects of the pastoral, that most conventional and densely populated of genres. In the 1815 Preface Wordsworth suggests that ‘Fancy depends upon the rapidity and profusion with which she scatters her thoughts and images; trusting that their number, and the felicity with which they are linked together, will make amends for the want of individual value’ (ll. 377-80). Flowers come in ‘flocks’ (‘How sweet it is’ l. 4), and in ‘shoals and bands, a morrice train’ (‘In youth from rock to rock I went’ l. 17). ‘By the season multiplied’ (‘Pleasures newly found’ l. 48) they provide ‘fifty greetings in a day’ (‘Pansies, lilies’ l. 24). ‘Pluck them, and another year / As many will be blowing here’ (‘Foresight’ ll. 23-24). Their generic, rather than individualistic, identity, is hinted by Wordsworth’s title ‘To the Daisy’, not ‘on a Daisy … a mighty difference’, the greater significance of which is discussed below.27 A ‘child of the year’ (‘In youth from rock to rock I went’ l. 73), the daisy’s and celandine’s temporality is the seasonal, the cycle of festivity, the realm of “‘beneath our shoon’”, (‘Pleasures newly found’ l. 50, quoting from Comus), rather than ‘beyond the moon’, the stellar region. These characteristics, among others, associate Wordsworth’s metaleptic flowers with intertextual models of literary relations, in which multiplicity, anonymity, and textuality are prioritized, ahead of the singular, named, and transcendental.

In the earliest versions of ‘With little here to do or see’ Wordsworth tells the daisy ‘Oft do I sit by thee at ease / And weave a web of similes’ (ll. 9-10), altering this, from the 1820 edition onwards, to ‘play with similes’. Both images are favourites of intertextuality. The first foregrounds textuality and sees its creations as a feminine activity. The weaver’s labour is the texture of her daily life: the textual is not separate from the non-textual, nor is it sacred.28 Fancy’s daisy-chain is a ‘slender thread’ (‘Love Lies Bleeding’ l. 11), but it weaves a web that Wordsworth prefers to the pattern that ‘the bold Discoverer [may] thrid’ on ‘the polar sea’ (‘Pleasures newly found’ ll. 51-52). The second recognizes the random quality of relatedness, signalled by the ‘ludo’ word-group, of which ‘allusion’ is a member, as discussed in Chapter 1. In the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth is apprehensive of ‘those arbitrary

28 The gendering of influence theories is too large an issue to be pursued here. Jeffrey Steele considers influence as masculine, intertextuality as feminine, in ‘The Call of Eurydice: Mourning and Intertextuality in Margaret Fuller’s Writing’, in Clayton and Rothstein, pp. 271-97, and see the introduction to that volume for an overview of critical positions.
connections' of words which might render his poetry 'ludicrous', but in the flower poems he 'plays' with them. Fancy, he explains less anxiously in the 1815 Preface, is 'capricious as the accidents of things, and the effects are surprising, playful, ludicrous, amusing, tender, or pathetic' (II. 373-75). That fancy's work is 'wayward' ('How sweet it is' I. 2), is reflected in its creations: a wild-rose is imagined as 'a bold Girl, who plays her agile pranks' and 'mocks' (II. 6, 8).

Such images, being 'freak[s]' ('With little here to do or see' I. 28), are particularized minutiae, yet also poetical commonplaces. Milton's 'pansy' is 'freaked with jet' (Lycidas l. 144), in a coinage: 'freak' was previously only a noun, with the sense 'capricious humour' (as in Wordsworth's sonnet). J. F. Killeen suggests that Milton intended the verb to have the sense of 'adorned', taking his cue from the Latin use of the past participle of 'ludere', used in this way. Thomson admires 'the Tulip-Race, where Beauty plays / Her idle Freaks' (Spring 539-40). His catalogue, which celebrates Nature's 'infinite Numbers' and 'endless Bloom' (II. 553-55) reads like a relieved discovery that there is always more to write about, the endless range of flora providing endless potential for poetry. Yet his freaked tulips, whilst defying Johnson's stricture not to 'number the streaks of the tulip' are already numbered.

The 'similes' in Wordsworth are images, presented, as in 'How sweet it is', with dream-like vividness. But alongside this pictorial stream is the suggestion that it is words that weave themselves: the images in 'With little here to do or see' are identified as 'thy appellations' (I. 24). In Ruth, Wordsworth's engagement with the pastoral and ballad traditions involves an investigation of textuality, and of its intersection with reality, and of names — their double propensity to individualize objects, and particularly people, but also to suggest other names, in Barthes's 'tireless approximation ... metonymic labor' (S/Z, p. 11). His questioning of language, and of whether its power amounts to priority, anticipates that of post-structuralism (of which intertextuality was a development), as do the explorations of his flower poems, one of the fancy's concerns being naming.

'Many a fond and idle name' ('With little here to see or do' I. 13) succeed one another in the mind, 'link by link' ('How sweet it is' I. 11). Curtis notes that Wordsworth's chain of similes is comparable to Herbert's, in 'Prayer (I)' (see above n. 21). Herbert's poem is a list,

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the syntactic equivalent to the linked thread of fancy. When the last and longest of the ‘Poems of the fancy’, The Waggoner, was first published, in 1819, Wordsworth headed it with two quotations from Shakespeare: ‘What’s in a Name?’ and ‘Brutus will start a Spirit as soon as Caesar’ (meaning the names ‘Brutus’ and ‘Caesar’). Juliet answers her own question with ‘a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet’ (Romeo and Juliet II ii 43-44). The arbitrariness of names makes them interchangeable, as are the items on a grammarless list.

The celandine poem beginning ‘Pansies, lilies, kingcups, daisies’ syntactically summons all other flower catalogues, as lists of names. The naming process itself is dwelt upon in ‘Love Lies Bleeding’, in the Fenwick note to which Wordsworth contemplates ‘our Forefathers in their simple state of society. How touching & beautiful were in most instances the names they gave to our indigenous flowers’ (p. 67). Wordsworth positioned this poem, first published in 1842, after ‘A Wren’s Nest’, in which the bird builds ‘by a brae / That overhangs a brook’ (ll. 19-20), a ghostly echo of the willow ‘askaunt the brook’ under which Ophelia drowns (Hamlet V I 166). There, too, images of flowers tend towards the naming of them, with an example that perhaps prompted Wordsworth’s qualifying, ‘in most instances’:

Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cull-cold maids do dead men’s fingers call them.

(V i 168-71)

It is because flowers are at once natural and textual, literal and metaphorical, that Wordsworth can commend his own poetry even as he dedicates it to nature, singing ‘Hymns in praise of what I love’ (‘Pansies, lilies’ l. 64): the celandine and the poem. Flowers’ irresistible metaphoricity reaches the height of abstraction in ‘To a Young Lady who had been Reproached for Taking Long Walks in the Country’, in which she is imagined

healthy as a shepherd boy,
And treading among flowers of joy
Which at no season fade

(ll. 7-9)

Entirely metaphorical yet introduced, in a manner characteristic of Wordsworth, as if they are literal, these flowers are emblems of their own doubleness, of metaphoricity itself.

Ricks defends such solipsism ‘because it is characteristic of art to find energy and
delight in an enacting of that which it is saying'. But Wordsworth, however much he delighted in writing that was covertly, metaphorically self-referential, did not consider it of primary significance. The note to 'Love Lies Bleeding' seems to glance towards the originary naming of flowers by Eve in Eden (Paradise Lost XI 273-77). Wordsworth honours the flowers' 'plain English appellations, which ... bring them home to our hearts by connection with our joys & sorrows' (Fenwick Notes, p. 67). The naming of flowers, like the naming of places, is an act which creates a bond, strengthened by the names' repetition, as in the note to 'The Thorn'. 'Sacred associations' Wordsworth said much later, 'belonged to the ipsissima verba' of the Authorized Version. Relinquishing the chain of similes in 'With little here to do or see', he finally addresses the daisy 'Bright Flower!', re-establishing a confidence in names to identify and express:

for by that name at last,  
When all my reveries are past,  
I call thee, and to that cleave fast,  
Sweet silent creature!  
(ll. 41-44)

iii
'in chaste hearts uninfluenced by the power
Of outward change, there blooms a deathless flower,  
That breathes on earth the air of paradise.'
('From the Italian of Michael Angelo' ll. 12-14)

Flowers are the fancy's favourite image, illustrating its playful shape- and name-changing, but not all flower poems are fanciful. Curtis points out that the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry in which Wordsworth immersed himself from 1800 to 1802 'often use[s] the natural object as a text for "sermons" both courtly and moral, as in Robert Herrick's poem, "Upon Roses"' (Wordsworth's Experiments, p. 65). Wordsworth revises the lessons of these moralists in flower poems of the Imagination and the Epitaph.

Herrick employs the daffodil as an emblem of mortality in 'To Daffadills', the first stanza of which describes the flower, whilst the second applies the moral to humanity, and in 'Divination by a Daffadill':

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32 Reminiscences, p. 471.
When a Daffadill I see,  
Hanging down his head t'wars me;  
Guesse I may, what I must be:  
First, I shall decline my head;  
Secondly, I shall be dead;  
Lastly, safely bureyed.

As Curtis complains, such a poem 'sharply divides subject and simile' (Wordsworth's Experiments, p. 66). In 'The Small Celandine' (1804), Wordsworth uncharacteristically followed this pattern of observation – 'There is a Flower, the lesser Celandine' (l. 1), and application – 'behold our lot' (l. 22), a formula more didactic than that which prevails in his poetry of this period. The poem came to be isolated from its floral contemporaries, in the 'Old Age' section.

Wordsworth did write other such conventional flower poems, such as the early 'In Part from Moschus – Lament for Bion', and 'To —' ('Look at the fate of summer flowers') (1824), both of which express the motif, transit gloria mundi. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century lyrics tend either to point to the death of flowers as a type of man's death, or to lament the fact that, whilst flowers return each spring, man's life is a single cycle. Occasionally, some kind of return for man is envisaged too, as in Herbert's 'The Flower':

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean  
Are thy returns! ev'n as the flowers in spring ...  
Who would have thought my shrivel'd heart  
Could have recover'd greennesse? It was gone  
Quite under ground; as flowers depart  
To see their mother-root, when they have blown  
(ll. 1-2, 8-11)

All that returns, however, is hope; for a more profound survival, Herbert needed a more striking and original image:

Sweet rose, whose hue angrie and brave  
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye:  
Thy root is ever in its grave,  
And thou must die.  
Onely a sweet and vertuous soul,  
Like season'd timber, never gives;  
But thou the whole world turn to coal,  
Then chiefly lives.  
('Vertue', ll. 5-8, 13-16)

Wordsworth's 'Look at the fate of summer flowers' imitates the sentiments and transitions of 'Vertue', as well as its stanza-form. But in 'The Primrose of the Rock' (1831), he interprets
the primrose's 'annual funeral' (l. 24) and revival as an emblem of man's resurrection through 'God's redeeming love' (l. 36). The poem is classed under 'Imagination' because it communicates a sense of the other world, and also, perhaps, because it elevates the human mind, ending with a celebration not of God but of 'each soul' which is 'a separate heaven, / A court for Deity' (ll. 53-54).

In Wordsworth's best known poem of the Imagination, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud', daffodils are transformed from emblems of mortality, to immortality. Whether Wordsworth had Herrick's poems in mind it is impossible to say, especially since daffodils, like other flowers with drooping heads, are traditionally associated with death (Baker, p. 62).

Wordsworth's daffodils, however, are star-like, and have suggested in their dance (which is emphasized by being mentioned in each stanza), to Harvey Peter Sucksmith, the 'cosmic dance' of John Davies's *Orchestra; or, A Poem of Dancing* (which Wordsworth could have read in Anderson, volume II), 'archetype of psychic order, harmony, completeness, even of the integrated Self which has sometimes been called the *mandala*, the symbol of which can be a star or a golden flower.'

When Wordsworth's memory visualizes the daffodils, his heart joins the dance. The continuity of memory is a species of immortality, which out-manoeuvres death. Daffodils, incidentally, are also known as 'Easter lilies', which is suggestive of resurrection.

'Daffodil', etymologically descended from 'affodyle', meaning 'that which comes early' (hence Shakespeare's 'daffodils / That come before the swallow dares'), is related thereby to the 'asphodel', an immortal flower, as in *Comus*, in which Sabrina is said to have bathed 'in nectared lavars strewed with asphodel' (l. 837) in preparation for her metamorphosis into a goddess.

The flower's immortality, in which man's memory enables him to participate, is the 'immortality of succession', as Wordsworth called it in the Fenwick note to *Vernal Ode* (p. 17), which endows the most common flower with an amaranthine quality. Its significance to Wordsworth is apparent in his insistence that 'To the Daisy' ought not to be misnamed 'To a Daisy' (see above, p. 225): that it is essentially the same daisy that returns each year is the

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most vital point. The celandine, "beneath our shoon" ('Pleasures newly found' l. 50), shares the power of the 'haemony' in *Comus*:

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the dull swain
Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon,
And yet more med’cinal is it than that moly
That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave
(ll. 633-36)
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Though on earth it is 'a small unsightly root', in 'another country' haemony has 'a bright golden flower' (ll. 628, 631-32). Herrick mournfully says of some tulips, 'dye ye must away: /
Even as the meaneast Flower' ('To a Bed of Tulips' ll. 5-8). But Wordsworth’s 'meaneast flower' inspires contemplation because it communicates immortality to the Imagination.

The dull swain of *Comus* seems to be remembered again in 'The Triad' (1828), in which all the associations of flowers are brought together:

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flowers themselves, whate’er their hue,
With all their fragrance, all their glistening,
Call to the heart for inward listening –
And though for bridal wreaths and tokens true
Welcomed wisely; though a growth
Which the careless shepherd sleeps on,
As fitly spring from turf the mourner weeps on –
And without wrong are cropped the marble tomb to strew.
(ll. 204-11)
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Though the imagination revised the emblem of mortality into a symbol of eternity, flowers' elegiac role is not forgotten, since the epitaph, as Wordsworth argues in his first Essay on that subject, should commemorate both the mortal and immortal parts of man. The triumph of 1804 was short-lived, or flashed upon Wordsworth's mind only occasionally. The conviction that replaced the radical idea of the memory as a kind of immortality was the more modest assertion that our consciousness of immortality incites the desire to be remembered, and that the memory consecrates that consciousness. In the *Essays*, written in 1810, and in poetry of around this period, flowers take on one more metaleptic meaning, as commemorations, both literal floral tributes and poetic epitaphs, combining both the strands of fancy and of imagination.

Poets' elegies upon one another have been a focal point for influence-studies. Wordsworth concludes the first Essay by quoting from Milton's elegy on Shakespeare, with its claim that no 'star-ypointing pyramid' (l. 4) is needed to preserve Shakespeare's fame, since his works are a superior monument. For Wordsworth, too, poetry is epitaphic. In the fourth of his 'Inscriptions' (1811) he builds 'From airy words alone, a Pile that ne’er decays' (l. 20).
More often, however, this epitaph is not a monument. In the first essay Wordsworth explains that ‘a sepulchral monument is a tribute to a man as a human being’, whilst an epitaph ‘includes this general feeling and something more’. It is ‘a record to preserve the memory of the dead ... a satisfaction to the sorrowing hearts of the survivors’, and is also ‘for the common benefit of the living’ (ll. 153-59). ‘Rear who will a pyramid’ he allows in ‘Pleasures newly found’ (l. 53), but prefers a different tribute for the small celandine: a simple lyric, that reflects, and is reflected by, the flower.35

Wordsworth explored poetry’s commemorative role from an early period. His ‘Memorials of a Tour in Scotland’ of 1803 begin with an eager ‘Departure’, only to move straight to three poems inspired by Burns’s grave (the first of which quotes from Burns’s ‘To a Mountain Daisy’): a series not so much of memories, as of commemorations. ‘The Brothers’, of 1800, anticipates the church-yard arguments of Book VI of The Excursion, written mostly between 1809 and 1812, in which Wordsworth turns again to the language of flowers. Unsurprisingly, this Book is full of books. De Selincourt annotates its literary texture, finding remembrances of the Bible, The Franklyn’s Tale, The Faerie Queene, Twelfth Night, Othello, Hamlet, Comus, Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained (PW V). The majority of the pastor’s subjects, meanwhile, have literary leanings. The prodigal has ‘skill in letters’ (l. 309), the uncharitable woman a ‘keen desire of knowledge’ and ‘books’ (ll. 700-01), and the unfaithful husband (whose tale was drafted in 1800) a ‘delight’ in them.36 The pair of unlikely friends leave a monument, the sumptuousness of which the pastor feels the need to justify, and an inscription, with which he is more comfortable (ll. 491-521).

The most intertextual of these tales, unsurprisingly, are those of lovers: of Ellen, the unmarried mother, who ‘in lonely reading found a meek resource’ (l. 896), and of the disappointed lover who makes a ‘calendar of flowers’ (l. 174) and bequeaths it as ‘a monument of faithful love’ to the woman who rejected him (l. 210). This lover is healed by Nature’s ‘sweet influence’ (l. 187), but this is not through, but despite of, his flower-gathering, which is represented as a mistaken enterprise, ‘attempt[ed] ... hopelessly’ (ll. 176-77). As discussed in Chapter 6, love is a textually-determined phenomenon. The pastor reiterates,

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35 Wordsworth declined to contribute a poem for the bicentenary of Shakespeare’s death, claiming, ‘I should have before me the tender exclamation of Milton, “Dear Son of Memory, great Heir of Fame, / What need’st Thou such weak witness of thy Name”’ (letter to John Britton, 18 March 1816, MY II, 289).

36 See ll. 1085-93, apparatus criticus, in PW V.
‘Tis affirmed
By poets skilled in nature’s secret ways
That Love will not submit to be controlled
By mastery

(ll. 161-64)

(Amongst these poets, de Selincourt suggests, are Chaucer and Spenser). Flowers afford no escape from love, because they are textual too. The lover’s collection is an anthology of love lyrics.

Fancy’s flowers link themselves into metonymic chains of names and similes. Frances Ferguson points out that

For the fancy, naming does not reveal the essence of any object …
a name becomes simply the one apparently still point in the chain of metamorphoses of these objects … Just as the metaphors of passion can never know that they are metaphors, the metaphors of the fancy can never not know that they are metaphors. For the fancy comes to be a principle of pure sequence. (p. 66)

Ferguson finds that the ‘epitaph or tombstone’ is Wordsworth’s central metaphor for language (p. xi), but in her view fancy’s arbitrariness – which, in Wordsworth’s darkest interpretation, is ‘at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve’ (Epitaphs III, 187-88) – overpowers the attempt to speak ‘the general language of humanity’, the epitaphic language that ‘harmoniously unites the two worlds of the living and the dead’ (Epitaphs I, 306, 444). For Ferguson, Wordsworth’s ‘echoings drive toward an inarticulateness which closes over even the poet and his consciousness’ (p. 170). But though Wordsworth distrusted ‘words doing their own work’ (Epitaphs II, 597), he tried to show that a genuinely expressive ‘uncorrupted language of affection’ (l. 398-99) could be achieved, by matching the flower of fancy’s textual play, with an epitaphic flower, as the lover’s book of quotations becomes his epitaph.

The churchyard is described as

almost wholly free
From interruption of sepulchral stones,
And mantled o’er with aboriginal turf
And everlasting flowers

(VI 607-10)

Through the ‘immortality of succession’ such flowers encapsulate an absolute continuity, from the beginning of time, to its end. At the end of Book VI, six daughters are a father’s ‘bright garland’ (l. 1127). Flowers themselves, their work is to cultivate flowers around their home,
and they and their creations become a living memorial of their mother: 'her Spirit yet survives on earth!' (l. 1191).37

Wordsworth considers poetry in the same way, as in the first of his ‘Inscriptions’ (1808), in which he looks back to Shakespeare and his poetic contemporaries, and forward to ‘some future Poet’ (l. 14). J. Douglas Kneale points out that in Wordsworth’s vision of ‘a mighty scheme of truth’ (Prelude XII 302), the poets, from whom he hopes to be ‘vouchsafed / An influx’ (ll. 307-08), ‘influx being linguistically and thematically cognate with influence’ (Kneale, p. 70) are joined ‘each with each’ (l. 301), as the days of his life are bound ‘each to each’ in ‘My heart leaps up’.38 Theirs too is the ‘immortality of succession’. In 1809 and 1810 he translated Chiabrera’s epitaphs, translation being a suitable mode for the commemorative impulse, as is allusion, since each ‘unites the two worlds of the living and the dead’, speaking in two voices, that of the dead poet, and that of his successor, like the two kinds of epitaphs described in the first Essay. Echoes are epitaphic because they forge a ‘sympathetic chain’ (Ferguson, p. 165), as when Wordsworth’s epitaph ‘Six months to six years added’ recalls the style and sentiments of Ben Jonson’s ‘On My first Son’.39 The pastor’s parishioners themselves recall Jonson’s poems, being ‘of nature’s unambitious underwood’ (Excursion VI 653). The epitaph’s allusions are those of the intertextual mode, discussed in Chapter 2, rather than of the influential: because the epitaph is ‘exposed to all ... it is concerning all, and for all’ (Epitaphs I, 400, 406-07), its language, like its ‘thoughts and feelings’, should be ‘common-place’ (Epitaphs II, 573-74), as the daisy is (‘With little here to do or see’ l. 5). ‘A judicious Man will be less disposed in this case than in any other to avail himself of the liberty given by metre to adopt phrases of fancy’ (Epitaphs II, 481-83), yet Wordsworth can use his own inescapably allusive image of fancy because it is humble and ordinary.

The epitaph shares all the qualities of the fancy, and of the intertextual mode of literary relations, but combines them with the imagination. In The Excursion Wordsworth prefers orally delivered biographies, ‘Depositories faithful and more kind / Than fondest epitaph’ (VI 613-14), as the intertextual prefers anonymous and popular poetry. Wordsworth’s

37 In Wordsworth’s 1805 epitaph upon his brother, ‘To the Daisy’ (‘Sweet Flower!’), however, daisies, though suggestively a ‘starry multitude’ (l. 28), do not seem to impart their continued life to the ‘senseless grave’ (l. 70) on which they grow.
39 Dorothy’s journal records that Wordsworth read ‘On my First Daughter’ and found other ‘short poems’ by Jonson ‘too interesting’ on 11 February 1802.
epitaphs 'all reflect a drive to move beyond specific characters and specific communities'.
Their 'anonymity includes [the stranger-viewer] in the community by suggesting that he can
provide the name of the unnamed deceased' (Ferguson, pp. 158-59). The reader is thus asked
to share in the 'soothing influences' of nature (Epitaphs I, 200), the 'benign influence' of the
country churchyard (Epitaphs II, 45), and the 'wholesome influence' of the epitaphic principle
(Epitaphs II, 116). But at the same time Wordsworth believes epitaphs to be permanent. The
pastor's words 'Deposited upon the silent shore / Of memory, images and precious thoughts, /
That shall not die, and cannot be destroyed' (Excursion VII 28-30).

Book VI opens with an image of the epitaph, linking the living and the dead, and of the
seeming paradox of allusion that I discussed in Chapter 3, that of a prophetic communication
that is simultaneously visionary and inherited, authentic and borrowed. Wordsworth describes
'spires whose “silent finger points to heaven”' (l. 19). The spires signify the other world to
earthly observers, linking the living and dead. That which they communicate is transcendent, so
that their 'language' is symbolic, but Wordsworth's description of them is borrowed from
Coleridge. Such spires, Coleridge wrote, 'when they reflect the brazen light of a rich though
rainy sunset, appear like a pyramid of flame burning heavenward.'\(^{40}\) Flowers, too, replace
pyramids as superstructures of language which, whilst playing with their own 'arbitrary' and
'mechanical' power (Epitaphs II, 359), combine this self-conscious textuality with imaginative
expression. I. A. Richards complains that 'it is the use of responses not available without
special experience, which more than anything else narrows the range of the artist's
communication and creates the gulf between expert and popular taste' (p. 168). But
Wordsworth's commonplace echoes of familiar phrases illustrate his ideal, expressed once
more in the first Essay as 'that pious humility and self-abasement, which are ever most
profound as minds are most susceptible of genuine exaltation' (ll. 486-88).

\(^{40}\) The Friend 14, quoted in PW V, 456.
CHAPTER 9: WORDSWORTH'S INTERTEXTUAL IMAGERY

[i]

'[the moon] seemed far & distant in the sky there
were two stars beside her, that twinkled in & out,
& seemed almost like butterflies in motion & lightness'

(Dorothy Wordsworth, Journals, 16 March 1802)

In the spring of 1802, Wordsworth wrote four poems in quick succession about, or involving, butterflies. All were published in the 1807 Poems, in Two Volumes, though only two were in the same subsection, and in the Complete Poems of 1815 the four were separated still further.¹ 'Beggars' is in 'Imagination', 'To a Butterfly' ('Stay near me') is in 'Childhood', 'The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly' is in 'Fancy', and 'To a Butterfly' ('I've watched you now') is in 'Affections'. Each of these poems, but the last especially, might be seen to possess that quality of slightness, of undue concern with trivial subjects, that has troubled readers of Wordsworth from Coleridge onwards. But these poems, companions in terms of composition, share with Spenser and Shakespeare specifically, and literary and folklore traditions more generally, an allusive cluster of emblematic and metaphorical associations, which answers that charge of triviality, showing why Wordsworth found these creatures significant.

In 'The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly', Wordsworth is moved by an impulse of sentimental melancholia as he witnesses a minute instance of what Tennyson was to call 'nature red in tooth and claw'.² But both butterfly and robin also symbolize greater things, that are the cause of a more profound anxiety. In the two poems entitled 'To a Butterfly', Wordsworth expresses the importance of the butterfly as an 'historian of my infancy', reminding him of his childhood. The happiness of Wordsworth's earliest years was soon lost, after the death of his parents, with the break-up of his 'father's family' ('Stay near me' l. 9). The butterfly triggers the memory, so that 'dead times revive' (l. 6). But Wordsworth also hints at something more universal. Any of the details of summer days of child's play might

¹ In 1807 'Stay near me' and 'I've watched you now' were in 'Moods of my own Mind', 'Beggars' was in 'Poems Composed During a Tour, Chiefly on Foot', and 'The Redbreast and the Butterfly', as it was then titled, was in 'The Orchard Pathway'.
² Other observations of predatory robins include Thomas Day's The History of Sandford and Merton, 10th edn, 3 vols (London: Stockdale, 1801), in which Tommy is consoled over the cat's killing of his tame robin, by learning that robins themselves kill worms, and Keats's To J. H. Reynolds, Esq.:

   Still do I that most fierce destruction see,
   The Shark at savage prey – the hawk at pounce,
   The gentle Robin, like a pard or ounce,
   Ravening a worm (ll. 102-05)
recall that time, but the butterfly has a special significance, though it is made explicit only by allusive connection.

In ‘Beggars’, written the day before ‘Stay near me’, Wordsworth borrows a phrase, ‘a weed of glorious feature’ (l. 18), from Spenser’s *Muiopotmos: or The Fate of the Butterflie*:

What more felicitie can fall to creature,  
Than to enjoy delight with libertie,  
And to be Lord of all the workes of Nature,  
To raine in th'aire from earth to highest skie,  
To feed on flowres, and weeds of glorious feature,  
To take what ever thing doth please the eie?  
Who rests not pleased with such happines,  
Well worthie he to taste of wretchednes.  

(ll. 209-16)

Critics disagree about the precise interpretation of Spenser’s tale of a butterfly who gets trapped in a spider’s web, but certainly the butterfly is an allegorical figure for the soul, an association that is found world wide.\(^3\) Spenser refers in passing to the more familiar story of Psyche (l. 131), which he briefly tells in *The Faerie Queene* (III vi 50). Its best known source was in Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*, which had been translated by Thomas Taylor, with a commentary, in 1795.\(^4\) Coleridge, who called the tale ‘the most beautiful Allegory ever composed’, explains of ‘psyche’ in a poem published in *Biographia Literaria* that ‘The butterfly the ancient Grecians made / The soul’s fair emblem, and its only name’.\(^5\)

Wordsworth employs the platonized butterfly in *The Excursion*:

Mounts on the breeze the butterfly; and soars,  
Small creature as she is, from earth’s bright flowers,  
Into the dewy clouds. Ambition reigns  
In the waste wilderness: the Soul ascends  
Drawn towards her native firmament of heaven  

(IV 392-96)

In his 1802 lyrical address to the butterfly he gives no hint that he may have this tradition in mind, yet he had alluded to Spenser’s allegory in the poem written just the day before.

Wordsworth transforms the significance of the image – literary in British culture, religious in

\(^3\) Maria Leach notes that in Japan and Europe, and amongst native Americans and Pacific Islanders, the butterfly has been the prime emblem of the soul, or even its actual incarnation (*Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology & Legend*, 2 vols (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1949-50), I, 176).


\(^5\) *Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature*, II, 102; *Biographia Literaria*, I, 78.
others — into his own personal, quasi-religious scheme. On the surface of it, the emblem of man's immortal soul is demythologized, becoming just a butterfly again. But the sight of it prompts an act of the immortal memory, restoring a sense of the child's imperviousness to the passing of time, his unselfconscious innocence that, in retrospect, gives the impression that he was living in an immortal Eden. Time stood still, or at least 'childish days' 'were as long / As twenty days are now' ('I've watched you now' ll. 18-19).

This is a curious kind of not-quite-performed allusion. Wordsworth seems to intend the image to carry its allegorical force, even though he does not prompt an allegorical reading. The lyrical effusion is emotionally underpinned by the authority of an ancient metaphor, yet required to express this significance in its own naturalistic terms. Wordsworth uses this same technique in 'My heart leaps up', which, from the 1815 volume onwards, directly preceded 'Stay near me'. The rainbow, providing the same memory, and continuity, as does the butterfly, is a descendant of Noah's: a naturalized covenant of God; Nature's 'security', in both senses of that word. As it happens, the butterfly is linked directly to the rainbow by Spenser, in Muiopotmos. Compared to its colourful wings:

Not halfe so manie sundrie colours arre
In Iris bowe, ne heaven doth shine so bright
(ll. 92-93)

In Wordsworth too the butterfly shares the special meaning of the rainbow: a personal association with childhood that inherits a transformed biblical, literary, or classical authority to become an article of faith. In an early version, the butterfly was called not 'Historian of my infancy' (l. 4) but 'bible of my infancy'. Wordsworth has not had to create the promise of the butterfly, it has been given to him by nature, as God presented the rainbow to Noah. This is the first reason, then, that the sight of the butterfly being pursued by the robin is distressing: it is not merely a tiny creature that is under threat of destruction, but a symbol. The butterfly, like the rainbow, is a fragile security at best, for only when it chances to appear can Wordsworth receive from it that vital connection with the past, the backward continuity that is a replacement for a future immortality. To see the emblem of his faith in danger may exacerbate Wordsworth's sense of the tenuousness of that faith itself. But the butterfly has further associations, as does the robin, which suggest that Wordsworth not only mourns his lost youth in the three butterfly poems but that here, and in 'Beggars', he grapples with personal and political anxieties.

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6 See the apparatus criticus in the Cornell Poems, in Two Volumes, p. 203.
‘the bird whom Man loves best’
(‘The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly’ I. 1)

Wordsworth is distressed by the fact that it is the robin, of all potential predators, that is
hunting the butterfly, because he had thought of the robin as a compassionate bird. Its pity is
described in the ballad, ‘The Children in the Wood’, when the babes, abandoned by the
henchman of a treacherous uncle, starve to death:

No burial this pretty pair
Of any man receives,
Till Robin-red-breast piously
Did cover them with leaves.
(ll. 125-28)\(^7\)

Wordsworth mentions this phenomenon in ‘The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly’, and in three
other poems as well. In *Descriptive Sketches* he describes a cabin which ‘the redbreast peace
had bury’d ... in wood’ (I. 169), in ‘The Redbreast’ (1834) he recalls ‘that good and pious deed
/ Of which we in the Ballad read’ (ll. 9-10), and in ‘Fort Fuentes’ (1820) he hopes that, in
winter,

Some bird (like our own honoured redbreast) may strew
The desolate Slumberer with moss and with leaves.
(ll. 11-12)\(^8\)

The robin’s sympathetic act is a recurrent literary anecdote, cited as a curiosity in several
prose works, such as Thomas Johnson’s *Cornucopiae; or, Divers Secrets*. Webster and
Shakespeare both adopt the anecdote:

Call for the Robin-Red-brest and the wren,
Since ore shadie groves they hover,
And with leaves and flowres doe cover
The friendlesse bodies of unburied men.
(\*The White Devil\* V iv 89-92)

the raddock would,
With charitable bill ...
bring thee all this;
Yea, and fur’d moss besides. When flow’rs are none,
To winter-ground thy corse
(\*Cymbeline\* IV ii 224-25, 227-29)

\(^7\) The text is from Percy, III, 171-77. Wordsworth quoted this ballad in his 1800 *Preface* to the
*Lyrical Ballads* and alludes to the quoted lines (the babes’ wanderings) in several places – see above,
Chapter 6.

\(^8\) Bewell suggests that ‘in Peter Bell, Wordsworth explores the relationship between burial and the
state of nature by naming the son of the dead man Robin and by describing him as being “like a bird”,
“fed on many a crust of bread”’ (p. 311).
Herrick appeals on his own behalf 'To Robin Red-brest':

Laid out for dead, let thy last kindnesse be
With leaves and mosse-work for to cover me:
And while the Wood-nimphs my cold corps inter,
Sing thou my Dirge, sweet-warbling Chorister!'

(II. 1-4)

In an earlier instance, Drayton instructs that 'Covering with Mosse the deads unclosed eye, /
The little Red-brest teacheth Charitie' (The Owl ll. 87-88). Wordsworth expresses anxiety over
charity in 'Beggars', in which the beggar boys, like the robin, chase a 'crimson butterfly'
(l. 22). Both these sights were in fact Dorothy Wordsworth's and were recorded in her journal.
To William, the parallel was not superficial, for he had already pondered the equivalence of
birds and beggars, and was to continue to do so throughout his career. The Old Cumberland
Beggar begrudges the birds the few crumbs that he accidentally drops, from the meal that was
itself some one else's 'scraps', and the opening of 'Old Man Travelling', a poem of the same
period, hints at this beggar-birds parallel too. Of all birds, the robin is most like a beggar
because, staying in Britain to endure the scarcity of winter, it is driven in its need to come to
the door, begging alms. Much later, Wordsworth considers this analogy explicitly, in 'The
Redbreast' (1834) and 'I know an aged Man' (1846), and these poems show that this metaphor
is not just a picturesque detail. Wordsworth makes the equation in order to build up a specific
point of social policy: the question of what ought to be done about vagrancy.

In 'The Redbreast', Wordsworth stresses that the robin, though dependent on man –
'in all lands / Nurtured by hospitable hands'(ll. 58-59) – is free:

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9 It is not possible to know which works Wordsworth had in mind when writing his own robin poems.
De Selincourt notes that Knight compared Wordsworth’s 'pious bird' with Cowley’s, whose lark has
also been cited as a source for Wordsworth's (PW II, 492 & 518). Percy’s note to 'The Children in the
Wood' mentions Addison’s article in the Spectator 85. Addison cites Horace's account of a turtle
dove that covered him, when sleeping, with leaves. Perhaps this is a source for the 'desolate
slumberer' of 'Fort Puentes', in contrast to the dead bodies of the other instances. Webster's dirge was
included among the Poems and Extracts Chosen by William Wordsworth (p. 42). De Selincourt
suggests that the 'Dirge' that Wordsworth wrote as a boy was influenced by Collins’s 'Dirge in
Cymbeline' (PW I, 367), which provides another rendering: 'The Redbreast oft at Ev'ning Hours /
Shall kindly lend his little Aid: / With hoary Moss, and gather'd Flow'rs, / To deck the Ground where
thou art laid' (ll. 13-16). Further evidence of the anecdote's contemporary appeal is Ann Francis’s
'Elegy on a Robin, Occasioned by seeing a favourite Cat approach the dead Bird, and after having
examined it, leaving it unhurt', which refers to the ballad, as does Sarah Trimmer in The History of
the Robins – first published in 1786 as Fabulous Histories: Designed for the Instruction of Children
Free entrance to this cot has he,
Entrance and exit both yet free
(ll. 60-61)

The italicizing of the word 'yet' implies a topical point, for in the year of this poem's composition, 1834, the Poor Laws had been altered. The Poor Law Amendment Act moved to abolish the local, outdoor relief for which the individual parish had been responsible, and those seeking assistance had to enter the workhouse. In a letter of 1829 Wordsworth had argued that 'the great Principle of the Poor Laws ... tend[s], if judiciously applied, much more to elevate than to depress the character of the Laboring Classes'. It is the overturning of that principle that Wordsworth attacks in these late poems:

I know an aged Man constrained to dwell
In a large house of public charity,
Where he abides, as in a Prisoner's cell,
With numbers near, alas! no company.

When he could creep about, at will, though poor
And forced to live on alms, this old Man fed
A Redbreast ...

Dear intercourse was theirs, day after day;
What signs of mutual gladness when they met!
(ll. 1-7, 13-14)

His reaction is consistent with the views that he had held back in 1802 – when he wrote 'The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly' – and in the 1790s. In the note to 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', dictated to Isabella Fenwick in 1843, he makes the connection between that poem – now 45 years old – and the nine-year-old Amendment Act (p. 56). In the 1790s, Wordsworth says, the war and agricultural failures had caused a great increase in vagrancy, which had therefore become a topic for debate. Wordsworth sees the Act of 1834 as the culmination of an attack on the principle of almsgiving that had begun when he wrote his first beggar poems. In an anticipation of what was indeed to happen, Wordsworth had exclaimed of the Old Cumberland Beggar, harsh as his life of vagrancy was, 'May never HOUSE, misnamed of INDUSTRY, / Make him a captive' (ll. 179-80).

The beggar retains some comfort and dignity in being free. Wordsworth asks, 'let the chartered wind that sweeps the heath / Beat his grey locks against his withered face'
(ll. 175-76), recalling, Stein suggests (p. 191), Jacques's words in As You Like It:

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10 Letter to George Huntly Gordon, 1 December 1829, LY II, 182.
I must have liberty
Withal, as large a charter as the wind
(Il vii 47-48)

Insofar as he has the beggars' own welfare at heart, Wordsworth always believed that they ought not to be deprived of their physical liberty: they are better off being, like the robin, dependent, yet free. But Wordsworth's conclusion is based not only on what he believed to be best for the beggar, but on his wider ideas about social dynamics. For he sees the beggar as having a vital role in the community. As a mendicant, he prompts acts of charity that ennoble the giver. 'The poorest poor' he explains in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar',

Long for some moments in a weary life
When they can know and feel that they have been,
Themselves, the fathers and the dealers-out
Of some small blessings
(Il. 147-51)

Wordsworth describes a woman who, though poor herself, aids the beggar. In this way he acts as a kind of social glue for the community, 'a record which together binds / Past deeds and offices of charity / Else unremem'erd' (Il. 89-91). Keeping the dignity at least of freedom himself, he enables acts of self-dignifying charity from others, thereby giving something back, in a system of mutual benefit. The robin, in the combination of its literal and its literary incarnations, is thus an apt metaphor for the beggar. It too benefits from man's charity, and, as Drayton put it, 'teacheth Charitie' in return. In this vision of a harmonious society, all are givers as well as receivers, and giving brings its own reward in the satisfaction of having helped a fellow creature.  

To return again to 'The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly', we can now see that it is not only the threat to the butterfly – a vital symbol of nature's promise to man – that causes Wordsworth distress, but also the fact that it is the robin that poses the threat. The very bird that has become an emblem for man at his best, giving and receiving in acts of mutual

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Robin Jarvis points out that Wordsworth's attack on workhouses is only one aspect of the poem. His wider purpose, which has offended many readers as complacent, is to defend the alms-giving status quo against 'the rationale advanced by political economists for the counter-productive and depraving effects of institutional toleration of dependent poverty' ('Wordsworth and the Use of Charity', in Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1780-1832, ed by Stephen Copley & John Whale (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 200-17 (p. 204).
benevolence, now demonstrates a darker side of man: aggression. Might not Wordsworth fear that his picture of peaceful man, living in harmonious liberty and responsibility may be an illusion? Might man’s more natural impulse be to destroy his fellow creatures, including man himself? The sight of the robin chasing the butterfly seems to be made more distressing by the fact that the butterfly is, ‘in crimson drest, / A crimson as bright as [the robin’s] own’ (ll. 35-36). Their likeness suggests that they might be the same species, as, emblematically, they both represent man. A popular fable tells that the robin’s breast was dyed red by Christ’s blood, when the bird tried to extract the thorns from his forehead when he was on the cross. (Here again this bird shows sympathy for the dead or dying). In Wordsworth, the crimson suggests a less innocent staining, the nature red in tooth and claw that I mentioned earlier, or, on the human level, a violence that may or may not be natural.iii

iii 'For her own person, / It beggar'd all description' (Antony and Cleopatra II ii 197-98)

‘Beggars’ expresses an anxious contradictoriness. The poet is both attracted to, and mistrusting of, the beggars. He admires them, but believes that they are lying to him. He gives the woman alms, but refuses them to the little boys. Thomas Frosch suggests a psychoanalytical reading of this anxiety, in which Wordsworth’s ambivalence springs from traumatic feelings about mothers. An alternative is that the encounter with these idiosyncratic beggars stirs up troublesome political questions. The question of alms-giving was both a specific point of social policy for Wordsworth, and one on which to found a broader philosophy, that of benevolence, which exalts the self-respect of the giver even as it aids the beneficiary. These particular vagrants also summon up questions greater than their own circumstances: namely, the possibility of a radically alternative social system. The woman is

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12 These two emblematic creatures seem to become permanently associated for Wordsworth. In The Excursion he refers to the robin yet again as a recipient of charity, just a few lines before his platonic butterfly:

I guess that, welcome to your lonely hearth,  
The redbreast, ruffled up by winter’s cold  
Into a ‘feathery bunch,’ feeds at your hand  

(IV 385-87)
The quotation is from James Hurdis’s Favorite Village (1800).

13 Leach notes that in the north of England it was customary to kill red butterflies (I, 176), in which case the robin is still more like a human, though, as we shall see, Wordsworth remembers killing white ones.

14 Thomas R. Frosch, ‘Wordsworth’s “Beggars” and a Brief Instance of “Writer’s Block”’, Sir 21 (1982), 619-36.
described, with that phrase borrowed from Spenser, as 'a weed of glorious feature'. Though of the lowest social standing – a 'weed' in the garden of society – she is nevertheless 'of glorious feature', so that she has a dignity, even, to Wordsworth's mind, a certain nobility. Indeed, she has 'fit person for a Queen', though Wordsworth's choice of societies over which she might rule, 'Amazonian files' and 'Bandit[s]’ maintain the sense that, though queenly, she is an outsider. She would be the ruler of an alternative, rather than the established, community. This image of an outcast queen is further suggested by the word 'Egyptian'. It is short for 'gypsy', but glances also at Cleopatra.

The allusion to Spenser in 'Beggars' hints that the boys are in some way like the butterfly that they pursue. In the final line they 'fly' away, and in the sixth stanza, which Wordsworth added in 1827:

\[
\text{they, so blithe of heart, seemed fit} \\
\text{For finest tasks of earth or air:} \\
\text{Wings let them have, and they might flit} \\
\text{Precursors to Aurora's car,} \\
\text{Scattering fresh flowers; though happier far, I ween,} \\
\text{To hunt their fluttering game o'er rock and level green.} \\
\text{(ll. 31-36)}
\]

The boys are transformed into some kind of angels, or cupids, since they are small children. But the wings, and the reminder of their 'game', 'fluttering' just as they 'might flit', associate them with the butterfly. In fact, angels and butterflies are themselves associated: 'many medieval angels have butterfly wings rather than those of a bird'. Wordsworth brings them together in Home at Grasmere, with a remembrance of the same stanza of Muiopotmos to which he alludes in 'Beggars':

I thought …
Of Sunbeams, Shadows, Butterflies, and Birds, 
Angels, and winged Creatures that are Lords 
Without restraint of all which they behold. 
(MSB reading text ll. 25, 31-33)

Spenser tells us that Clarion the butterfly's wings were more intricately patterned than Cupid's
(ll. 97-101). 'Full manie a Ladie faire,'

in Court full oft 
Beholding them, him secretly envide, 
And wisht that two such fannes, so silken soft, 
And golden faire, her Love would her provide
(ll. 105-08)

\[15\] Leach, I, 176.
A ‘fan’ is a poeticism for a ‘wing’ (Keats has ‘the fans / Of careless butterflies’ in *Endymion* I 764-65), so that Spenser’s is not a strange progression, and it is perhaps the ‘divers-color’d fans’ with which Cleopatra’s ‘pretty dimpled boys’ are equipped which suggest to Shakespeare that they are ‘like smiling Cupids’ (*Antony and Cleopatra* II ii 202-03). (Kneale hears ‘an inexplicable echo of *Anthony and Cleopatra* in Wordsworth’s description of the breeze that fans his cheek’ at the beginning of the 1850 *Prelude* (p. 33)). The beggar boys are, similarly, attendants on an Egyptian Queen; as butterflies, they are angels, or souls. As human as anyone else, they are poor, but regal, in accordance with Wordsworth’s early poetical and political agenda. Settling on an attitude towards them involves placing himself, and strangely enough, butterflies were also associated for Wordsworth with friends and enemies, natives and foreigners.

It is plain from Dorothy’s journal that the butterfly incidents in ‘Beggars’ and in ‘Stay near me’ were directly related in Wordsworth’s mind. Dorothy read out her account of the beggar boys on 13 March. Wordsworth composed ‘Beggars’ on that day and the following one, and then wrote ‘Stay near me’ that same day, following a conversation about his own butterfly-chasing, that was surely prompted by the memory of the beggar boys. He and his school-friends, Dorothy tells us, ‘used to kill all the white [butterflies] ... because they were frenchmen’ (*Journals*, 14 March 1802). This picture of the naive, patriotically xenophobic child is amusing, but it is also strikingly ironic, given Wordsworth’s later French allegiance. In old age, Wordsworth recalled having once thought of being a soldier. In Orleans, Nicholas Roe suggests, Wordsworth thought seriously of joining the French patriot army, at the time when he was under Beaupuy’s influence. When England joined the war against France, Wordsworth felt like an enemy to his own countrymen, an ‘alien in the land’ (*Prelude* X 193).

In a discussion of xenophobia, Jay Clayton notes that in Wordsworth’s poetry ‘abandoned women, the poor, and the infirm become objects of suspicion – their poverty and pain make them aliens in their own land’ (‘The Alphabet of Suffering’, p. 56). The xenophobic impulse allies beggars with Frenchmen, and Wordsworth had himself been mistaken for a Frenchman, not only figuratively in his own sense of his political allegiance, but literally, in the Spy Nozy

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16 Titania instructs her fairies to ‘pluck the wings from painted butterflies / To fan the moonbeams from [Bottom’s] sleeping eyes’ (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* III i 172-73).
affair of 1797, when his ramblings along the river in Somerset were mistaken for surveillance operations. Had he fought with the French, he would by implication have hunted English butterflies. His experience in France alienated him from his nation, and divided his conscience. Concern for social outcasts like beggars is involved with an uncertainty about himself: is he an insider or an outsider, a friend or an enemy to his country, and ultimately to himself?

In March 1802, Wordsworth would have had his experiences of France in mind, for he was planning to take advantage of the peace that had been negotiated—though it was to prove only temporary—to go back there to visit his ex-lover and daughter. I would ask of these butterfly poems, as David Ellis asks of *The Prelude*, whether the lessons Wordsworth felt he had learnt about himself during the Revolution did not in fact determine both the prominence he gives to certain childhood memories... and the way he chooses to regard the disciplining process which goes on in them as providential. (pp. 38-39)

Wordsworth often advocates passivity, and is so moved by the example of Dorothy’s gentleness, because he has experienced the aggressive urge.

ivy
‘A very hunter did I rush / Upon the prey’
(‘Stay near me’ ll. 14-15)

The shadowy relation of Wordsworth’s butterfly-hunting to nationalist warfare has a precedent in *Coriolanus*, a play that abounds in animal imagery, making use of many of the traditional connotations of animal fable and heraldry. This may be a ‘source’, or only a chance analogue. I do not think that the status of its relationship affects its ability to illuminate, for the reader, Wordsworth’s concerns. Valeria describes Coriolanus’s son, Martius:

I saw him run after a gilded butterfly, and when he caught it, he let it go again, and after it again, and over and over he comes, and up again; catch’d it again: or whether his fall enrag’d him, or how ’twas, he did so set his teeth and tear it. O, I warrant, how he mammock’d it! (I iii 60-65)

The image suggests simply that young Martius takes after his father: he will be a soldier too, pursuing his enemies with equal relentlessness. But when the metaphor is used of Coriolanus himself, it is surprisingly employed. Coriolanus has gone over to the enemy Volscians, and leads them into battle:
they follow him,
Against us brats with no less confidence
Than boys pursuing summer butterflies,
Or butchers killing flies.

(IV vi 92-95)

There is a vital confusion here. The Romans are like the butterflies, being pursued, though they remain ‘brats’. The Volscians are the aggressive children, but though the ‘flies’ they want to kill are the Roman ‘brats’, the butterfly they are ‘pursuing’ is, strictly, Coriolanus: it is him they ‘follow’, though into the war as their leader, not as their prey. The confusion denotes Coriolanus’s own confused allegiance; he has turned against his own nation, and his place is now precarious: he will indeed be butchered, like a fly, by Aufidius and the Volscians. The very political sentiments that fostered his military career alienate him from a section of his own nation, and lead him to betray both his nation and himself.

The footnote to ‘The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly’ likens small things to great:

See ‘Paradise Lost,’ Book XI., where Adam points out to Eve the ominous sign of the Eagle chasing ‘two Birds of gayest plume,’ and the gentle Hart and Hind pursued by their enemy.

In The Prelude, too, Wordsworth links boyish activities with the political upheaval that he later experienced, and his is often a violent participation. He recalls his acts of thieving in the night, his aggressive solitude, his combat with the elements. Hunting woodcocks, he was ‘a fell destroyer’ (I 318). When ‘a strong desire / O’erpowered [his] better reason’, ‘the bird / Which was the captive of another’s toils / Became [his] prey’ (I 325-28). In the preface to The Borderers, reflecting that ‘power is much more easily manifested in destroying than in creating’, Wordsworth’s example is ‘a child’ whom, ‘Rousseau has observed, will tear in pieces fifty toys before he will think of making one’ (ll. 34-37). Wordsworth describes the Jacobins finding ‘joy’ in the terror:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{ever thirsty, as a child –} \\
&\text{If light desires of innocent little ones} \\
&\text{May with such heinous appetites be matched –} \\
&\text{Having a toy, a windmill, though the air} \\
&\text{Do of itself blow fresh and makes the vane} \\
&\text{Spin in his eyesight, he is not content,} \\
&\text{But with the plaything at arm’s length he sets} \\
&\text{His front against the blast, and runs amain} \\
&\text{To make it whirl the faster} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Prelude X 336-45)

Pitt, meanwhile, ‘childlike longed / To imitate’ the excesses of Robespierre (Prelude X 247)
650-51), and Wordsworth’s own boyish nature stays with him into adulthood too. In *Home at Grasmere* he reviews the history of his aggression:

> While yet an innocent little-one, a heart
> That doubtless wanted not its tender moods,
> I breathed (for this I better recollect)
> Among wild appetites and blind desires,
> Motions of savage instinct …
> Yea, to this day I swell with like desire;
> I cannot at this moment read a tale
> Of two brave Vessels matched in deadly fight
> And fighting to the death, but I am pleased
> More than a wise Man ought to be
> (MS B 910-14, 928-32)

He admits that he had ‘too exclusively esteemed that love, / And sought that beauty, which as Milton sings, / Hath terror in it’ (*Prelude* XIII 224-26); Emile Legouis suggests that he found ‘a kind of fearful poetry in the Terror.’ Whether or not – as the allusion to *Paradise Lost* suggests – violence is part of human nature, Wordsworth certainly feels it to be part of *his* nature.

Shakespeare connects the child’s comic butterfly-hunt to the adult’s militarism. ‘He is a lion / That I am proud to hunt’, says Coriolanus of his arch-enemy (I i 235-36). Does the child Wordsworth, ‘fell destroyer’ of woodcocks, grow up to be a killer too? In France, in 1792, Wordsworth believed that violent revolution might bring about the effective relief of the impoverished. Reflecting on the violence that went far further than it was meant to, and was directed against those that it was supposed to be aiding (the majority of the victims of the September massacres, for example, were common people), Wordsworth feels a sense of guilty implication. His own political ideals, which gave him a seemingly sure place on the ‘right’ side of the argument over France, can be seen to have been manipulated by events so that, like Coriolanus, he found himself to be a betrayer of those to whom he owed his first allegiance. There is no hard evidence that Wordsworth reflected on *Coriolanus* in this way, but two of the subjects with which Shakespearean references in Wordsworth are frequently involved are guilt

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The outline of Wordsworth's changing political allegiance can be traced by his use of Shakespearean quotation in his letters. In 1794 he complains of Pitt's ministry that 'they are already so deeply advanced in iniquity that like Macbeth they cannot retreat'.\(^\text{21}\) By 1805, however, Wordsworth feels less politically involved. The wars, he complains, are ""a tale told by an Idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing"" \textit{(Macbeth V v 26-28)}.\(^\text{22}\) In 1835, fearful of impending reform, he argues that 'to the great Whig Lords may be truly applied the expression in \textit{Macbeth},

\begin{quote}
They have eaten of the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner.\(^\text{23}\)
\end{quote}

Shakespearean allusion recurs in Wordsworth's poetry of guilty betrayal to more subtle effect. As a boy, Wordsworth lays 'springes' for 'wood-cocks' which, literal though they may have been, recall the traps of intrigue in \textit{Hamlet}.\(^\text{24}\) Poaching others' catches, he feels haunted when, Macbeth-like, 'the deed was done' (I 328), and Hamlet's ghost is remembered in the passages on Wordsworth's father's death, \textit{Prelude XI}.\(^\text{25}\) Wordsworth also responds with Shakespearean guilt to the events in France. Returning to Paris just 'a little month' \textit{(Hamlet M v 2)}.

\textit{Letter to William Mathews, 7 November 1794, EY, p. 135.}
\textit{Letter to George Beaumont, 3 June 1805, EY, p. 593.}
\textit{Letter to Lady Frederick Bentinck, summer 1835, LY III, 80.}
\textit{Bryan Crockett points out that Polonius describes Hamlet's courtship as 'springes to catch woodcocks' (I iii 115), whilst the wounded Laertes describes himself as 'a woodcock to mine own springe' (V ii 307-08) ('Negotiating the Shade: Wordsworth's Debt to Ovid', \textit{Classical and Modern Literature: A Quarterly} 11 (1991), 109-18 (p. 116)).}

\(^\text{20}\) Milton's presence in Wordsworth's poetry has also frequently assisted analysis of the latter's politics. Robert A. Brinkley finds a version of Miltonic republicanism: a personal faith that enables the social conscience, a 'politics of survival' ('Vagrant and Hermit: Milton and the Politics of "Tintern Abbey"', \textit{WC} 16 (1985), 126-33). Nicholas Roe charts the changes in Wordsworth's imaginative revision of Milton. It is weakest during the period of his closest political identification. From the summer of 1793, Wordsworth transforms Milton's supernatural guiding light into the glowworm torch of individual enlightenment – a politics of self-sufficiency ('Wordsworth, Milton, and the Politics of Poetic Influence', \textit{Yearbook of English Studies} 19 (1989), 112-26). Nicola Trott finds that Wordsworth develops this image whilst still an avowed republican, so it does not simply signal his political withdrawal or apostasy (as proposed by Marjorie Levinson in \textit{Wordsworth's Great Period Poems}). Rather, it is to be the guiding light of a 'natural, and hence gradualist and non-violent revolution', associated with the Puritan Revolution, which is now disassociated from the events in France. Trott describes this as 'idealizing' but not 'reactionary' ('Wordsworth, Milton and the Inward Light', in Low & Harding, pp. 114-35 (p. 122)).
I i 147) after the September massacres, Wordsworth seems to hear a voice cry ‘Sleep no more!’ (Macbeth II ii 32 & 38), ‘to the whole city’, but chiefly to himself (Prelude X 64-82).\(^{26}\) In 1793 Wordsworth felt the execution of Louis to be justified. His intellectual, if not his practical, involvement, seem to have resulted in a sense of ‘his own ineluctable responsibility for the Terror’ (Roe, p. 41).

The plays which are most often summoned by Wordsworth’s guilt are Macbeth and Hamlet, but in Wordsworth’s own play, The Borderers, the intertext of implication is extended.\(^{27}\) Rivers’s discussion of murder-plotting (1797-99 version, II iii 299-304) echoes Brutus’s in Julius Caesar (II I 61-69), and Mortimer asks Herbert

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Do you believe
In ghosts? – the spirit of a murder'd man
Might have fine room to ramble about here,
A grand domain to squeak and gibber in.
(III iii 44-47)
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He is alluding to Hamlet, in which Horatio, having seen the ghost of Hamlet’s father, reflects that

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In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets
(I i 113-16)
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Ghostly presences multiply themselves, Horatio’s words echoing Calpurnia’s warning to her husband:

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graves have yawn’d and yielded up their dead …
ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets,
O Caesar, these things are beyond all use,
And I do fear them.
(II ii 18, 24-26)
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\(^{26}\) Shakespeare’s involvement in Wordsworth’s political imagination – the nightmarish reflection of the regicidal tragedies in the French Revolution – is explored by Jacobus, see above, Chapter 1, note 43, and by Roe, pp. 74-75.

\(^{27}\) Reeve Parker gives a compelling account of a ‘notably anti-aristocratic, pro-republican adaptation of Othello’ staged in Paris in 1792, which, Parker conjectures, Wordsworth may have heard of, or even seen, in ‘Reading Wordsworth’s Power: Narrative and Usurpation in The Borderers’, ELH 54 (1987), 299-331.
The late version of *The Borderers*, published in 1842, ends with Marmaduke (previously Mortimer) echoing Macbeth's rejection of the Roman way of suicide, falling on one's own sword (ll. 2309-11, *Macbeth* V viii 1-2).

Jane Worthington has drawn attention to the use of Roman history by commentators on the French Revolution. Roman writers were cited in debates and newspapers in the National Assembly, Legislative Assembly, and National Convention (Worthington, p. 3), and in England, too, Wordsworth found British patriots adopting Roman ways ... John Thelwall ... offers the most striking example of an Englishman using ancient history after the French manner. In 1796 when the Convention Bill prevented his direct attacks upon the British Government, he immediately resorted to lectures on Roman history. In these lectures, which were delivered in the country as well as in London, he continued to expound republican principles, merely shifting the point of application from modern England to ancient Rome. (p. 10)

Shakespeare's far from factual renderings of Roman history were also brought into the discussion. Jonathan Bate comments that 'as Burke implied by means of his persistent use of theatrical metaphor in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, drama had been transferred from the realm of fiction to the political stage in Europe' (p. 48). Another application was made by Hazlitt in 1816:

CORTOLANUS is a store-house of political common-places. Any one who studies it may save himself the trouble of reading Burke's Reflections, or Paine's Rights of Man, or the Debates in both Houses of Parliament since the French Revolution or our own.  

Hazlitt's essay on *Coriolanus* is the one place where Shakespeare's play and Wordsworth are brought into direct contact. Hazlitt is troubled by Shakespeare's sympathy with a tyrant, the fact that Coriolanus is in some sense a hero, and he concludes that poetry is necessarily elitist. Marilyn Butler notes that Hazlitt seems to challenge Wordsworth specifically when he says that 'the principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle', for Hazlitt 'had still thought of Wordsworth's as a "levelling Muse" when he reviewed *The Excursion* (1814)' (p. 167). Now he argues that 'kings priests, nobles, are [poetry's] train-

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28 Wordsworth mentions his own attempt to apply ancient examples to current events in the *Prelude*, X 158-75.
bearers, tyrants & slaves its executioners', and quotes Wordsworth, very provocatively:
"Carnage is its daughter" – Poetry is right royal' (Howe IV, 214).30

Bate emphasizes the significance of Hazlitt's 'recognition that studying Coriolanus was like reading both Burke and Paine' as demonstrating 'that Shakespeare could not be confined to a single camp in the debate on the French revolution'.31 He finds George Cruikshank's caricature of George IV's accession, Coriolanus Addressing the Plebians (1820), perhaps influenced by Hazlitt's reading, to be similarly ambivalent (p. 102). But despite his attack on Wordsworth, Hazlitt's argument that 'the language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power' was not one which Wordsworth had not himself considered: during the Terror he feels 'a kind of sympathy with power' (X 416), and though he presents it as the power of lawful vengeance, he is not untroubled by it. In that passage of Home at Grasmere which alludes to Muiopotmos, Wordsworth rejoices that 'such liberty was mine, / Such power and joy', then checks himself:

    but only to this end:
    To flit from field to rock, from rock to field …
    … here
    Should be my home, this Valley be my World
    (MS B 35-37, 42-43)

He wants only the limited 'power' of the self-sufficient butterfly. The pursuit of power is a bloodthirsty hunt: in the Fenwick note to the Thanksgiving Ode (p. 29) Wordsworth's example of the power-fixated man is Nimrod, whom he describes in the sonnet 'Go back to antique ages' (1826?) as

    the first mighty Hunter [to] leave the brute –
    To chase mankind, with men in armies packed
    For his field-pastime high and absolute,
    While, to dislodge his game, cities are sacked!
    (ll. 11-14)

Like Coriolanus, he progresses from animal to human prey.

An identification of Wordsworth with Coriolanus may be articulated by his evidenced and nightmarish self-identification with Robespierre, whose career has some similarities with

30 The quotation is from the Thanksgiving Ode of 1816, though the passage in question was transferred in 1845 to the Ode: 1815 ('IMAGINATION – ne'er before content'), see PW III, 155, apparatus criticus.

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Coriolanus's. Each demonstrates a personal ambition at odds with a patriotic devotion which leads him from service to tyranny. Each finds domestic and foreign policies to be irreconcilable and destroys what he had sought to defend. And in both the events of the 1790s and Shakespeare's play, it is the common man who is the primary victim. Coriolanus despises the populace, he 'loves not the common people' (II ii 6), whom Brutus tells,

He was your enemy, ever spake against
Your liberties and the charters that you bear
I' th' body of the weal;
(II iii 179-81)

That Coriolanus cannot sympathize with the poor is conveyed by his own refusal to be humble: "twas never my desire yet to trouble the poor with begging" (II iii 69-70). If his fault begins with such unconcern for the 'common people', 'liberties', 'charters' (like that of Wordsworth's Jacques-inspired 'chartered wind') and 'begging', it is these that end up being the victims of the Anglo-French war, in both countries, as money is denied to the needy in order to fund the war. And who is to blame? If the allies, as Coleridge suggested (see note 32 below), provoked the Terror, their aggression at least followed, if not by necessity, the Revolution. And how relevant is it to assign causes when the results are the same? Famine in France was aggravated by the war. Coriolanus felt that, if it relieved poverty too liberally, the state would never retain the internal order upon which its strength in the face of the enemy depended. Wordsworth cannot be sure that his own concern for 'the common people', 'liberties', 'charters' and 'begging' did not ultimately harm those very virtues.

Wordsworth finds himself to be a betrayer, from whichever angle he views himself. His return to England was a betrayal of the French (Roe, p. 41) and his anti-war feeling a betrayal of his own country, and of the little boy who happily killed white butterflies. Yet his persistence in the French cause would have been a betrayal too, and a bloodier one. 'The evidence of imagination in The Borderers, The Prelude, and The Excursion insists upon Wordsworth's awareness of his active revolutionary self and, more significantly, of that self as potentially violent and extreme as Robespierre and his Committee of Public Safety' (Roe, p. 39). In The Prelude he recalls passing through Arras 'place from which / Issued that Robespierre' (X 455-56), and it is as if he had been following in his footsteps, on the road to revolutionary fervour. Wordsworth hastens to distance himself from Robespierre, recalling his elation when he heard of his death. But his own joy is violent, apocalyptic as the revolution he has now disowned. 'Both Coleridge and Wordsworth discovered in Robespierre an alarming,
distorted version of themselves' (Roe, p. 210).\textsuperscript{32} Not only was it difficult to take sides, but those sides mutated, so that Wordsworth 'might have written or spoken out against political violence' or 'he might equally well have been “entangled” in furthering those deeds he sought to prevent' (p. 41).

\begin{quote}
'in the natural and the moral world, qualities pass insensibly into their contraries, and things revolve upon each other’
\textit{(Epitaphs I, 136-38)}
\end{quote}

In Book X of \textit{The Prelude}, Wordsworth uses the image of the butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, echoing phrases, for a third time, from the same key stanza from \textit{Muiopotmos}, to describe his political idealism. He had

\begin{quote}
wished that man should start
Out of the worm-like state in which he is,
And spread abroad the wings of Liberty,
Lord of himself, in undisturbed delight.
\textit{(X 835-38)}
\end{quote}

Events themselves, however, were not undisturbed, so that Coleridge's comes to seem the more realistic depiction of human nature: though the soul is a butterfly,

\begin{quote}
in this earthly frame
Our’s is the reptile’s lot, much toil, much blame,
Manifold motions making little speed,
And to deform and kill the things, whereon we feed.
\textit{(II. 4-7)}
\end{quote}

Coriolanus, too is reptilian: the gross distortion of his own nature, the transformation of promise into something monstrous, prompts a third use of the butterfly image in the play:

\begin{quote}
There is a differancy between a grub and a butterfly, yet your butterfly was a grub. This Martius is grown from man to dragon: he has wings, he’s more than a creeping thing. \textit{(V iv 11-14)}
\end{quote}

These surreal and hideous metamorphoses are like the anxiously circular protean transformations of Wordsworth's symbols. Emblems of compassion, charity, the philanthropic instinct, become symbols of an eternal humanity, but then mutate into the destroyers of all

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{32} In 'Wordsworth on Milton and the Devil’s Party', \textit{Milton Studies} 11 (1978), 83-98, Edna Newmeyer argues that Wordsworth cannot be counted amongst the ‘Romantic Satanists’ because he compares Satan to Robespierre and to Napoleon. But as Roe shows, Wordsworth’s feelings about Robespierre were mixed. Coleridge considered Robespierre’s means to have betrayed his own, still noble, ends, and even suggested in his lecture ‘On the Present War’ (1795) that it was the allies’ aggression that was responsible for the Terror, as Robespierre was faced with the impossibility of managing the expense of foreign combat and domestic problems at once. Wordsworth had no such sympathy, but his recognition of his own Robespierrean potential is undeniable.
\end{footnotesize}
those things, and of themselves. In ‘Ode’ (‘Who rises on the banks of Seine’), written probably in 1816, Wordsworth exclaims of an allegorical figure of revolution, ‘How sweet to rest her wide-spread wings beneath!’, though these wings ‘are ever playing, / And twinkling in the light’ (ll. 4-6). But before long he finds that

She through many a change of form hath gone,
And stands amidst you now an armèd creature,
Whose panoply is not a thing put on,
But the live scales of a portentous nature;
That, having forced its way from birth to birth,
Stalks round – abhorred by Heaven, a terror to the Earth!

I marked the breathings of her dragon crest
(ll. 15-21)

This mutation is a malignant variant of Spenserian metamorphosis. Another of the themes of Wordsworth’s metaleptic allusiveness is change: Wordsworth transforms passages from Spenser that deal with transformation. Karen Swann finds self-referential allusion to Spenser on the level of single words. In Salisbury Plain, ‘poignant’, ‘dart’, ‘thrill’, and ‘piercing’ are all Spenserian words, related to ‘gride’, ‘an archaism with a well-documented pedigree’ which ‘always functions as an allusion’. These words enact their own meanings, in an elusively intertextual way:

piercing through the narrative fabric to scenes whose bearing
on the manifest remains mysterious, ‘gride’ functions less like
a Spenserian allusion than a nodal point in fantasy or dream; and
it allures us into a maverick interpretive activity more like dream-
analysis than traditional exegesis. It invites us to free-associate.33

In ‘The World is too much with us’, Wordsworth’s ‘sight of Proteus coming from the sea’ (l. 13), is the sight of Milton, whose alchemists

bind
Volatile Hermes, and call up unbound
In various shapes old Proteus from the sea
(Paradise Lost III 602-04)

But Wordsworth transforms Milton’s Proteus into Spenser’s, since he also hears ‘Triton blow his wreathèd horn’ (l. 14), echoing Colin Clouts Come Home Againe, which describes

Triton blowing loud his wreathed horne ... 
Proteus eke with him doth drive his heard
Of stinking Seales and Porcpisces together
(ll. 245, 248-49) 

(Wordsworth's 'pleasant lea' (I. 11) is Spenser's too (I. 283)). Theresa Kelley notes that we are reluctant to call a narrative allegorical if it has no personifications. And yet Romantic figures which possess the factitious, narrative-bound character of allegory, and are presented in a highly allusive or resonant text, do appear to exhibit at least a tendency toward allegory, if not allegory itself. 

This kind of allegory is well represented by Wordsworth's butterfly poems, which seem to allude to models that provide moral and political meanings, but only covertly, so that such interpretations exist only as possibilities. Kelley cites Maureen Quilligan's distinction between rigid 'allegoresis' and true 'allegory', which 'is a polysemous, reader-oriented narrative which is open to several readings' (Kelley, 626-27). Wordsworth's allegory is intertextually polysemous, and is reader-oriented by virtue of its tentativeness. Other critics have noted a similar strategy in Wordsworth as regards other metaphorical modes. G. H. Durrant finds Ovidian parallels in Wordsworth, though they are internalized. Wordsworth attempts 'to achieve the poignant compression of metamorphosis without directly employing it'. This is partly because he recognizes such transformations as being the workings of the mind, not of nature.

Wordsworth celebrates the imagination's Protean transformations of inherited material, as in Resolution and Independence, in which the mind metamorphoses the leech-
gatherer first into a rock, and then into a sea-beast. But though this creature seems harmless enough, it hints at the monstrous. Samuel Schulman argues that ‘Wordsworth alludes ... to Spenser’s Rocke of vile Reproch, encountered by Guyon and the Palmer on their voyage to Acrasia’s bower’. The metamorphic propensity has a dangerous potential. This is sometimes expressed with reference to language, as in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads and the third Essay Upon Epitaphs, discussed above in Chapters 2 and 8. Spenser is implicated in this anxiety, his glittering style highlighting, Peter Bement suggests, ‘the inherent artificiality of poetic language’. Schulman finds that the prevailing image of Spenser in Wordsworth’s time was a double one, of ‘gorgeous manner’, but ‘sober matter’. Spenser’s magical world, too, which Coleridge described as dreamlike, with a ‘true imaginative absence of all particular place & time’ threatens to obliterate reality. But shape-changing also takes the form of deceitfulness in Spenser. Wordsworth describes the Maid of Buttermere’s seducer as ‘a bold bad man’ (Prelude VII 323), Spenser’s epithet for Archimago (Faerie Queene I i 37), a master of metamorphic disguise. Doubleness characterizes both Spenser’s allegorical style, and the dangers of moral temptation that are his subject, so that an engagement with the former is itself a kind of fictionalized repetition of the latter: ‘beguilement by lone fancy was a danger that Wordsworth often considered as he pondered his own ambiguous relationship with the pastoral

37 The stanza of Muiopotmos to which Wordsworth repeatedly alludes is one of two that depict Clarion’s rise and fall – or a revolution of the wheel of fortune. Their pattern, a stanza describing bliss, and the next beginning ‘but ...’ is one which Wordsworth draws on in Resolution and Independence, which was begun in May 1802. Stanza 4 descends from joy, and seems to recall the Renaissance wheel:

But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low;

Further ‘buts’ follow in stanzas 5 and 6, into each of which the repeated pattern is compressed. Spenser’s lesson is fatalistic – doom cannot be avoided – yet he allows that ‘He likest is to fall into mischaunce, / That is regardles of his govemaunce’ (ll. 383-84). These lines, especially, anticipate Wordsworth’s:

But how can He expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?

(ll. 40-42)


40 Lectures 1808-1819, II, 409.
tradition and with Spenserianism’ (Bement, p. 169). An anxiety over the ill-effects of
metamorphic models seems to lie behind the invocation of the Prospectus:

    upon me bestow
    A gift of genuine insight; that my Song
    With star-like virtue in its place may shine,
    Shedding benignant influence, and secure,
    Itself, from all malevolent effect
    Of those mutations that extend their sway
    Throughout the nether sphere!

(11. 87-93)

But Wordsworth also follows Spenser, in himself attending to moral duplicity. Kelley
explains that, in the Renaissance, ‘the suspicion of Proteus-like powers in poets co-existed with
affirmations of the poet’s god-like power to transform language’ (p. 630), and notes that, in the
Faerie Queene, the lascivious Proteus is himself compared to Archimago. For Wordsworth,
shape-changing, though an attribute of the imagination, can bring about delusion, most evilly
when the morally right itself mutates into the wrong. The Fenwick note to The Borderers
explains Wordsworth’s intention to represent ‘what I had observed of transition in character &
the reflections I had been led to make during the time I was a witness of the changes through
which the French Revolution passed’ (p. 78). He ends his sonnet ‘Blest Statesman He’ (1838),
‘Perilous is sweeping change, all chance unsound’, alluding to the Faerie Queene V ii 36, and
in another note to The Borderers, published in 1842, he suggests that ‘in the trials to which life
subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities’. Moral mutation
results from corrupting involvement in political vicissitudes. The discussion of power that is
oddly involved with Muiopotmos in Home at Grasmere suggests that Wordsworth perhaps
read Spenser’s allegory as a poem of political ambition. Potts, who notes many verbal
parallels, associates the Wordsworth of Prelude IX with ‘a Knight of the “Chivalry of
France”, who wandered through the events of political change’, as well as through Spenser’s
‘profoundly ethical fairyland’ (Wordsworth’s Prelude, pp. 294, 297), and T. J. Gillcrist finds
Wordsworth to engage with Spenser’s politics in Salisbury Plain. Alluding there to ‘Errours
den’ (Faerie Queene I i 13), Wordsworth condemns ‘foul Error’s monstrous race’ (l. 545), of
which Coriolanus, metamorphosed into a dragon, and Wordsworth’s ‘terror’ with her ‘dragon
crest’ might be two members.

42 T. J. Gillcrist, ‘Spenser and Reason in the Conclusion of “Salisbury Plain”’, English Language
In 'Beggars' there is one more allusive suggestion of change. At the poem's end, the boys fly away 'in the twinkling of an eye' (l. 46). Characteristically, Wordsworth uses the phrase as a naturalistic colloquialism – its allusiveness is submerged. Its source is the Bible:

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump:
for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised
incorruptible, and we shall be changed
(I Corinthians 15. 52)

Brought together, Wordsworth's metamorphic butterfly poems create a spiritual allegory, but one that is built upon specific disappointments and crises. The scope of these poems' reference is very great, from simple observation of nature, and childhood memory, to questions of social amelioration, politics and war, to the effect upon the soul (that is, his soul) of an involvement in all of these issues. Wordsworth mourns the harm that war inflicts on the poor, but also the abuse of the inner self, by the self. Nimrod-like, man hunts down man. But Acteon-like he pursues himself also, destroying his own soul, or moral self, in a personal apocalypse.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

It has become clear from this study that Wordsworth employed allusions of many kinds, yet it has, at the same time, often proved difficult to categorize individual instances of allusion with any certainty. I thought, for a time, that the 'peculiar grace' of Resolution and Independence (l. 50) was inherited from Thomson's Castle of Indolence (l. 668), of which Wordsworth was fond. 'Grace', might refer in part to the poet's gift, as well as to the divinity's, as does the 'influence' with which it is paired in Wordsworth's other use of the phrase: a good man's own 'powers shed round him ... / A constant influence, a peculiar grace' ('Character of the Happy Warrior' ll. 45-47). Perhaps Thomson's influence is indeed both present and, with subtlety, acknowledged, but one cannot be sure, because 'peculiar grace' is not at all a peculiar phrase: it is used also by Milton, Dryden, John Beaumont, John Wesley and Charles Wesley, and many others.

I have added to Ricks's list of knowingly self-referential allusions the influential angel, the angel's star, and the star's humble cousin, the flower. Wordsworth echoes echoes and transforms images of metamorphosis. But another of those metaleptic images, the ghost, though its shadow is often cast by the clear light of the poet's conscious intention, is the projection also of the reader's searching and source-hunting mental gaze. Time spent amongst secondary sources discovers contradictory claims of traditionally-conceived literary relations which must, in their own terms, disprove one another. But it reveals, at the same time, the way in which the drawing of allusive connections — even when that drawing is more creative than its authors, the critics, know — brings about sensitive interpretation. Whilst Wordsworth's most ingeniously-crafted, complex allusions will always be of primary interest, particularly when, with near-perversity, he seems to half-conceal their brilliance, I conclude at the same time that the difficulty in discerning whether certain allusions are 'there' or not is central to the fascination of allusion-study. The failure of empirical methods, rather than negating claims of allusion's presence, shows rather that it has been too narrowly defined.

On the subject of literary-relations theory, again, I must reach a 'both-and' conclusion. Bloom's agonistic model was never intended to exclude the affectionate and benign, but to explore it. Charles Lamb's description of Wordsworth's relation to Milton as 'free homage and generous subjection' (quoted above in Chapter 4) anticipates Bloom by understanding that Wordsworth simultaneously humbled himself before his precursor, and felt confident in the nobleness of his own devotion. But Bloom's sense of psychological dynamics, though forceful, is excessive in its pessimism, and in its solipsism. If allusion is not the site of Bloomian
influence, it is a strategy for struggling with the anxiety of that influence. Wordsworth uses allusion’s qualities of doubleness and irony, as well as its authorizing legacy, to address his own problems of belatedness. He plays voices off against one another, to avoid the overwhelming influence of a single too-powerful model, and he finds consolation in the succession of echoing poets. Allusion, too, of the kind that is most elusive, and most difficult to categorize, helps the reader to place the poetry in its broader contexts, beyond the universe of other poetry to which Bloom’s theory confines it. Wordsworth’s poetry is shaped both by the dexterity of his influenced intentions, and by the linguistic intertexts of which imaginative literature is only the first.
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