

How Wordsworth became Wordsworth:
A Dialogic Study of a Poet and his Audience

by

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the emergence of William Wordsworth's literary reputation during his lifetime. It is constructed as a variety of biography, organized chronologically in order to attempt a fuller sense of the negotiation of public image and reputation that went on between Wordsworth and his audiences.

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *dialogism* structures the study as a series of "conversations," interconnected and moving outward from self, to intimate group or *coterie*, to public, reviewers, and culture at large. The *coterie* and members of it have a large part to play in Wordsworth's emerging style. The evidence drawn upon for each "conversation" moves from biography to letters to published poems and to published reviews of those works, again roughly describing a movement outward from self to *coterie* to culture at large.

The "conversations" appeal to two or more different kinds of audience, however, because of a "multi-voiced" feature of Wordsworth's published collections, especially noticeable in the critical success of the sonnet form. Further, members of the *coterie*, notably Coleridge, later emerge as important interpreters, advocates, and critics themselves, adding to the critical success of William Wordsworth in the larger cultural conversation.

Ultimately, Wordsworth is recognized for his contribution – a triumph of his confidence in his own style, as well as the education of a new kind of reader that now engages with Wordsworth's poetry at a level of intimacy that makes the reader feel like a member of the *coterie*.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to

My parents, who gave me a thirst for knowledge

My sons, who have given my life purpose

My grandchildren, who keep me young

And my wife, who makes me happy.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study argues that William Wordsworth's perceptive ear for varieties of language and his democratic spirit inform his work and his editing practices and are the most distinctive features of his entire career. By examining his career and work through the framework of M. M. Bakhtin's lexicon of dialogism, we can see that Wordsworth never completely lost his early idealism but rather presented it in different ways at different points in his career, maintaining a heterogeneous variety of social dialects or "voices" in his works. Further, I argue that Wordsworth's greatest accomplishment was the development of a unique style that incorporated these varieties of language in several ways, and the negotiation of that style through a sustained conversation with his publics.

When I began this project, two ideas guided my initial thinking. At the time, I was influenced by Jerome J. McGann's work on social editing theory, and I thought his chronological arrangement of poems and other works in his 1994 *New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse* was a provocative way of presenting the material. It challenged me to think about how these works would strike a reader living through the years of this most exciting literary period. It also seemed a way to trace the emergence of a "Romantic ideology" rather than simply view the period through the lens of that ideology. The second influence was the basic structure of dialogism from Bakhtin. So many things in my own experience I could see in terms of dialogue, and the more Bakhtin I read, the more I could see the applicability of Bakhtin's theories to the work and career of Wordsworth.

Now, years later, as I look at this study, I can see how these two ideas informed my work: one in organizing the overall structure of the piece and attempting to

reconstruct a point of view that was an alternative to the established critical ideology; the other providing a framework for exploring the career and compositions of William Wordsworth along the lines of dialogue or conversation. Proceeding chronologically seemed to be a very revealing approach, and something that has affected my teaching of Romanticism. The broad notion of dialogism, too, is useful and applicable to the classroom.

What follows is a study of William Wordsworth's public reception as it emerged, in effect suggesting an alternative narrative to the totalizing, unifying, and selective critical project that takes into account all documentary evidence, both literary and biographical, discovered since Wordsworth's death in 1850. According to this narrative, Wordsworth developed a clear idea of what he thought a poet was, but this idea was complicated by the realities of making a living, and subject to the judgment of critics. Wordsworth's style engaged the reader on an intimate level, but not all readers were receptive to that intimacy. Wordsworth tried by various prose statements, in addition to his poetry, to influence the critics' judgment, and got himself into years' worth of trouble because his theories did not always align with his practice. Still, he always had a faithful and supportive coterie group around him, consisting largely of family. Some of his coterie had a public presence, too, and their contribution to the "cultural conversation" on Wordsworth's poetry helped establish his reputation. There is a small joke in Wordsworth studies suggesting that, given the prominence of one particular dwelling at the edge of Grasmere, the Wordsworth promotion exercise was a "cottage industry." While this is in large part true, my study has brought me to another analogy: working on Wordsworth's poetry and its promotion was a *family business*, with some members of the

coterie (Coleridge, de Quincey, Arnold, for example) being “adopted” into (or simply adopting?) the Wordsworth family. The ultimate triumph of Wordsworth’s style was achieved with the support of the “family” members who were convinced of his worth, and his canon expanded from 1815 on with recursive publishing gestures that brought intimate conversations before the public. And finally, a significant readership responded to that intimacy of address and became, in effect, members of a huge coterie.

I

Scholarship on William Wordsworth, as with scholarship on most other writers, builds towards a conceptually unified assessment of a conceptually unified body of work. Indeed, Wordsworth himself argues in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* for assessing the whole, not the part, in the case where, having been pleased by one or some of an author’s works, we must give him some benefit of the doubt because, as one editor puts it, “on other occasions where we have been displeased, he nevertheless may not have written ill or absurdly” (*Prose* I:154). Similarly, Wordsworth’s own editing practice throughout his lifetime, and particularly in the case of *The Prelude*, practically forces such an approach to Wordsworth’s work. The long autobiographical poem, never published during his lifetime, yet so assiduously prepared for publication, was finally published posthumously in 1850, and literally and intentionally forced a reassessment of the author’s work in the light of this autobiography. Similarly, when the letters were collected and published, they formed more documentary evidence of Wordsworth’s thinking, and forced further reassessment; and so on through the discovery of the *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* or the love letters between William and Mary: each piece of text adjusts the whole of the poet’s work, and forces a reflection back on who William Wordsworth was and the

nature of his accomplishment. Yet, such an approach, while an accepted way of treating our literary lions, privileges retrospection and the vantage point of our (the current readers') present over that of the poet or of the poet's contemporary audience.

While not dismissing such approaches, I propose in the current study a competing narrative: to examine Wordsworth's very self-conscious conception of himself and his work *as it evolved*, which considers also, then, *as he helped to construct it*. This also necessitates recognizing that his conception of himself as author evolved in relation to his conception of his audience and, indeed, his audience's conception of him. It is somewhat difficult to conceive of organizing such a study, since it seems, at times, a biography. In one sense, it *is* biography: I am here analyzing the writings of a poet in order to see what image of himself he created through time by the features of his writing which he chose to promote, conceal, and so forth, as he saw fit, and as he proceeded through his long life. But I will proceed from beginning to end, trying to avoid a retrospective point of view. Interested as I am in the construction of Wordsworth's *public* persona and image, it seems crucial to explore compositions that were presented to a public, i.e., for publication. *The Prelude* seems a special case, touching on so many points: an origin early in the poet's career, addressed to a friend, in circulation only amongst an intimate sphere for years, expanded and thoroughly revised as if being prepared for publication many times throughout Wordsworth's career. However, given that it was published after Wordsworth's death, I will avoid discussing it except in the most general of terms.

Commentators have suggested the need for such an approach for years now, in different ways. Wallace Douglas, for example, as far back as 1968 produced a psychological study of the poet called *Wordsworth: The Construction of a Personality*,

which outlines the necessity of an attempt to get through the myths of Wordsworth to the real actions and reactions of his life. Similarly, Paul Sheats, in the prefatory material to his study *The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry: 1785-1798*, attempts to read the early poetry without peering through the thick lens of the later reputation, citing Matthew Arnold and H. W. Garrod as types of the critics who disregarded the early poetry:

But we may usefully remember that the young man who made them considered them poems, not biographical or philosophical documents, and that he by no means regarded them as failures From the beginning, furthermore, he was a self-conscious craftsman whose technique was the product of decision, informed or misinformed (Sheats xii).

Sheats goes on to identify another major problem in the “anachronism” of reading Wordsworth through the Victorian and modern interpretations of him and other Romantic poets, partly as a result of the success Wordsworth himself had in creating the taste by which he was to be judged:

It is often assumed that he was a romantic poet from birth and that his early poems may therefore be read as if they were naïve effusions of personal feeling (Sheats xiv).

And in Stephen Gill's 1989 *William Wordsworth: A Life*, as he explains the motivations behind his own project, Gill suggests that we must pay more attention to “the imperious, self-willed Wordsworth, who wanted to be recognized as an intellectual power” (vii). And so, in an extended way, I hope to take up the challenge made by Douglas, Sheats, Gill, and others.

I take as my subject that creation of the “immortal” poet “William Wordsworth” as it was both consciously and accidentally constructed through a dialogic negotiation throughout the life of the actual historical person William Wordsworth. Wordsworth decided early in his life that he ought to devote his life to the betterment of mankind through his writing. His early attempts at publication were largely obscure. After his meeting with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, however, and the publication of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, something happened. The relative success of the volume of poetry, and the care with which Wordsworth guided successive volumes through printing, all led to a public “image” of the Lake Poet emerging through the period 1800 until his death in 1850, an image which, I suggest, was recognized, controlled, maintained, and even manipulated, by William Wordsworth and, subsequently, by a “William Wordsworth machinery” (that “cottage industry,” or my “family business” – and ultimately a “Romantic ideology”). Today, Wordsworth’s place in the English literary canon seems secure, although his particular contribution and talent are under continual review. His “image,” therefore, as one of the “founding fathers” and leading figures of Romanticism has not changed much since Matthew Arnold’s 1879 assessment of Wordsworth as standing right behind (or below) Shakespeare and Milton in greatness in Modern English literature. How did Wordsworth emerge from the obscurity from which we all begin and become such an influential force on succeeding generations of writers and readers?

The notion of “audience” is, of course, a complex one. Many commentators have noted that Wordsworth was caught in an historical double bind: at the same time that book publishing was becoming more and more the vehicle for the transmission of a writer’s works, Wordsworth (like many other writers of his time) yearned for a return to a

more basic, more intimate exchange, based largely on the presence and power of voice rather than writing. I conceptualize at the heart of Wordsworth's notion of audience real, individual readers (himself, Dorothy, Coleridge), then expanding outward in a series of concentric circles to include public audiences of varying size and character.

Wordsworth's unique contribution was that he maintained an intimacy of address – a risk, to be sure, at the more public level – inscribed in the poetry for the reader to respond to.

The origin of audience in one's self and close to oneself is recognized by Mikhail Bakhtin's disciple Volosinov, especially as applied to certain forms of poetry:

A form especially sensitive to the position of the listener is the lyric. The underlying condition for lyric intonation is *the absolute certainty of the listener's sympathy* (112-113, italics in translation).

In the case of Wordsworth, this coordination of lyric form, intimate audience and presence of voice seems to accurately describe some of the key features of his poetry – and his ultimate success. Wordsworth depended all his life on the sympathy of a coterie audience, and sought to replicate that on a large scale with a general public audience. This study examines some of the early poetry that, I suggest, explores the rhetorical structures of the intimate listener/audience, and Wordsworth's anxieties about finding an audience wider than the coterie in order to achieve the cultural power he hoped for.

The writings of Bakhtin and his circle¹ establish the general communication paradigms of *dialogism*, *heteroglossia*, and *style* which lead to the illuminating features and profound insights of Bakhtin's thinking and, as we shall see, are strikingly parallel to Wordsworth's art and his place in the larger culture of his time. Don Bialostosky, in his

1984 study *Making Tales: The Poetics of Wordsworth's Narrative Experiments*, employs Bakhtin with great effectiveness in order to analyze Wordsworth's pronouncements on poetics, and to see Wordsworth's poetics in social terms and as experimental in their treatment of language. What Bialostosky does not account for, though, is the place of Bakhtin's notions of dialogism, and the retrospective and revisionary impulse to which Wordsworth was always subject. Like so many other critics, Bialostosky posits a unified "Wordsworthian poetic project," and therefore is able to interpret early poems in the light of later on poetics. For example, Bialostosky uses the 1815 "Essay, Supplementary" a great deal to establish a poetics, which is then used to illuminate poems written fifteen or more years earlier. Even the 1800 "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*, I suggest, is suspect if this unified, retrospective approach is taken; more revealing of the intentions and meanings of the 1798 volume would be the statements Wordsworth made leading up to its publication.

Stephen Behrendt, in his 1989 study *Shelley and His Audiences*, starts from a similar assumption. His book, a detailed analysis of Shelley's rhetorical positions and strategies, argues that, far from being unaware of his intended audience, Shelley was extremely aware of who he was writing to and for, deliberate in his appeals to those audience(s), and sophisticated in the generic, stylistic, and other techniques he used in order to both persuade and educate them:

I shall argue that as a skilled rhetorician Shelley routinely and deliberately attempted to manipulate his audiences into positions favorable to him and his designs (7).

The unique contribution which Behrendt makes to the realization of the problematic of the reading public is the notion of multistability, which allows Shelley to “look two ways,” so to speak, when constructing an utterance:

Multistability enables images, words, or other constructs to alternate between, usually, two different schemata or significations. The most familiar multistable image is the two-dimensional picture that alternately discloses an urn and two face-to-face profiles The extent to which Shelley’s works, especially his prose, attempt to address different audiences or to convey different messages within the same work suggests the relevance of the concept of multistability to his writing his deliberate manipulation of genre, style, and language in *The Cenci*, the exoteric political poems of 1819, *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, and *Peter Bell the Third*, among others, indicates his willingness – indeed his enthusiasm – simultaneously to address and capture both a general, ‘popular’ audience and the limited circle of the SUNETOI, the ‘ideal’ readers for whom *Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion* were intended (2).

Because I believe Wordsworth started to do something similar, Behrendt’s study also bears a resemblance to the approach here, although the addition of Bakhtinian vocabulary provides, I suggest, an even more powerful tool for organizing and conceptualizing the “conversation” between Wordsworth and his audiences.

In extending the sense of Wordsworth's audience out to the next circle, I will also be looking at reviews and other evidence of "real" readers like Shelley, Byron, de Quincey, Hazlitt, Jeffrey, and others, and their responses to the poet's work. Theorizing about Wordsworth's more mature conception of and response to his audience(s) benefits from the work of Jurgen Habermas and some of his respondents like Jon Klancher. Klancher's 1987 work *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* is crucially important to a study like this one. Other more recent book-length studies that pick up the work begun by Klancher of the relationship between author and reading public during the Romantic period include Lucy Newlyn's *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism* (2000), which helpfully outlines the place of the coterie and identifies Wordsworth's "reception anxiety," and John Mahoney's *Wordsworth and the Critics* (2001), which spends one chapter on a brief overview of the critical reactions to Wordsworth's major publications, then moves on to Victorian critical assessments, those of the twentieth century, and so on. Even more recently, a valuable article by Scott Hess entitled "Wordsworth's 'System,' the Critical Reviews, and the Reconstruction of Literary Authority" posits a thesis that relates to the present study: the place of Coleridge in the renovation of Wordsworth's reputation through the publication of the *Biographia Literaria*.

This, then, is my approach: to suggest Wordsworth's intentions (his intended purpose, his intended reception, his intended image of himself as "poet," and so on) based on statements in letters, advertisements, prose essays, and rhetorical structures embedded in the works; to explore his real audiences, both the coterie and the public, and their responses to the work and those rhetorical structures and strategies based on statements in letters, reviews, and other writings; and then to review subsequent changes

in poetry, poetics, or publishing strategy, in order to get a better sense of the shifting, evolving poetic project “William Wordsworth” as it emerges over time and ultimately prevails in relation to early negative criticism. By considering these forces as constituent elements in a complex cultural dialogue that took place over 60 years – indeed, is continuing even to this day – we see that this present study moves beyond the critical reception to a recursive, negotiated “conversation.”

II

Mikhail Bakhtin’s model for communication has a Shelleyan dimension of both centre and circumference to it; indeed, as Michael Holquist, editor of the English translation of *The Dialogic Imagination*, puts it, at the heart of Bakhtin’s concept of language is a sense of “ceaseless battle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart, and centripetal forces that strive to make things cohere” (xviii). For the purposes of the present study, three key interconnected points emerge from Bakhtin’s thought which help to understand Wordsworth’s relationship with his audiences: *dialogism, heteroglossia, and style*.

Two potentially limiting features of Bakhtin’s theory must be recognized: first of all, he was not particularly systematic in his thinking, and concepts were defined and re-defined over his career; and second, much of Bakhtin’s literary theory is specific to the novel, so it may seem imprudent to apply it to poetry. However, the apparent inconsistency of a term like “dialogism” shows a development in Bakhtin’s interests and thinking, and, curiously enough, Wordsworth’s interests develop along similar lines, as we shall see. Also, it is clear that some of Bakhtin’s theory holds for all language or all literature; further, he devotes long passages to comments on poetry within his studies on

the novel, as a way of getting at defining the one in relation to the other. So it turns out there is a great deal Bakhtin has to say about poetry.

The first, and most overarching, of Bakhtin's key concepts is that of *dialogism*, at its heart a model of two actual people talking to each other in a specific dialogue at a particular time and in a particular place. He argues that we ought to think of this dialogue or conversation as constituting both the speaker (often the "self") *and* the imagined or anticipated listener (or "other"): "The listener and his response are regularly taken into account when it comes to everyday dialogue and rhetoric, but every other sort of discourse as well is oriented toward an understanding that is 'responsive'" ("Discourse in the Novel" 280). A writer, then, often creates verbal pieces that re-enact this kind of exchange between a now-fictional speaker and a now-fictional listener, both created within the language of the work itself. Further complicating the work of literature is the recognition that the speaker in a work is not, strictly speaking, identical to the voice of the poet, and that the exchange will be read by a real reader who is not necessarily the listener addressed in the represented dialogue:

The author is authoritative and indispensable for the reader, whose relationship to the author is not a relationship to him as an individual, as another human being, as a hero, as a determinate entity in being, but rather a relationship to him as a *principle* that needs to be followed ("Author and Hero" 207).

Volosinov, too, seems to have in mind this model of an actual, historical, specific conversation, complicated by the nature of linguistic art, as he discusses the parallels

between various discourses in his essay “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art” and clearly identifies within the literary work the “presence” of a third figure, the reader:

In poetry, as in life, verbal discourse is a *scenario of an event*. Competent artistic perception reenacts it, sensitively surmising from the words and the forms of their organization the specific, living interrelations of the author with the world he depicts and entering into those interrelations as a third participant (the reader’s role) (109, italics in translation).

I will argue that Wordsworth’s approach to his art parallels this more theoretical framework of a writer/audience transaction. Statements in the poetry and the prose support the notion that Wordsworth hoped to enliven the dead letter with a living music of poetry.

While Bakhtin’s communication model extends to include all communication scenarios, we begin (chapter 3 below) by exploring how it helps determine the speaker’s subjectivity. Volosinov articulates the mechanism by which the individual subject develops:

[e]ven the most intimate self-awareness is an attempt to translate oneself into the common code, to take stock of another’s point of view, and, consequently, entails orientation toward a possible listener (114).

Wordsworth’s early years as a writer can be seen in just this way (as can the growth towards identity of almost anyone, not just artists). “Wordsworth demands that his

language talk to us as one person would intimately talk to another – or even to himself or herself,” writes Kim Blank in his *Wordsworth and Feeling*; he sees Wordsworth’s poetry

as searching for a kind of inner acceptance through public performance, although during his lifetime he never gave the public *The Prelude*, his most deliberate attempt to confirm his personal growth and inner acceptance (38).

Blank recognizes Wordsworth’s struggle to form a personal identity, suggesting that the poet’s handling of certain polar opposites was crucial to this development. Writing was therapeutic to Wordsworth, at least as far as his mental health and individuation were concerned. The primary sets of binary pairs for Blank are feeling/thought, inner/outer, child/adult, and even mother/father, and he argues for their eventual integration in *Lyrical Ballads*, and even more specifically, in “Tintern Abbey.” I believe these are all valid observations in relation to the crisis and eventual recovery in Wordsworth’s life; for my purposes, though, I want to highlight some other binaries, especially once the poet gains a sense of himself, including poet/audience, private/public, and even historical/transcendent.

The next thing to consider is the formation of the “listener” in Wordsworth’s early poetry, and the crucial role it played in his choice of vocation and his gaining a poetic voice of his own. As mentioned above, Wordsworth tries to restore an intimacy of exchange that includes a primacy of (and an implied presence of) voice and, I argue, he conceives of an imagined communication scenario within which he is speaking to an “authoritative representative.” In Wordsworth’s case, what I have in mind is that the “authoritative representative” was early and at its heart a real member of Wordsworth’s

“intimate group” like Dorothy or Samuel Coleridge; later in his career, it became more an abstract, an “ideal,” construct. But even at the larger, more public level, he was trying to reach readers on an individual basis – to create one large coterie.

But just as Bakhtin’s later writings re-define “dialogism,” so our focus shifts from the real and imagined “speaking scenarios” at play in the early Wordsworth to the larger struggle on the cultural landscape of the early nineteenth century. Bakhtin moves from defining specific voices towards a more social definition of dialogism: “[I]n a string of works from 1934 onwards, [dialogism] is defined as the unmasking of social languages” (Hirschkop 11). One feature of these social languages is their multi-stable, stratified variety. Bakhtin’s notion of *heteroglossia* denotes these rhetorical structures within an utterance that can be identified as separate dialects of address, and based largely on social distinctions:

[a]t any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also – and for us this is the essential point – into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, ‘professional’ and ‘generic’ languages, languages of generations and so forth Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disintegration, intersect

in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity Every utterance participates in the ‘unitary language’ (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces) (“Discourse in the Novel” 271-2).

Herein lies the paradox at the heart of Bakhtin’s concept of language. At the same time that we, as listeners, presume a unitary, present voice in the speaker of an utterance, there is an opposite pressure towards incoherence; Bakhtin describes these opposite pressures as if they were actual, physical laws. It strikes me that the analogy from physics that Bakhtin uses aptly describes some of the contemporary responses to Wordsworth’s poetry. In choosing to write in the “real language of men,” Wordsworth seeks a stable, unified, potentially monumental or epitaphic language; at the same time, that very choice separates Wordsworth’s language from others’ established language, thus leading the poet to defend his choices in some of his . Even Coleridge focuses on diction in his criticisms of Wordsworth’s work, and a poet-critic like Byron brutally attacks Wordsworth’s poetry based on class and dialect distinctions. I suggest that, from the publication of *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) onwards, Wordsworth responded consciously by employing a heteroglossic strategy that attempted to reach readers from at least two different social strata, which is to say with different types of poetry, as well as

different “ways of reading” poetry, while at the same time maintaining his adherence to his own poetic principles.

The third of Bakhtin’s ideas employed in this study is that of *style*: for it is the writer’s style that negotiates the heteroglossia of his or her language and asserts an individual voice or identity, and it is Wordsworth’s search for and defense of his style that, I believe, is his most heroic struggle and greatest triumph. Emerging from the notions of dialogism and heteroglossia, *style* for Bakhtin contains several elements we might not normally consider as “stylistic”: language, of course, but in many dialects, as well as political and historical contexts, character, subject-matter – all the possible markers of a particular place and time as presented in the poet’s language. At the same time, the individual poet’s style seeks a unity, a purity of expression; it “works in its own language *as if* that language were unitary, the only language, as if there were no heteroglossia outside it” (“Discourse in the Novel” 399). Bakhtin argues for a widening of our view of style, moving beyond a very “private” analysis of the writer’s language to the life “outside the artist’s study” – public spaces, social groups, and their interactions and uses of languages (“Discourse in the Novel” 259). Given the relations between subject, speech, and other as outlined above, Bakhtin insists on the give-and-take of the various “heteroglot” layers the poet encounters and ultimately uses in his or her writing:

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word

does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own ("Discourse in the Novel" 293-4).

This sounds like how we all encounter language, and not just how a writer encounters it. It does seem, however, a very apt description of how Wordsworth works first within a tradition, and then tries to achieve his own poetic style; and it also explains why many Wordsworth poems employ or appropriate the voices or language of others. At the same time, though, Bakhtin insists on a "purity" of language in poetry:

The language of the poet is *his* language, he is utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it, he makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its unmediated power to assign meaning (as it were, 'without quotation marks'), that is, as a pure and direct expression of its own intention ("Discourse in the Novel" 285).

This development of a unique and monologic dimension to a poet's style is something we will consider as we note developments in Wordsworth's own style, and how he presents his entire career to his audience.

III

The above theoretical framings help analyze the poetical work of William Wordsworth in order to explore the evolving presentation and reception of the poet that

forms the focus of this study. The primary metaphor of my study, of course, is *dialogue*, but sometimes I describe it more as *conversation*, using the two terms interchangeably. The next chapter reviews the publication environment within which Wordsworth was writing. What follows after that is arranged chronologically into five different phases of his life, each one marked by some decisive event that signals a shift in the poet's relationship to his audience. I am not suggesting that the dates I have chosen for these phases are definitive, or that they could not be substituted with others equally as logical – they suit my present purposes.

The third chapter discusses Wordsworth's early life, his search for a vocation and a living, especially during the years at university and immediately after. His early sense of calling, his relationship with his sister Dorothy, and, of course, the beginnings of the close symbiosis with Coleridge, all fall into this early period. Some of these early compositions, both published and unpublished, will be analyzed as rehearsals of Wordsworth's initial reception anxiety. The chapter will review the complicated publication history and authorship issues surrounding the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, and conclude with the departure of William and Dorothy for Germany while this landmark volume is in the press. The fourth chapter is a short piece devoted entirely to the period in Germany.

The fifth chapter deals with the period 1800-1814, a period when much of Wordsworth's reputation was disputed. During this period, work begins (and effectively concludes) on *The Recluse* project; feedback on the *Lyrical Ballads* is received and incorporated, along with several more poems, into subsequent editions; some of Wordsworth's greatest prose pronouncements, like the "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*,

are produced; and two major publications contributing to Wordsworth's sense of his place in English literary history are published: *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) and *The Excursion* (1814). From 1807 marks a specific sustained debate within the cultural conversation between Wordsworth and Jeffrey that goes on for at least the next ten years. Of course, during this time period as well, the "second generation" Romantics – Byron, Shelley, and Keats – begin to read and respond to Wordsworth's poetry in private and public ways.

The sixth chapter deals with the period 1814-1820, or from the reactions to *The Excursion* up until a series of publications in 1820. His reputation continues to be openly argued and negotiated in the reviews, countered by his own published prose statements and by the championing of Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria*; we see his stock definitely rising as this phase of the cultural conversation comes to a close and he reaches a wider audience, having negotiated a change in taste to make more acceptable his own intimate style.

The seventh chapter deals with the last thirty years of Wordsworth's long life, from 1820-1850, often seen as a period of decline. Certainly, he slows down, as this period marks less new publication. And yet Wordsworth is fully engaged in dialogue with his culture, continuing to be a public figure, and working at selecting and collecting his poems, revising poems written early in his life, some of which have never been published, and generally *composing* himself and carrying himself like the Poet Laureate he becomes in 1843.

So with this overview, let us see if we can imagine being a contemporary reader constructing our image of "William Wordsworth" as we encounter him. First, though,

two questions need to be answered: “What was the publishing industry like when Wordsworth was writing?” and “What was Wordsworth doing before I ever encountered him?”

Chapter 2: The Reading and Publishing Context

Let us briefly consider the forces at work on the relationships between writers and readers when William Wordsworth started writing. The key features of the change in actual author-reader relationships include numerous interrelated forces, including an increase in literacy rates, the emergence of a new class of readers, as well as improvements in technology that over time made books cheaper; the Romantics' recognition of the rise of a commodity culture, and their attempts to resist it; the existence of coteries and how they functioned; changes to a patronage system, including new forms of patronage; and the place of professional critics. Taken together, these constituted the major factors in a complex dialogue or conversation about literature and literary value. Authors tried to conceive of their actual audience, but it was complicated by coterie audiences, and mediated by the comment and power of the critics. Discussion and debate ensued, with many voices of the time taking part. A poet like William Wordsworth was, in effect, challenged to analyze this heteroglossia of the cultural conversation of his time in order to develop his own authorial voice and style.

By Wordsworth's time, it was becoming more and more difficult for a writer to evaluate the audience for whom s/he was writing. Over the course of several decades from the late-17th through the early-19th centuries, the patronage system, where a writer was supported by a monied individual, was being replaced by the market system. Of course, direct patronage still existed, but it supported fewer and fewer writers. Other varieties of patronage existed, as well, such as the Calvert gift to Wordsworth, or the Wedgwood annuity settled on Coleridge. But even in examples like these, the author is not seen to be writing solely *for* the patron, but for a larger audience. Still, books were

expensive luxuries at the turn of the century, so publishers were mostly targeting well-educated, and well-to-do, audiences and hoping for favourable reviews of new volumes in order to nudge book sales into profitability (Erickson 4-5).

The readership was expanding from the latter half of the 18th century onwards, at least as regarded periodical literature and the novel. Indeed, we might say that a notion of the publishing “infrastructure” most of us might carry around today, however ill-informed, regarding book publishing and sales, promotion, copyright, and so forth, really did not exist when Wordsworth was beginning to publish in the 1790s. This decade falls between the flowering of public discourse in the coffeehouses and periodical essays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the mass audience consuming Dickens’s serial contributions in the Victorian era. Sandwiched in between was a turbulent thirty- to fifty-year period during which the dialogue between writer and audience, and the publishing trade, changed dramatically. For example, H. J. Jackson marks the beginning and end of a “reading boom” from 1790-1830, spurred on partly by social, political, and technological changes but also “by competitive commercial activity, especially advertising and reviewing” (Jackson 9). Further, Erickson (23) argues that reading poetry was actually a genteel fad around the turn of the century. So Wordsworth’s publishing career begins right about the time of this rise in the publishing industry, and especially of publishing poetry, that reaches its peak about 1820 (Erickson 28).

Of course, there was a downside to this surge as well, and again Wordsworth was well attuned to it (see the 1800 “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads*, for example). Raymond Williams, in his chapter on “The Romantic Artist” in *Culture and Society*, writes that “[t]here was an advance, for the fortunate [writers], in independence and social status –

the writer became a fully-fledged ‘professional man.’” But the change also meant the institution of “‘the market’ as the type of a writer’s actual relations with society” (32). Jurgen Habermas, too, traces the transformation of the reading public, positing the creation of a bourgeois public, and a “public opinion,” in opposition to the existing public authorities specifically to debate the “rules” of the emerging commodity economy. The medium of this debate, argues Habermas, was unique: “people’s public use of their reason” (27). The democratic spirit which characterized so much of the discourse of the eighteenth century combined with a new commodity culture of the publishing industry, and Wordsworth and other Romantic poets bear witness to this transformation:

The English Romantics were the first to become radically uncertain of their readers, and they faced the task Wordsworth called ‘*creating* the taste’ by which the writer is comprehended This inchoate cultural moment compelled a great many writers to shape the interpretive and ideological frameworks of audiences they would speak to. They carved out new readerships and transformed old ones (Klancher 3).

Wordsworth developed a keen interest in these changes to the publishing industry, and he also undertook the challenges of finding new and changing old audiences.

There are some problematic dimensions to these changes. The first is the difficult task that comes, we might say, at the “production” end, for the writer trying to identify an audience of real readers, or to construct a “virtual” or “ideal” reader. If (or while) the author chooses to work with “real” readers, choices must be made regarding how to

address one's audience. Should a writer proceed on the assumption that the audience will be small, and therefore tailor the message to a select few (in other words, the poet tries to tightly control the reception of the work by "pitching it" at an audience of intimates he or she can clearly imagine reading the work)? Or will the audience be large and composed of a range of people, tastes, education levels, and so on? Let us begin by choosing the first of these options.

The Romantic poets, and Wordsworth in particular, were concerned with the apparent breakdown of personal communication based on a model of oral communication – a model, we must note, parallel to Bakhtin's some 100 years later. Rieder refers us to the famous formulation in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* in order to explain this:

When Wordsworth wrote his famous definition of the poet as 'a man speaking to men', he meant to reduce the relation between poets and their audiences to the essential proposition that poetry's cardinal virtue is its ability to re-create the face-to-face presence of a speaker to one or more listeners (Rieder 13-14).

Newlyn (21) argues that one of the main activities intended to work against the loss of this "authenticity" was the practice of reading aloud. Reading aloud was a popular activity, partly because the cost of books meant that poetry, in particular, circulated among small groups quite widely. Not everyone would buy the book: friends gathered to read aloud from a volume, and books were lent and borrowed, either between friends or through the various lending library schemes that began to spring up. But in addition to the economic advantage, reading aloud fed the desire to recapture the intimacy of

conversation – it restored reading as a dialogue; it contributed to the cultural dialogue in which writers and readers were engaged. We know that Wordsworth often read aloud his work to the immediate, supportive circle of family and friends. Such a group is often identified as a *coterie*, and the coterie represented a special, intimate audience. Alan Liu puts this succinctly when he says “friends . . . are what Romantic poets have in place of patrons” (334). The coterie practice of reading the work aloud became more and more important as the mass audience became, in effect, more and more faceless; further, the practice of work circulating, both in oral and in written form, among a coterie gave the author a chance to work out some of the artistic or other difficulties he or she might be struggling with in the written work: “[C]oterie[s] allow[ed] writers to circulate their work before it appeared in print (thus delaying and pre-empting its public reception)” (Newlyn 24). Wordsworth certainly displayed this pattern with several of his works. Well-known examples of poems that existed only among a coterie audience for long periods of time would be Coleridge’s *Christabel*, or Wordsworth’s *Peter Bell*, *The Borderers*, and even *The Prelude*. These examples also illustrate how the existence and reputation of poems known among the coterie unavoidably joined the larger cultural dialogue, as their existence was transmitted by word-of-mouth or, in the case of *The Prelude*, references to its existence were made in other publications.

Of course, as the example of Coleridge suggests, there might be a temptation to allow the work to continue to exist *only* at the coterie level – in other words, for reasons of reception-anxiety over a larger audience’s reaction, or simply to control the release of one’s works as part of a more self-conscious project of identity-formation, a poet might choose to never seek publication for a work. Wordsworth recognized this danger, even

though he did leave substantial works unpublished for years at a time (*Ruined Cottage*, *Peter Bell*, *Salisbury Plain*). His place in the literary tradition, though, necessitated his getting published: “Wordsworth well knew that the fate of his poetry was bound to the circuit of writing, publishing, and reading rather than simply speaking and listening” (Rieder 16). And it seems clear that he did eventually plan the release of most of his works as part of a collection, known variously as *Poems*, *Miscellaneous Poems*, or *Poetical Works* as that collection was re-conceived and supplemented over the years. His own attempts to influence how “posterity” would regard him are an essential part of this discussion.

Another aspect of these changes is that it complicates the reception of the work. A category of professional critics, writing for the periodicals, largely took upon itself the task of guiding public taste when it came to reading new publications. Critics, like poets, were keenly aware of the growing mass audience, but the critics often adopted an attitude of arbiters of the value of new work, citing their responsibility for controlling the public’s taste:

More potential readers of literature existed than ever before, but fewer and fewer, it was feared, were genuinely qualified to understand what they were reading. Those, meanwhile, who did understand – the professionals, or experts – were often perceived as threatening (Newlyn 4).

The critics, then, became powerful intermediaries in the publication-reception process I am calling the cultural dialogue or conversation. One feature we must recognize is that the reviews themselves took the form of a dialogue: they responded to a book, but they

did not all appear at one moment, and those published first were taking more of a risk in assessing a new publication; those who followed could assess how the cultural conversation was proceeding before entering into the dialogue. Wordsworth and other authors inserted themselves into the conversations in various ways, too, as, for example, the “Preface” and “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface” of the 1815 *Poems*, illustrate.

Depending on the reviews, the poet can choose to prefer one or the other voices of the audience. In other words, if the reviews of the professionals are not favorable, the poet can fall back on an ideal of “the people” as a reading public separate from the professional critics; if, on the other hand, sales are slow, the author can be consoled by the knowledge that the coterie appreciates the work and that is, after all, the intended audience:

However the immediate argument went, whatever the reactions of actual readers, there was available a final appeal to ‘the embodied spirit. . . of the People’: that is to say, to an Idea, an Ideal Reader, a standard that might be set above the clamour of the writer’s actual relations with society (Williams 34).

The present study argues that Wordsworth’s “Ideal Reader” arises from the actual readers in his coterie, creating a reading subject and audience that Wordsworth firmly believes will appreciate his work, even if that appreciation comes after the poet’s death. In this calculus, Wordsworth’s Ideal Reader is a member of his coterie; that is, the poet strives for a relationship with his readers that defines them as members of one large coterie.

To further complicate the interrelationship between the author and his/her reading public, there was the fear of a kind of “tyranny of the masses” criticism, a decline in standards because of the rise in democratic institutions and practices. Williams quotes Thomas Moore, from Moore’s 1834 *Memoirs, Journals, and Correspondence*, who laments the “lowering of standard that must necessarily arise from extending the circle of judges; from letting the mob in to vote, particularly at a period when the market is such an object to authors” (Williams 35).

Because Wordsworth himself paid some attention to both conceptions of readers in constructing his image through both prose pronouncements and through his poetry, this study examines the interplay between both sets of “real” readers’ reactions. Volosinov describes some of the results of these actual pressures, also, by the way, introducing a notion of multiple publics and their roles in shaping Wordsworth’s style:

The more a poet is cut off from the social unity of his group, the more likely he is to take into account the *external demands of a particular reading public*. Only a social group alien to the poet can determine his creative work from outside. One’s *own* group needs no such external definition: It exists in the poet’s voice, in the basic tone and intonations of that voice – whether the poet himself intends this or not (114, italics in original).

In Wordsworth’s case, sometimes the “real” and the “ideal” are one and the same, especially early in his career; later, he becomes more aware of the changing, enlarging

dynamic between writer and public(s), and modifies his approach somewhat to take these changes into account. In Volosinov's terms:

[t]he listener, too, is taken here as the listener whom the author himself has taken into account, the one toward whom the work is oriented and who, consequently, intrinsically determines the work's structure. Therefore, we do not at all mean the actual people who in fact made up the reading public of the author in question (110).

As suggested above, Wordsworth's sense of audience begins in the immediate and real: with himself, his sister and brothers, and his teachers. Habermas implies as much when he describes the rise of the "public sphere" from family relationships: "The public's understanding of the public use of reason was guided specifically by such private experiences as grew out of the audience-oriented (*publikumsbezogen*) subjectivity of the conjugal family's intimate domain (*Intimsphäre*)" (Habermas 28). But the public sphere is a different, abstract audience, and once Wordsworth moved into the realm of the public, once he sought publication, he would have been confronted with two fundamental questions: "*For whom* am I writing?" and "*Who is* my audience?" The questions, while related, are not the same, and they set the terms of the dialogue. The first question is driven by the poet's envisioning of ideal readers, or the desire to reach actual readers who are receptive to the work – I would argue that the answer to this question asserts the author's authority in the public domain. The second question would have been the more difficult one to ascertain in Wordsworth's time, but attempting an answer forces the poet to take a hard look at who is buying and reading the work. The answer to this question

asserts the public's authority in the dialogue or conversation between poet and public. Put another way, question one tries to identify *readers*, while question two tries to identify an *audience*. This distinction is necessary because, as Klancher notes,

[a]udiences are not simply aggregates of readers. They are complicated social and textual formations; they have interpretive tendencies and ideological contours. Studying them requires us to ask what kind of collective being they represent and how an individual reader becomes aware of belonging to a great social audience (Klancher 6).

The complex relationships of individual readers and collective audience are further complicated depending on the poet's attitude towards the collective. Habermas recognizes how we sometimes hold "public opinion" in high regard, as an authority above that of political authority; at other times, as the capitalist economy emerges, the public is seen as simply a *market* to be exploited:

'Public opinion' takes on a different meaning depending on whether it is brought into play as a critical authority in connection with the normative mandate that the exercise of political and social power be subject to publicity or as the object to be molded in connection with a staged display of, and manipulative propagation of, publicity in the services of persons and institutions, consumer goods, and programs. Both forms of publicity compete in the public sphere, but

‘the’ public opinion is their common addressee. What is the nature of this entity? (Habermas 236).

Poets and critics of the early Romantic period, including Wordsworth and Coleridge, attempt to have it both ways, too, when they confront the nature of the public:

In an early *Spectator*, Addison had located his readers at the tea table and the coffeehouse, and when Coleridge in 1795 tried to find the line to be drawn between ‘ranks possessing intercourse with each other’ and the lower orders whom the philosopher should ‘teach their Duties in order that he may render them susceptible to their rights,’ he found that line ‘between the Parlour and the Kitchen, the Tap and the Coffee-Room – there is a gulph that may not be passed’ (Klancher 35).

The early Romantics, then, inherit a rapidly changing publishing scene, and the changes force new recognition of the composition of the reading public or publics, the nature of the market, and the role of the poet and his or her work. William Wordsworth became keenly aware of these changes and could see that there was a dynamic dialogic set of relationships at work. He, more than others, was able to employ strategies in his writing that exploited these very features of the writing and publishing milieu, first as it underwent transformation in the last decade of the eighteenth-century, but then, because of his long life, throughout the rest of the period of transformation. It was a particularly poignant time, writes Klancher, because, on the one hand,

perhaps for the last time, it was still possible to conceive the writer's relation to an audience in terms of a personal compact. The small, deliberative, strategic world of early nineteenth-century reading and writing still allowed for Wordsworth to imagine the reading of a poem as a personal exchange of 'power' between writer and reader, for Shelley to imagine rather intensely the 'five or six readers' of *Prometheus Unbound*, or for Coleridge to scan the audience of his plays to recognize those who had also attended his lectures (Klancher 14).

The audience that is initially made up of several discrete "publics," including close circle of friends, radical readership, and middle-class book-buyers, molds into a more abstract general audience. Eventually, though, the mass readership emerged which Klancher suggests dates from the 1820s, and which was certainly in place by Victorian times.

Chapter 3: The Poet Imagined

I. Dialogue with Self: Towards Person and Poet

To explore the beginnings of William Wordsworth's conversation with his audiences, and ultimately with posterity, we must begin with some pertinent points from his early life – his life before publication – and so this section must necessarily be retrospective. This may seem inconsistent with my stated method, but we need to try to account for the early factors in Wordsworth's emerging sense of himself as Poet. Therefore, this chapter, dealing primarily with a period during which Wordsworth was *unpublished* and *unknown*, draws more on the usual stuff of biography, but I am calling it a “dialogue” or “conversation” with himself in which he “puts on” or “tries out” the various facets of what it might mean to be a poet. Generally, I am interested here in facets of his character that determined his dedication to writing and his conception of a “writer” – in particular, those pronouncements by Wordsworth himself, or assessments by others close to him, that pertain to his choice of writing as career and calling. His progress towards his career was not a simple or straight one: he proceeded haltingly from one role designed for him by others (the law, for example, or the clergy) towards another (or simply away from the first one?), and then towards yet another. There are some useful theories that account for this erratic movement, so familiar to many of us, towards maturity and vocation. Bakhtin's dialogism, for example, describes the individual's subject-formation, at least as it emerges from language. In many respects, he seems to anticipate Louis Althusser's notion of the “interpellated subject,” first posited in the 1960s. Althusser explained that, in addition to repressive “State Apparatuses” like the police, the courts, the army, and so forth, “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs) like the

various religions, schools, trade unions, and cultural pursuits (including sports, the arts, and literature). In a kind of intellectual *mise en abyme*, Althusser argues a simultaneity of the ISA creating the individual subject, at the same time that the ideology is defined as that which creates the subject:

[T]he category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology,
 but at the same time and immediately I add that *the*
category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology
insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of
'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects (Althusser
Lenin 171).

Althusser describes the process as one of “hailing” the individual to fill a particular position or role, and we might keep this explanation in mind when reviewing Wordsworth’s ultimate assumption of a particular role distinct from and often in opposition to those offered him by the guardians and benefactors around him. We should also keep this function in mind when we turn to Wordsworth’s own construction of his “ideal reader” within his works – he, too, is creating an interpellated reading subject who, he hopes, will respond to Wordsworth’s “hailing.” At this point in his life, Wordsworth must work out certain features of his early life and his personal psychology, at the same time working through what he thinks it means to be a public poet.

The broad outlines of Wordsworth’s childhood and youth are well known, largely through his own presentation in *The Prelude*: a moody child who loved nature, then suffered loss of mother and father; dispersal of family; instructive experiences in the natural world; school days and surrogate family; money and inheritance (and waiting for

inheritance). His education at Hawkshead Grammar School was a good one, and both exposed him to literature and provided him with occasion to write poetry and a sympathetic audience. Sheats suggests that Wordsworth's commitment to poetry began here at school, where William felt part of an intimate community of readers and teachers, "a prototype of those smaller enclaves of trust and dedication he would seek and find at Nether Stowey and Grasmere" (Sheats 1) – in other words, a prototype of his coterie or the "intimate group." And, of course, we have Wordsworth's own recollection of his dedication to his art in the 1843 Fenwick Note to *An Evening Walk* after quoting a line of his poetry in an attempt to assert its veracity:

This is feebly & imperfectly exprest; but I recollect distinctly the very spot where this first struck me. It was in the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure. The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them: and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency. I could not have been at that time above 14 years of age (6-7).

Such a memory emphasizes Wordsworth's constitution of himself as exceptional and destined for greatness: to think that, at 14, he could provide something in poetry that he believed to be lacking – and to look back, at 73, and tell this story as if it was still significant!

He was exposed to models of lyric poets like Anacreon, Catullus, Collins, Gray and many of his imitators, and Beattie, and his first attempts at writing were “summer vacation” exercises, for which he was praised (Sheats 5,1), including one on the second centenary of Hawkshead school, and another the sonnet “On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress,” which Gill considers “as empty a confection as any poem could be” (Gill 31). In other words, many features of a dialogic subject-formation are already at work: Wordsworth is secure in an intimate environment of listeners, whose very presence and encouragement validate his identity and his early poetic pursuits; further, his education is exposing him to the heteroglossia of the European literary tradition, and he is venturing into that tradition with some early linguistic productions of his own – highly derivative, and not yet in his own style or “voice,” but attempts nonetheless. But the most significant production of the Hawkshead years is *The Vale of Esthwaite*, a work of almost 600 lines which was written in the topographical mode popular in the eighteenth century.

The Vale of Esthwaite, written in the couplets fashionable among the predecessors Wordsworth would later “disown,” pays homage to nature, which we would expect of a topographical poem written c.1787. Wordsworth employs stock figures like the nightingale and a lone woman, he refers to both a stream and his own memory, and he makes direct reference to the poems of Thomas Gray. The interesting thread in this fragment is the use of Gothic elements (castles, ghosts, a Baron) throughout, which introduce a conventional atmosphere of Romance. Note, for example, this elaborate martial metaphor for the harsh winds beating the castle:

They seem'd to my fear struck mind

Gigantic moors in battle joined
 While each with loud and threat'ning tone
 Claim'd the castle as his own (ll. 145-148).

These very conventional elements make clear the young poet's engagement with the poetic voices of his present and immediate past, but the inclusion of his own memory presages the contribution he will make, introducing the young man's originality. The overall impression of *The Vale of Esthwaite* through the curious combination of reverential nature-description with weird Gothic elements is one of slight discord, not unlike the overall impression Wordsworth himself later recorded of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Of course, since part of the present approach is to resist this kind of retrospective interpretation, all that can be done is to note the remarkable presence of these several elements in the young poet's work as the "germ" of future work. As Hartman points out, the images from nature, representative of the young poet's reverence for Nature, interspersed with gothic passages, leads to the conclusion that the poem's ultimate subject is, indeed, the mind of the poet (Hartman 76; Sheats 21). Still, Wordsworth's experiments show that he is engaged in a dialogue with other poets and with the popular literature of his time.

Even more remarkable, especially when thinking of a writer's life as a continuing conversation with his or her audience, is the turn near the end of the poem to a specific reader/auditor: Dorothy. Near the end of the fragment come these lines:

Sister for whom I feel a love
 What warms a Brother far above,
 On you as sad she marks the scen[e]

Why does my heart so fondly lean

Why but because in you is giv'n

All all my soul would wish from heav'n

Why but because I fondly view

All, all that heav'n has claim'd in you. (ll. 380-387)

From the very beginning of his career, Wordsworth's sister Dorothy is at the heart of his readership; in the Bakhtinian model, she is the auditor in relation to the imagined speaker. Dorothy operates here more as single, intimate, absent auditor, but the address at the end of *The Vale of Esthwaite* prefigures the use of a "Dorothy" or "sister" representing a wider audience of sympathetic readers. Dorothy as ideal auditor shows up in the early poetry as a single "real" auditor but, I suggest, figures as a synecdoche for Wordsworth's hoped-for future readership.

Wordsworth's years at Cambridge (1787-1791) are often portrayed as unspectacular, again largely because of his own representation of them in *The Prelude*. He entered as a bright student, a sizar, with the family apparently expecting him to work his way into the fellowship at St. John's held by his uncle William Cookson. There were family connections that seemed to ensure his securing a living in the Church, as well, or pursuing law after graduation. But these were the plans of his guardians and benefactors, and Wordsworth clearly and intentionally, though not overtly, spurned these advantages by spending money his own way during his undergraduate life, and failing to sit the necessary exams to ensure a fellowship. Here we see an early example of a range of roles, of positions, of subjectivities for the young William Wordsworth to fill, and of his own rejection of those positions as he works out his own subjectivity and sense of self.

Wordsworth choosing an alternate path of “poet,” even though it, too, was early constructed by an ideology of just what a poet was, was a first step towards finding his own voice and forging his own poetic style.

During the “Cambridge years,” Wordsworth, in poetic composition, experimented with “the weightier and more stately pentameter line, in both blank verse and heroic couplets” (Sheats 44), and the first of his projects is the poem he begins as early as 1787, immediately after abandoning *The Vale of Esthwaite – An Evening Walk*. This new composition borrowed some of the imagery of the *Vale* poem and was also in the topographical mode.

It was also during his Cambridge years that Wordsworth took his first tour of the continent, in the summer of 1790. This trip was vital to him, his poetry, and his poetical identity. First of all, life at Cambridge must have been disillusioning for Wordsworth; he later described the 1790 walking tour in Book VI of *The Prelude* as “an open slight / Of College cares and study” (ll. 342-343). The walking tour taken by Wordsworth and his classmate Robert Jones from Wales was, further, a clear slight of Wordsworth’s family’s expectations for his future. William asked for money from his brother Richard, and took great pains to plan the trip so as to incur the least possible expense. The trip unfolded like an abbreviated and budget version of the Grand Tour. Wordsworth and Jones covered staggering distances each day, on foot, rising early and walking late. This was not a leisurely trip. This was a tour with the express purpose of seeing as much (the Alps, the Grande Chartreuse, Lake Como, etc.) as possible in the time allotted. It was one of a few pivotal moments in Wordsworth’s early life: Birdsall (4) and Johnston (188) suggest it is from this point in his life that Wordsworth began to think of himself as a poet. The 1790

tour also provided material for one of his first published poems, the full title of which was *Descriptive Sketches| In Verse| Taken During a Pedestrian Tour in the Italian, Grison, Swiss, and Savoyard Alps*. Further, the tour introduced Wordsworth to the people, places, and politics of France and Switzerland, in particular, and these became repeated touchstones for him in years to come, as he returned imaginatively to places like Chamonix, or poeticized the politics of the Swiss cantons.

In the years immediately after graduation, Wordsworth was something of a devoted radical. His subjectivity was forming, in other words, in relation to the republican dialogism of the time as he identified with the young radicals who supported the French Revolution in its early days. We know this retrospectively from the private records, the trips to France, and the people with whom he associated. As he groped and staggered toward a vocation, toward a “living,” he seems to have had no *clear* purpose in mind. The period of 1791-1794, especially, is one of languor, doubt, and crisis – of looking for or waiting for direction, and of working through matters of morality, subject matter, and form.

As the year 1791 drew to a close, we have Wordsworth’s announcement that he was “doomed to be an idler thro[ughou]t my whole life.” It appears that, by this time, some idea of being a “man of letters” had formed and even been communicated to others like Mathews, his main sounding-board during this period of his development:

My Uncle the clergyman proposed to me a short time ago to begin a course of Oriental Literature, thinking that that was the best field for a person to distinguish himself in as a man of Letters. To oblige him I consented to pursue the plan

upon my return from the continent. But what must I do amongst that immense wilderness, who have no resolution, and who have not prepared myself for the enterprise by any sort of discipline amongst the Western languages? Who know little of Latin, and scarce anything of Greek. A pretty confession for a young gentleman whose whole life ought to have been devoted to study. (*Letters* I:62).

So with no clear idea of his future path, Wordsworth fell back on the young republican part of his subject-formation, promoted by that element of the cultural dialogism that was caught up in the French Revolution and other causes in the name of liberty. Specifically, William Wordsworth returned to France (November 1791-Autumn 1792), observed some of the French Revolution first-hand, and fathered a child with Annette Vallon. These experiences were some of the most formative of his life, waking him from his indolence and shaping his future in decisive ways. Much of Wordsworth's creative life was a working out or working through of his relationship to the French Revolution, and his relationship with Annette and daughter Caroline remained a personal reminder of his relation with France at that particular historical moment. The French Revolution had provided Wordsworth with the stuff of myth, both personally and politically, for him to work with creatively for years to come.

II. Dialogue with Tradition: *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*

Wordsworth's first success at attempting to establish a *public* identity as a *poet* comes in 1793 with his first publications, the January 29 printing of *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*. *An Evening Walk* he began in 1788, possibly earlier,² and

Wordsworth later claimed that he had finished the poem by 1789; even so, with his compulsion to revise, we can assume that Wordsworth made changes to the poem in the three years before its publication. Its concerns and imagery come directly out of the unpublished *Vale of Esthwaite* poem. *Descriptive Sketches* was based on Wordsworth's 1790 tour of France, Switzerland, and Italy and he began composing it the following year in France when he was living there, first in Orleans and then at Blois, with most of the drafting done between December of 1791 and the Fall of 1792 (Birdsall 8).

Drawing on Bakhtin, we will consider these first two publications in terms of Wordsworth's engagement with heteroglossic and unifying forces at work in language and in the poetic tradition, especially in the sense that he must work against these unifying forces in order to establish his own poetic authority and style.

That he wished to establish a public identity seems clear from the fact that he is named as author of the two works: *W. Wordsworth, B.A., of St. John's, Cambridge*. There is no "market value" attached to his name at this point in his career; however, the further identification of the author as a graduate of a college at Cambridge may carry some cultural weight with a particular audience. The poems are somewhat similar in that both are set in the natural world, drawing on the loco-descriptive tradition, as well as addressing a specific individual (*Evening Walk* is addressed in the title to "A Young Lady" [i.e., Dorothy]; *Descriptive Sketches* is addressed in the title to "The Revd. Robert Jones" – in both cases, then, Wordsworth is clearly conceiving of the poems within the Bakhtinian model of address) and displaying a heavy influence by poetic forebears and contemporaries. As nature poetry, both poems seek "the 'hiding places' of power" (Hartman 103). The figure of the poet-traveler is itself, of course, highly conventional,

but one Wordsworth had adopted in this early poetry. Wordsworth had already placed great value in travel and was even fashioning himself as a roving minstrel. Dorothy notes this in a letter to Jane Pollard of July 1793, too, when she writes of how brother William reminds her of the figure of Edwin in Beattie's very popular poem *The Minstrel*: "'and oft he traced the uplands &c, &c, &c.[']'" (*Letters* I:100-101).³ Indeed, the editor of the Cornell *Evening Walk* suggests that "[n]ever again was he so entirely the poet of nature as in *An Evening Walk*" (Averill 3).

Despite the poet's retrospective claim in the *Fenwick Notes* (6-7) at age 73 that *An Evening Walk* was made up entirely of things the poet had seen himself, the derivativeness of these first two published poems has been noted by many. Yet we expect such to be the case for a young poet's earliest productions – genius and originality must be carefully prepared for; they do not spring full-blown into the public's consciousness. From the loco-descriptive approach, and the numerous quotations, references, and allusions, we can see the influences of Wordsworth's education up to this point:

Throughout, the poem employs the characteristic diction that Wordsworth had learned from his reading. With *Descriptive Sketches* among Wordsworth's long poems, it most evidences an enthusiastic and catholic involvement in English poetry. Indeed, the poet of *An Evening Walk* often seems less interested in keeping his eye on the object than on other poems (Averill 6).

And Johnston (154) points out the "literariness" of *An Evening Walk* as the young poet struggles to find his own voice – he produces works that are, in effect, pastiches of past

voices. In Bakhtin's scheme, Wordsworth is entering the heteroglossic language of his chosen vocation, and in his early productions he is, in a sense, controlled by the "centripetal" or unifying forces of that language; it is only after the poet has established his own identity within that tradition that he develops his own poetic style, his own *voice*. At this early stage of his career, Wordsworth identifies with the loco-descriptive tradition of nature poetry, and this will remain an important part of his poetic identity throughout his writing, although he will move beyond the loco-descriptive in subject matter, style, and range as he matures.

An Evening Walk. An Epistle; In Verse. Addressed to a Young Lady, from the Lakes of the North of England begins with an "Argument" to explain the plot/structure/episodes, then moves to an address to the absent Dorothy: "Far from my dearest friend, 'tis mine to rove / Thro' bare grey dell, high wood, and pastoral cove" (1-2). Stephen Gill notes that "*An Evening Walk* is shaped with Dorothy in mind as its ideal reader, a presence deeply missed" (43), again illustrating the Bakhtinian scene that directs so much of Wordsworth's poetry. Addressed like a letter, then, "intercepted" by the publisher and "overread" (as opposed to overheard) by us, the poem speaks to a real reader whom, because absent, Wordsworth effectively generalizes and abstracts into a "young lady." This is a significant first step in making the intimate exchange of dialogue into a public exchange between writer and audience. After several lines of description, the poet returns to the "young lady" with a request which, in effect, engenders the rest of the poem: "will my friend, with soft affection's ear, / The history of a poet's ev'ning hear?" (ll. 51-52). The poem also displays some very conventional structural or poetical devices, including the use of couplets; personification (something Wordsworth

specifically attacks in his later “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads*) in figures of Hope (“With Hope Reflexion blends her social rays / To gild the total tablet of his days” [33-36]), Melancholy, Mirth, and so forth; the use of highly conventionalized symbols like the nightingale; and some unfortunate word choices: he liked “sombrous” so much he used it twice (72, 139), and then there are the “paly loopholes” (335).

Two striking features emerge from this poem if we try to approach it as first-time readers, distant from Wordsworth’s current reputation. The first feature is what this poem looks like the first time one sees it: the poem is larded with repeated appeals to authority (in general) and veracity (in particular) through both quotation and assertions of experience. The quotations and allusions are mentioned above, noted by several critics, and include references to Tasso, Drayton, and Young, and Wordsworth’s own notes. For example, he glosses lines like line 114, in which he uses the phrase “green rings,” noting “‘Vivid rings of green.’ – GREENWOOD’S Poem on Shooting.” In line 116, “‘Down the rough slope the pondrous waggon rings.’ BEATTIE” glosses “Downward the pond’rous timber-wain resounds.” As we might expect from a young poet, in his first publication, Wordsworth is working with the heteroglossia of poetic language in at least two ways: first of all, like an undergraduate of today, he is making obvious his borrowings so no one will accuse him of having “lifted” lines that he employs from the unified centre of the poetic tradition; second, he is showing his audience that he has absorbed some segment of that tradition, which is probably a more persuasive rhetorical strategy for a poet who has aspirations of one day asserting his own poetic voice and becoming part of that tradition.

The notes asserting certain lines' truth to life are especially interesting. In them, Wordsworth assumes the role of poet-traveller, adding to it dimensions of *witness* and *guide* which, as we shall see from the reviews quoted below, was not only an important part of the tradition of loco-descriptive poetry, but practically a prerequisite in the eyes of the reviewers. As witness, Wordsworth has seen things that we have not, or he wants to be absolutely accurate about his poetical figures: "These lines are only applicable to the middle part of that lake" (note for lines 10-15). As guide, he has knowledge and experience that we may need or want, should we wish to undertake a similar journey. The kinds of knowledge he has are varied, and pertinent to our Bakhtinian analysis is a recognition that the knowledge of which he makes his readers aware includes linguistic knowledge, specifically the heteroglossia of regional dialect: "The word intake is local, and signifies a mountain-inclosure" (note for line 65), for example. The young Wordsworth's engagement with the dialogism of his cultural moment makes him keenly aware of those linguistic contributions that may be outside the ken of his readership, at the same time that he realizes that this kind of contribution is at least fashionable, if not necessary to developing his own style. At other times, he comes across as the experienced traveller who offers simple advice for fellow travellers. Note these examples:

The reader, who has made the tour of this country, will
recognize, in this description, the features which
characterize the lower waterfall in the gardens of Rydale
(note for line 83);

and this long one for line 171:

Not far from Broughton is a Druid monument, of which I do not recollect that any tour descriptive of this country makes mention. Perhaps this poem may fall into the hands of some curious traveller, who may thank me for informing him, that up the river Duddon, the river which forms the aestuary at Broughton, may be found some of the most romantic scenery of these mountains.

These footnotes, allusions, and quotations are so noticeable that Alan Liu has suggested that “*An Evening Walk* is a poem whose subject is convention – so many conventions, indeed, that it is difficult to judge whether its tradition is best read as single or multiple” (Liu 61). Here, Liu has, in effect, re-stated Bakhtin’s definition of the tensions both in language and in developing one’s own poetic style. Yes, the subject is convention, and working through the multiple voices of tradition is necessary to the development of Wordsworth’s own poetic authority.

But a second main feature surfaces when reading this poem in its original state: the confusion of eye and ear caused by the insistent interruptions by the notes. The overall movement of the poem is from day to nightfall, and the senses accommodate this change by moving from the visually-dominated to an emphasis on sounds as the poem closes.⁴ This movement allegorizes the young Wordsworth’s venture into poetry, as he already senses his susceptibility to the powerful draw of the visual, but realizes he must somehow escape that and move more towards the music of the poetic. In other words, the young Wordsworth’s “conversation” with tradition, with the loco-descriptive, makes him particularly susceptible to the enchantment of the visual; over the next few years his

poetic project will be modified through his mastery of the heteroglossia of the social languages around him and his incorporation of elements of those languages into his poetry.

Johnson, the publisher of the volumes, seems to have made sure that the book made its way into the likely shops for sales; for example, copies were sold in the Lake District, perhaps seen as a “tourist” market. The book had “reasonably wide circulation for a first poem” (Averill 10), but did not sell well beyond the pro-revolutionary radical circle and those at St. John’s College. In other words, Wordsworth seems to have produced works for a readership that mirrors what he had become, and his reading public was the same. It is difficult to avoid reading these early productions without placing them into the entire context of Wordsworth’s accomplishments and noting patterns, themes, expressions that eventually become known as “Wordsworthian.” But we do it all the time, and we ought to try to imagine these early works as the beginning of the poet’s career. Geoffrey Hartman places the early poems into that career when he states

[a]s *poetry* . . . there is something decidedly strange about Wordsworth’s first productions. How harsh they are! ‘Not musical as is Apollo’s lute.’ When we think of any great poet, of Keats or Spenser or Milton himself, we realize that their juvenile verse is sensuous and indulgent. Disciplined, yes, but words are enjoyed for the sheer, neutral, self-justifying energy in them. The word is sound before it is sense; logos before logic; myth before meaning (Hartman 100).

But let us turn to some contemporary responses to Wordsworth's first publication which, even if not written with an appreciation for the poet's "genius," are the real, specific utterances to which the young Wordsworth responded in his first public dialogue.

Some of the first criticisms of the poems were not published ones, but were from the "intimate sphere" of family. Dorothy plays critic with detailed criticism of the poem in a February letter to her friend Jane Pollard (*Letters* I:87-89), in which she particularly comments on some of her brother's diction, but also praises the many passages that are "exquisitely beautiful." Already, we see the "family business" trying to influence the reception of William's poems, however modestly. Also in this letter, Dorothy laments that William did not have a "Friend" who could review and criticize the poems; she herself understands the value of having his works tested in dialogue with a coterie audience before publishing to the world.

This letter reveals some other things as well. Dorothy was a sympathetic but careful reader who took seriously the task of reading and providing feedback on the poetry of her brother. She also displays what we might regard as a typical sympathy for her brother's productions, admitting faults but explaining them as unavoidable or at least understandable, given that these are William's first productions. Dorothy Wordsworth, as a member of the "intimate sphere" supporting the young William, was already doing what she could to assist in the positive reception of her brother's work. As we will see below, other family members (brother John, for example) and friends in the coterie audience (Coleridge, the Hutchinsons) also contribute to this attempt to control the reception to the poet's work and ensure a positive critical response – the beginnings of the "family business" feature of Wordsworth's career. Curiously, Dorothy here takes

exception to some of the “uncommon words” that William employs, singling out the words “moveless” and “viewless.” Choices of “uncommon words” may have been William’s most significant aspect of his attempt to find his own voice – his own contribution to the heteroglossia of poetic language – and yet Dorothy finds them odd. She does, however, show a strong faith in her brother’s talents. Later in the same letter, she explains that she and brother Christopher prepared a lengthy, line-by-line criticism of the poems, which was to be given to Wordsworth along with comments from readers at Cambridge: “The implication is that Wordsworth requested this sort of line-by-line critique from Dorothy and Christopher, for one can hardly imagine that the brother and sister would have spontaneously embarked on a ‘very bulky Criticism’ without a sense that the poet would be receptive to it” (Averill 11). Assuming Wordsworth received these comments, his first “reviews” or criticisms were from family and what might loosely be considered an audience of colleagues: a coterie.

The first public mention to appear was in March of 1793: an advertisement, more or less, in *The Analytical Review*, published by Johnson (publisher of Wordsworth’s book). It is not even a review, really, but a single sentence introducing a long quotation (*Analytical Review* 5).⁵

The next to appear was a review in *The Critical Review* of July 1793. This appreciative review also offers some specific criticism:

Our northern lakes have of late years attracted the attention of the public in a variety of ways. They have been visited by the idle, described by the curious, and delineated by the artist; their beauties, however, are not exhausted, and this

little poem is a proof of it . . . [there is] a harshness both in the construction and the versification; but we are compensated by that merit which a poetical taste most values, new and picturesque imagery (298).

The reviewer here appreciates some of Wordsworth's original contribution to the loco-descriptive tradition, at the same time taking exception to some of the structure and phrasing. For example, he writes "[w]e doubt whether *atop* for on the top, is not a contraction too barbarous," which seems a minor quibble, but also that "*sugh*, though an expressive word, [is] too local to be used in any species of elegant writing" (298). The word "*sugh*," a Scotch word which Wordsworth used in both these first two poems, and which is glossed each time in a note from the author, I think of as one of the very words or expressions the poet is thinking of as a new contribution to the dialogic development of the language of poetry; indeed, they are the "real language of men." The reviewer finds it "*too* local," however. The writer must educate his audience if he is to have his own style accepted, for the borrowings from other dialects ring too foreign on the ears of the reviewers. This reviewer in *The Critical Review* also discusses the very word ("moveless") to which Dorothy takes exception in the description of the swan: "we were particularly pleased with the following description of the swan [quotes ll. 199-218]. The beauty of *the moveless form of snow*, need not be pointed out to a lover of poetry" (298). Here, a nameless reviewer seems more accepting of the word than the poet's own sister. These reactions exemplify Wordsworth's early stylistic experiments, in the vein of what we now see as Bakhtin's heteroglossia: the "speaking" in the tongues of different voices. As his style matures, he does less of this, or he makes clear that the voices he presents are

quoted or are dramatic voices in dialogue. Wordsworth's great achievement is that he did, ultimately, assert his own authority over language by developing his own style, and a large part of that style was his variety of uses of dialects from other strata in the social language of his time. We shall encounter some of his different strategies in works like *The Excursion*, the various collections of *Works*, and the "mixed" volumes like *The River Duddon*, which contained *Vaudracour and Julia* and the *Guide to the Lakes* in addition to the sonnet series.

The next review, also favourable, appeared in *The European Magazine* in September 1793. It opens by leading quickly into a quotation pointing out how ear is inferior to eye:

“A living poetical writer has observed,
 ‘That which was formed to captivate the eye,
 ‘The ear must coldly taste; description’s weak,
 ‘And the Muse falters in the vain attempt’” (501)

Of course, this is another of the great tasks Wordsworth set for himself in his lifetime: to find a poetical language that would replace or stand for the “language” of nature, the *verba visibilia*. But the reviewer goes on to quote many lines of the poem, and sums it up as follows: “Mr. Wordsworth’s paintings, however, do not want force of effect, and read on the spot, we are convinced would receive additional advantages from the minuteness and accuracy of his pencil” (501). This reader has clearly been affected by the repeated notes regarding the authenticity of the representations, mentioned above. In other words, Wordsworth’s assertion that certain images and elements are “true” coordinates with this reviewer’s criterion for poetic effect.

The following month, October 1793, there was a short and largely dismissive review by Thomas Holcroft in the *Monthly Review*: “Seriously, these are figures which no poetical licence can justify. If they can possibly give pleasure, it must be to readers whose habits of thinking are totally different from ours. Mr. Wordsworth is a scholar There are passages in his poems which display imagination, and which afford hope for the future” (705). Even here, there is hope for the future, and there is a recognition that the “ideal reader,” someone who can appreciate these poems, is someone with a taste different from Holcroft’s, in particular, and maybe the prevailing taste in general. Indeed, the examples Holcroft cites as defects are the ones which seem most like Pope or other Neo-Classical writers – that is, the kind of diction Wordsworth himself will attack in seven more years in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. Holcroft quotes lines 27-30 of the poem:

‘Return delights! with whom my road begun,
 When *Life-rear’d* laughing up her morning sun;
 When Transport kiss’d away my April tear,
 “Rocking as in a dream the tedious year.”’

Life rearing up the sun! Transport kissing away an April
 tear and rocking the year as in a dream! Would the cradle
 had been specified!

Holcroft’s examples and his contempt clearly place Wordsworth’s style into the dialogue of poetic tradition, and challenge the young writer to develop his own voice.

From the *Gentlemen's Magazine* of March 1794, over a year after the subject poem's publication, came a very positive review of *An Evening Walk*: "I know not how I can better repay to these delightful vales the very large debt of pleasure I owe them, than by attempting farther to extend the prevalence of their charms, by recommending this poem to the attention of their several visitants" (554-555). Once again, the reviewer's enthusiasm for the actual countryside of the Lakes has got the better of him. This is the ideal reader – "the traveller" addressed in those footnotes of Wordsworth's. This is a tourist who has fallen in love with the natural beauty of the Lake District, has had that feeling reinforced by Wordsworth's poem, and now feels compelled to recommend that others do the same. Not only is this reader (he signs his name *Peregrinator*) entirely sympathetic to Wordsworth's subject matter, but he also identifies himself as a contemporary of Wordsworth's at Cambridge: "Feeling for the credit of my own University, I think we have reason to expect much from this, I suppose, first production (though by no means a faultless one) of Mr. W.'s muse; I trust he will restore to us that laurel to which . . . we have had no pretensions [since Gray and Mason]" (555).

Good, bad, or mixed, from sister, brother, or popular writer, Wordsworth's response to the reviews of these first two poems was to establish a pattern he followed throughout his life: revise. Certainly, in the case of *An Evening Walk*, Wordsworth undertook significant revisions in 1794 at Windy Brow, almost doubling the poem's length, adding a figure to the landscape to create a more dramatic situation, and beginning the poem more dramatically with line 17 of the 1793 version, "Fair scenes! With other eyes, than once, I gaze . . ." This emphatic opening shows us Wordsworth is already on his way to becoming the poet who wrote the dramatic opening lines to the

Two-Part Prelude, “Was it for this?” And yet, for all the energy he devoted to the poem in the first year after its publication, *An Evening Walk* was not published again until extracts appeared in the 1815 Poems in the category “Juvenile Pieces.”

Wordsworth’s other first-published poem, *Descriptive Sketches*, is also written in the loco-descriptive tradition, and also in couplets, and this time uses the material remembered from the walking tour of the Continent that he and Robert Jones undertook in the summer of 1790. It is a more “Wordsworthian” poem than *An Evening Walk* in that the poet seeks immutable values and principles in the natural surroundings, this time with the added dimension of politics. Liu makes the connection to politics very directly, arguing that Wordsworth chooses the descriptive or picturesque modes precisely *because* they idealize nature and freedom, and remove the poet from history: “[t]he picturesque . . . described nature as the form of liberal freedom – a rest or arrest of motive forgetful of institutionally accepted narratives and carefully balanced between discipline and freedom” (Liu 164). Also described as the “most fervently republican of Wordsworth’s poems” (Levinson 32), *Descriptive Sketches* seems already to be transposing the actual into the ideological: it shifts politics of the historical moment onto a more abstract plane. What is usefully identified here is a feature of Wordsworth’s emergent style and authority: he attempts to make the personal into the public, and assumes that the historical is representative of something universal.

Composed mostly in France between December 1791 and fall of 1792 (Birdsall 8), *Descriptive Sketches* opens with a dedication addressed to “THE REV. ROBERT JONES,| Fellow of St. John’s College, Cambridge,” his travelling partner during the trip the poem memorializes. Once again, the early Wordsworth sets up his poem with the

basic Bakhtinian scene in mind: an address to a real, individual reader, in this case even commenting on the assumed sympathy of at least that one reader: “I am happy in being conscious I shall have one reader who will approach the conclusion of these few pages with regret” (32). Keeping in mind this specific reader, Wordsworth ends his address by admitting he may never write about the beauties of Wales, before signing the letter: “Apprehensive that my pencil may never be exercised on these subjects, I cannot let slip this opportunity of thus publicly assuring you with how much affection and esteem, I am Dear Sir, Your most obedient very humble Servant” (34). Thus the act of publication and the presence of this preface memorialize the 1790 tour and the friendship of Wordsworth and Jones as much as anything.

Like *An Evening Walk*, this early poem of Wordsworth’s is steeped in convention and the immediate poetic forebears. In terms of an emerging “conversation” between the young poet and his sense of the tradition of which he wishes to become a part, we can see Wordsworth’s own voice still struggling in dialogue with voices, conventions, and poetic styles of the past. For example, although poets like Cowper, Akenside and Thomson had chosen blank verse for their longer descriptive works (Hartman 110), Wordsworth once again chose to write in couplets. Further, he feels compelled to display his knowledge of the Western literary tradition through the use of references and allusions, often glossed with author’s notes, to Petrarch (l. 165) and Pope (l. 105), for example; an illustration from the note to line 428 emphasizes this “undergraduate” tendency both to use other sources and carefully cite them, as Wordsworth cites a citation: “The summer hamlets are most probably (as I have seen observed by a critic in the Gentleman’s Magazine) what Virgil alludes to in the expression ‘*Castella in tumulis.*’” (80). Further, on a

presentational level, there are again numerous contractions, especially of the past tense (“sigh’d,” “view’d,” etc.), and there are poetic affectations, “poeticisms,” in the personifications of Love, Blasphemy, Freedom, and Slavery in the natural setting. Wordsworth uses as setting the Alps, at this time becoming more conventional for their awe-inspiring, sublime aspect. For ages, mountains had been considered mere impediments to travel, but by the late seventeenth century “attitudes changed and travelers began to feel a sublimity in the Alps” (Birdsall 5). Indeed, as with *An Evening Walk*, some of Wordsworth’s notes reveal how the relative newness of the Alpine experience (or, at least, Wordsworth’s sense of this newness) contributed to his construction of the voice in this poem. For example, Wordsworth feels obliged to explain in a note how to pronounce “Chamouny,” and that he has changed the pronunciation to make his meter right at line 680. Certainly, within the next two decades, that necessity disappears, as most Romantic writers engage with the Alps, Mont Blanc, and even the town of Chamonix in poetry. But here in *Descriptive Sketches*, the author’s notes also, as in *An Evening Walk*, draw attention to the reality of certain images, claims, and assertions, once again as an assertion of authority drawn from the experience of being there: “It is only from the higher part of the valley of Chamouny that Mont blanc is visible” (106). Wordsworth engages in a dialogue or conversation with his reader right on the page, to the point of expecting the reader will have confusions, or not believe what the author is telling him or her, or not know how to pronounce a word – all part of the readers’ expectations of this mode of poetry, but also all attempts to secure the reader’s favourable response by appearing both knowledgeable and sympathetic. What this attempt does, by assuming this dual purpose of knowledgeable authority as well as

sympathy to the reader's position, is create what we might see as the voice of a travel guide, as in these examples where he clearly addresses the potential traveller in some of the notes: "If any of my readers should ever visit the Lake of Como, I recommend it to him to take a stroll along this charming little pathway" (48, note to line 90), or "this pass I should imagine to be the most interesting among the Alps" (n179). In fact, we might usefully keep in mind the analogy of travel guide throughout Wordsworth's career: a poet who tries to establish both an authoritative voice ("I have been here" or "I have seen this" or "I know these things") as well as an active engagement with the reader, guiding her through the experience of the poem.

The poem opens with a description of Nature and its renovatory power, providing "spots" of refuge amid the "Pain" of the world: "doubly pitying Nature loves to show'r / Soft on his [the unnamed wanderer of the poem] wounded heart her healing pow'r" (13-14). Wordsworth then briefly sets the scene of his traveling in France during the celebrations of July 11, 1790:⁶

While unsuspected wheels the village dance,
 The maidens eye him with inquiring glance,
 Much wondering what sad stroke of crazing Care
 Or desperate Love could lead a wanderer there.
 Me, lur'd by hope her sorrows to remove,
 A heart, that could not much itself approve,
 O'er Gallia's wastes of corn dejected led . . . (41-47).

The wanderer proceeds to describe for us various "fair dark-ey'd maids" (l. 94) as well as the terrain of the Alps, Lake Como, and so forth.⁷ In the Swiss cantons, the wandering

poet finds stories of suffering (the Grison Gypsy, the chamois-hunter) and hope; the Swiss farmer, for example, would seem to pre-figure the type Wordsworth later finds in Yorkshire and the Lakes: simple, industrious, hopeful, yet superstitious⁸ and surrounded by “spots” with significance and story attached to them. The scenes and stories lead the wanderer to a hope that assuages the wounded heart with which he opens the poem. Later in the poem, he returns to the figure of the heart as something akin to memory or mind: “When the poor heart has all its joys resign’d / Why does their sad remembrance cleave behind?” (622-623). And just after that, the connection to the over-arching story of the French Revolution becomes clear in two related passages specifying Wordsworth’s desires and the possibility of healing his own heart:

Gay lark of hope thy silent song resume!
 Fair smiling lights the purpled hills illumine!
 Soft gales and dews of life’s delicious morn,
 And thou, lost fragrance of the heart return! (632-635) . . .
 Without one hope her written griefs to blot,
 Save in the land where all things are forgot,
 My heart, alive to transports long unknown,
 Half wishes your delusion were it’s own (676-679).

Thus the poem closes on a somewhat hopeful note, and with an investment in the French Revolution as the dawning of a new social order. Indeed, as Stephen Gill points out, “the whole poem is the most passionate verse Wordsworth had yet written, and this climax certainly reveals its author to be fiercely anti-monarchist, but the passage operates at such a level of generality as to make it applicable to all political situations, or to none” (65).

Wordsworth is thus very much a product of his time, engaging in the event/story of his time, the French Revolution, and entering into a dialogue with the public on that subject, contributing to the heteroglossia of the 1790s cultural conversation. He was also, in fact, an eye-witness to some of the events, and working within the poetic tradition of his time he was asserting that authoritative voice. Thus, the quality of eye-witness, of testimony, connects both his sense of himself in the world, and his engagement with the poetic tradition of the picturesque: “If you had been there, as I was, this is what you would have seen.” At the same time, however, as some of the commentators quoted above have pointed out, he was also already characteristically generalizing his themes into the kind of statements we recognize in a post-McGann context as the Romantic ideology. And this “de-historicizing” trend is one of the features of Wordsworth’s ultimate triumph in his search for style, for authoritative poetic voice.

Like *An Evening Walk*, *Descriptive Sketches* seems to have been distributed well for a first publication by an unknown poet. Birdsall notes that the Keswick museum keeper had some copies in stock, and he also assumes that, like *An Evening Walk*, the poem was known among sympathizers of the French Revolution and at Cambridge. In other words, given the republican debate and ferment of the time, there was a stratum of the cultural dialogue devoted to this kind of poetry. Indeed, we have Wordsworth’s brother Christopher’s recollection in *Social Life at the English Universities* (1874) of a meeting of a literary society at Cambridge at which Wordsworth was discussed. Coleridge, too, later wrote in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817) of the effect of encountering Wordsworth for the

first time, although with both these comments we must keep in mind the retrospective nature of the praise:

During the last year of my residence at Cambridge, I became acquainted with Mr. Wordsworth's first publication entitled 'Descriptive Sketches;' and seldom, if ever, was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced. In the form, style, and manner of the whole poem, and in the structure of the particular lines and periods, there is an harshness and acerbity connected and combined with words and images all a-glow, which might recall those products of the vegetable world, where gorgeous blossoms rise out of the hard and thorny rind and shell, within which the rich fruit was elaborating. The language was not only peculiar and strong, but at times knotty and contorted, as by its own impatient strength; while the novelty and struggling crowd of images acting in conjunction with the difficulties of the style, demanded always a greater closeness of attention, than poetry, (at all events, than descriptive poetry) has a right to claim. It not seldom therefore justified the complaint of obscurity (*Biographia* I:77).

What a wonderful description of the unique features of Wordsworth's poetry! Coleridge, with the advantage of hindsight, identifies the "strong," "knotty," "contorted" features of

Wordsworth's style; he emphasizes that these are not characteristic of the descriptive poetry of the time. In Coleridge's view, Wordsworth even that early was asserting a definite authority and voice on a prevailing genre, and within the contemporary cultural dialogue.

But despite the apparent appeal to a couple of heteroglossic strata of audience (Cambridge graduates and the revolutionaries), the critical reception of this poem was not particularly encouraging – less so than the comments on *An Evening Walk*, for example, which Johnston points out was “the more innocuous (and shorter) of the two” (331). The first of three reviews to appear in 1793, this one from the *Analytical Review* in March, is the most positive:

a lively imagination Alpine scenes . . . described with
studied variety of imagery . . . the whole is rendered
instructive by the frequent introduction of moral reflections.
At the same time we must own, that this poem is on the
whole less interesting than the subject led us to expect;
owing in part, we believe, to the want of a general thread of
narrative to connect the several descriptions, or of some
episodical tale, to vary the impression; and in part also to a
certain laboured and artificial cast of expression, which
often involves the poet's meaning in obscurity (294).

Certainly this last remark on expression reminds us of those comments Coleridge made years later in the *Biographia* (quoted above). Wordsworth's attempt to insert himself into the public conversation of contemporary poetry both echoes “the tradition” and

challenges it. This critic is picking up on the potentially new tensions and combinations that Wordsworth's emerging style is contributing to the dialogism of the descriptive poetry, and the reactions are already dividing into "camps": what one views as "knotty" but still strong, another simply sees as "laboured" or obscure.

The next review appeared in the *Critical Review* in August 1793, and its general drift is the same as that to which Wordsworth himself alluded in his footnote to lines 332-347 on the Alpine storm. This critic suggests that Wordsworth failed to accurately or adequately supply the language to describe the sublimity of the Alps: "Mr. Wordsworth has caught few sparks from these glowing scenes. His lines are often harsh and prosaic; his images ill-chosen, and his descriptions feeble and insipid" (472-473). Wordsworth knew this was the challenge: to capture something of the "spark," the grandeur of the mountains. His footnote comment reveals his own attitude, recognizing the absolute impossibility of approaching that natural splendour through language, but rather mediating it through imagination and language. The "harshness" of his language has been noted in a couple of places already, but my view is that these features are the first signs of Wordsworth's assertion of poetic style and authority over the genres with which he is working.

The final review, by Thomas Holcroft in the *Monthly Review* of October, was the most condemning, even though its specific comments are confined to the first twenty-eight lines of the poem. Holcroft seems to have been fed up with poetry in this genre, which explains his unusually dismissive tone: "More descriptive poetry! . . . Have we not yet enough?" Holcroft concludes with this advice to the young poet:

He is the happiest of mortals, and plods, is forlorn, and has a wounded heart. How often shall we in vain advise those, who are so delighted with their own thoughts that they cannot forbear from putting them into rhyme, to examine those thoughts till they themselves understand them? No man will ever be a poet, till his mind be sufficiently powerful to sustain this labour (216-218).

These comments seem to derive from a reading that is limited by the genre and the supposed egotism of this and other writers in that genre; no mention is made of Wordsworth's language *per se*. In dialogic terms, Holcroft really means "Why do poets put their thoughts into rhyme *when I do not understand them?*" Much of Wordsworth's challenge in gaining an audience was to either reach like-minded readers (his coterie and others) or to re-educate readers into understanding and accepting his own style as a new contribution to the cultural dialogue.

Thus ends the first cycle of Wordsworth's public performance and reception. Both poems get some praise for faithfully portraying the scenes where they are set, and it is widely acknowledged that the poet has some talent; the poems, however, are also criticized as derivative and clichéd. Some of the feedback on *language* must have caused Wordsworth to re-examine his style, and while of course he would not have used Bakhtin's terminology in this re-examination, I suggest his challenge was to assess that negotiation of language in terms along these lines: "Are these things I am attempting affectations? Or are they authentic words, voices, and registers that ought to contribute to the heteroglossia of the cultural dialogism?" Both *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive*

Sketches underwent substantial revisions shortly after the reviews were in, and especially after William's reunion with Dorothy in 1794.⁹ These revisions show that Wordsworth accepted the feedback from careful readers, including family; as Gill says, "[c]riticism from other creative writers . . . no matter how minor, or from people whose intelligence Wordsworth respected, was always taken seriously and frequently acted upon" (81). But even though he returned to these first two publications right away, his growth and development were carrying him further, and rapidly. Even so, there was no new publication as Wordsworth lay publicly silent for five more years. The culmination of the revisions to *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* would be two subsequent versions in the service of the mature Wordsworth's self-presentation: the "extracts" from each poem that made their way into the 1815 *Poems*, and the revised but "complete" versions of the poems that were published in every collected edition from 1820 on as part of the "Juvenile Pieces" section of Wordsworth's canon.

III. Dialogue with Self and Intimates: *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, Salisbury Plain, The Borderers, The Ruined Cottage*

After his initial publications in 1793, Wordsworth became, if anything, more convinced that his future lay in writing. And yet, one of the strange features of the poet's early life is that now, for a period of five years, and five years during which much happened personally, politically, and professionally, he lay publicly silent. We have the writings now (his *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, the *Salisbury Plain* poems, his play *The Borderers*, and *The Ruined Cottage*), and we can see Wordsworth grapple with his revolutionary ideals, with Godwinian philosophy, with his own moral crisis – but these documents were either presented to us by the later, more mature Wordsworth, or published after his death. As such, they go a long way to helping us understand the self-

presentation project in which Wordsworth was engaged, but they certainly do not figure into a public cultural dialogue. Wordsworth's development during this period deserves critical articulation, but more with an eye toward understanding how that self-presentation was conceived and how it evolved, and how Wordsworth refined and asserted his poetic style during this period, rather than with the development of the poetry as such.

As he approached the age at which he could take orders, and as the French Revolution and British relations with France took a turn for the worse in February 1793,¹⁰ Wordsworth, paying attention to the political dialogue of his time, faced what Sheats calls a "crisis of hope" (80) from which he did not recover for at least three years (Reed 141; Blank 96-110). Having presented his poems to the public, but not yet seen how they might be received, Wordsworth in early Spring 1793 moved to enter the dialogue with his *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* in response to the Appendix to the bishop's published *Sermon by a Republican*.¹¹ Although nominally addressed to the Bishop, the letter reads as if it was intended to be published, for in his attempts to refute the Bishop's assertions, Wordsworth rhetorically identifies a public to whom the letter is actually addressed:

I will therefore examine what you have advanced from a hope of being able to do away any impression left on the minds of such as may be liable to confound with argument a strong prepossession for your Lordship's talents, experience, and virtues (*Prose* I:32).

In pointing out the Bishop's inconsistent and inadequate arguments, Wordsworth also appeals strongly to his own authority based on direct and recent experience on the

continent. Early in the essay, he questions the Bishop's knowledge of the whole affair: "If you had attended to the history of the French revolution as minutely as its importance demands . . ." (*Prose* I:32); later, when defending the capabilities of the lower classes to understand politics, he writes "If your lordship has travelled in the democratic cantons of Switzerland . . ." (*Prose* I:39). Just as we saw with Wordsworth's experiments in the loco-descriptive and picturesque genres, an insistence on witnessing events, on actually having been there, forms one of the bases of his authority.

It is important to consider here the liminal state of Wordsworth's career and sense of self. The *Letter* was written with great conviction and soon after the pronouncement to which it responds, but Wordsworth also had his two recently published (29 January) poems before the public. *Descriptive Sketches*, especially, addresses social and political injustices with nearly as much passion as, if not with the specificity of, the *Letter*. As well, Wordsworth may have been awaiting further public response to his poems during this time before considering how best to proceed on his self-presentation project. It is conceivable, for instance, that strong, positive reviews of *Descriptive Sketches* might have contributed to the prompt publication of the *Letter*, convincing Wordsworth to seek a publisher more strenuously, and making a publisher like Johnson more receptive to the idea. This would have had a profound impact on Wordsworth's public self:

If published, the 'Letter to Llandaff' would have been one of the most radical of all responses to Burke, Watson, or any other conservative writer on the events in France even if [Wordsworth] had escaped prosecution and

conviction, [he would] have set his life on a course very different from the one he took (Johnston 339-40).

In the event, a combination of forces kept the *Letter* from forming a part of the public dialogue on French-English relations, as it remained a private document throughout Wordsworth's lifetime, not published until 1876.

Before leaving Wordsworth's *Letter*, a striking comparison needs noting.

Wordsworth opens the letter by asserting that "Reputation may not improperly be termed the moral life of man" (*Prose* I:31), and proceeding to Addison's analogy of crossing "an immense bridge" when entering "public life": most people fall off the bridge through one of the many trap-doors, but some make it all the way across. The allegory is intended as instructive to politicians, but it could just as easily be applied to a writer seeking a public audience, something on Wordsworth's mind at the time of writing the letter. That he did not publish it may be fortuitous in keeping Wordsworth from "falling off the bridge" at this early stage of his career. The *Letter* provides a good record of Wordsworth's radical or republican leanings at this time, although the silence of its non-publication contributes to the invisibility of the radical public Wordsworth who, unlike many of his contemporaries, remained a "silent voice" in the cultural dialogue.

There followed the events and mostly unpublished compositions of the next four or five years, events that solidified Wordsworth's own sense of himself as "poet," and compositions that Wordsworth *did* try to publish but that ultimately, retrospectively, provide a record of an emerging self, and a maturing thought and style in the poetry. In the summer of 1793, for example, Wordsworth was returning from a vacation on the Isle of Wight with William Calvert when Calvert's horse lost control and irreparably

damaged the carriage in which they were traveling. Calvert continued on horseback, while Wordsworth walked across Salisbury Plain on his way to Wales. Wordsworth wandered across the Plain for two or three days in what sounds like a near-visionary state; indeed, Liu suggests that it was the experience on Salisbury Plain that gave Wordsworth his “poetic commandment” (200). No wonder, then, that these events spurred the composition of a poem on which he worked for a long time: almost immediately he composed *A Night on Salisbury Plain*, then a revised version known as *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, then an excerpt published in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) as “The Female Vagrant,” the excerpt later reworked as part of *The Excursion* (1814), and finally, a version of the whole published in 1842 as *Guilt and Sorrow: or, Incidents upon Salisbury Plain*.

What was restorative to Wordsworth at this time was the reunion with sister Dorothy in January 1794. By April, they had moved into Windy Brow, William Calvert’s farmhouse above Keswick, and from this point on Wordsworth and Dorothy would always be in the same household. The dispersal of the Wordsworth children had no doubt affected them in deep ways, and the bonds between William, Dorothy, and John seem to have been particularly strong. Dorothy’s presence clearly was important to William’s emotional health and sense of himself, but in terms of the present study, she was further essential to his craft because she moved from being a sympathetic “real reader” and member of the coterie and the family business to representing the immediate audience he imagined receiving many of his publications, as well as a future audience that would ensure his place in the pantheon of English poetry. Almost immediately after their reunion, Wordsworth began writing. He undertook substantial revisions to *An Evening*

Walk and Descriptive Sketches, adding sociopolitical commentary to the former, and some specific imagery to the latter (Johnston 409). By the summer of 1794, Wordsworth was also immersing himself in the writings of William Godwin, another specific stratum of the cultural dialogism of the 1790s. Wordsworth felt the need to understand this voice that spoke to so many of his contemporaries, in a sense entering into another dialogue between Godwin and himself as emerging poet, further defining his sense of value as a “poet”:

In the summer of 1794 Godwin’s was the voice
Wordsworth most needed to hear. Firstly, it convinced him
that by writing, by using his imagination and powers of
language, he would be *actively* campaigning, not just for
universal suffrage or annual parliaments, but for the wider
reign of Truth (Gill 86).¹²

Turning away from the clergy or other plans others may have made for him did not seem as serious as long as Wordsworth believed he could contribute to the betterment of mankind through his writing, and reading Godwin convinced him of that.

Then there was the practical dimension of *money*: how to make a living. The inheritance from his father was still being contested by Lord Lonsdale, and Wordsworth had debts from school and from travel; he had a child in France for which he could not provide; and now he had a small household to run, all with no clear aim of career or living. That he considered himself a *writer* by now seems clear from the extensive correspondence between Wordsworth and his friend Mathews from May 1794, in which the prospect of launching a journal of some

kind is discussed: “You mention the possibility of setting on foot a monthly miscellany from which some emolument might be drawn But, as you say, how to set it afloat! I am so poor that I could not advance any thing” (*Letters* I:118). It is in these letters, too, that Wordsworth asserts some of his principles: “You know perhaps already that I am of that odious class of men called democrats, and of that class I shall for ever continue” (*Letters* I:119); “Freedom of inquiry is all that I wish for; let nothing be deemed too sacred for investigation; rather than restrain the liberty of the press I would suffer the most atrocious doctrines to be recommended: let the field be open and unencumbered, and truth must be victorious” (*Letters* I:125).

At this time, William and Dorothy were living rent-free at Windy Brow, the first of a series of “endowments” bestowed upon Wordsworth by people who were so convinced of some future value in his writing that they were eager to make an investment in this period of his life. Of course, the periodical project never did get off the ground, presumably in large part because of lack of money. By the fall of 1794, however, Raisley Calvert, younger brother of William, was very rapidly convinced of Wordsworth’s promise for doing something of value for humankind. Raisley was to inherit his portion of the family estate upon coming of age, but he was already ill with tuberculosis and took steps to ensure that Wordsworth got some of his money after his death. In October of 1794, Wordsworth was to accompany Raisley on a trip to Portugal in an effort to restore his health. They never left the Lake District, and Wordsworth nursed young Calvert through his final illness. Raisley Calvert died on 9 or 10 January 1795, and Wordsworth did indeed receive an inheritance of 900 pounds, which, though small, did release him

from some of his sense of obligation to family (Levinson 21). Once again, this was a gift on the personal level, but it reinforced Wordsworth's conviction that he ought to be a writer, and it also allowed him to pursue that aim in more practical ways. Things like the Calvert legacy must also have forged the intense and sustaining self-confidence Wordsworth developed – must have added a resiliency that would later allow him to assert his own voice and poetic authority while powerful critics were engaging in the cultural dialogue by heaping insults upon him.

The inheritance owed by Lord Lonsdale to the Wordsworths' father John, though perhaps not always a certainty, held promise for the children, and especially for William, throughout these formative years during which he sought direction and vocation. To now have received another substantial sum,¹³ followed shortly after by the offer of another rent-free house (Racedown in September 1795) and fifty pounds per annum to raise Basil Montagu's son Basil, must only have served to confirm Wordsworth's choice of career and his sense of his own worth. This overall and recurring notion of "birthright" or "inheritance" would function as a significant element of the Wordsworthian professional egotism and personal resiliency. While financial woes may have eased somewhat, Wordsworth in 1795 was still in the midst of a spiritual, philosophical, or psychological crisis. After the period of his most ardent devotion to Godwin, he turned, once he had relocated to Racedown in September 1795, to extensive revisions to *Salisbury Plain*, adding, for example, the character of the sailor, but also stripping away explicit political argument. These revisions produced a substantially different version of the poem, now referred to as *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. But even though he continued to work at the poem, and even though Coleridge began shopping it around to publishers and friends in

the next year, *Salisbury Plain* as a complete poem did not enter the cultural conversation for nearly fifty years. When it did appear, it was in an entirely different historical context. Wordsworth's search for form and style carried him quickly from one experiment to another: experiments with narrative voice, experiments with form, and experiments with genre. Since the 1793 publication of *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, it is as if Wordsworth sensed that he has emotional and aesthetic things to work through before he presented himself again to the public. He did, indeed, work through these things as he engaged in dialogue with his culture, even though the results did not get immediately presented to the public; he continued to work on his writing, but he tested it against more intimate audiences of self, Dorothy, and Coleridge.

Of course, it was also in 1795 that Wordsworth met Samuel Coleridge and Robert Southey. The relationship with Coleridge, of course, was absolutely central in its importance to Wordsworth's writing, career, and formulating the cultural phenomenon we now know as "William Wordsworth." Coleridge had already noted the promise in *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, had become an ardent supporter of Wordsworth, and ultimately served as a creative stimulus who helped Wordsworth emerge from his spiritual crisis as well as further confirm his identity as "poet." For example, Coleridge, already stretched trying to keep afloat his periodical *The Watchman*, tried in early 1796 to get *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* published. The manuscript of the poem was delivered to Joseph Cottle, Coleridge's publisher, via Azariah Pinney, and Cottle passed it along to Coleridge, who interleaved its pages with pieces of paper covered with his comments. Coleridge began a plan for its publication and distribution: a run of 500 copies, to be sold to the readers of *The Watchman*. Later, Coleridge sent the manuscript to Charles Lamb in

London, who wrote that he read it “not without delight” (Lamb *Letters* I:8-9). But, as mentioned above, the poem was not published, and rather than spend more time and energy on it, Wordsworth moved on quickly to his next project: a tragedy called *The Borderers*. It was as if he did not *need* the public reaction at this point.

Still, the episode shows us a little of Coleridge’s devotion to the man whose promise he believed in early and continuously. Coleridge and Southey became part of Wordsworth’s coterie during this period, and therefore contributed to his emerging refinement of voice and style, but within the larger cultural conversation, there was soon to be a particular and personal dialogue between Wordsworth and Coleridge that was vital to the development of William Wordsworth. Coleridge was the first member of an appreciative coterie audience to be admitted to “the family.”

Gill notes that, as far as Wordsworth took it, the *Salisbury Plain* poem was “very limited,” especially when compared to Wordsworth’s next work, *The Borderers*. This particular episode in the Wordsworth narrative highlights the various strata of the English cultural dialogism of the mid-1790s. Both Coleridge and Wordsworth turned to drama during this time (1796-1797), in part as a money-making possibility (given the recent successes of Matthew Lewis’s stage adaptation of *The Monk*, and other dark, Gothic-inspired productions that were all the rage). *The Borderers* is a very dark work, indeed, with deception at every turn and an existential dimension that makes it feel much like a twentieth-century work. And once again, we hear competing voices clamoring for our attention in the work, as Wordsworth must both work through his literary influences and find/project his own voice. Hartman formulates the central questions of the play: “can the intellect yield true moral judgments? Is it not tainted by originating in a crime against

nature, however unwitting or inevitable this crime may be?” (Hartman 129). This notion of the unwitting crime against nature reminds us of Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*, but the more obvious influence on Wordsworth’s first attempt at drama is Shakespeare. The play’s villain Rivers is very much like *Othello*’s Iago, and the plot, too, to some extent follows that of *Othello*; the setting near the Scottish borders region, and the names of some of the characters (Clifford, Wallace) invoke echoes of *Macbeth*; there are clear *Lear* parallels between the blind Herbert being led around by his devoted daughter Matilda and *Lear*/*Cordelia*; and Mortimer’s doubt and vacillation invite a comparison to *Hamlet*. There are even specific lines that play off the existing language of Shakespeare. For example, in discussing how to kill Herbert, Lacy blurts out “Stab him, were it / Before the Altar” (II, iii, 377-8), echoing Laertes in *Hamlet*: “[I would] cut his throat i’ th’ church!” (IV, vii, 125); Rivers, in the same conversation, invokes the spirit of *Julius Caesar*’s Cassius (“How many ages hence / Shall this our lofty scene be acted over” [III, i, 111-112]) when he asserts “His death will be a monument for ages” (II, iii, 429). But Gill argues that Wordsworth continues to develop an original voice, and Johnston, too, comments on Wordsworth’s poetic identity as it emerges from the English poetic tradition by noting how Wordsworth employs the four major tragedies by Shakespeare: “In Wordsworth’s self-creation, his use of them marks a new access of literary energy, for it says a good deal about the confidence of a twenty-six-year-old, first-time playwright that he should combine elements of his country’s greatest dramatist’s four greatest tragedies into a single play” (498). Of course, given the magnitude of Wordsworth’s poetic project, it was inevitable that he would have to enter into poetic dialogue with his predecessors, especially Shakespeare and Milton.

As Blank notes, *The Borderers* gives expression to Wordsworth at his lowest point (100), as shown, for example, by the overwhelming feeling of guilt permeating the play. Wordsworth himself explained the play as springing from his disaffection with the French Revolution and the figure of Rivers is thus often seen as a type of the French republican who could justify performing evil deeds in the name of a reasoned, higher good (*Prose* 69-74). We can add to this general sense of betrayal all the anxiety about money and a career, and speculate that Wordsworth may also now be working through his personal guilt about Annette and Caroline left in France. The character of Rivers, Satan-like, preying on the naïve Mortimer, represents the worst of intellectual pride. That Wordsworth identified with Mortimer seems apparent from the fact that around this time two of his poems were published in newspapers signed “Mortimer,” although it is possible that they were sent in by Coleridge (Johnston 501; Reed 212). The relationship between Rivers and Mortimer is the driving force behind this play, as Mortimer uncannily repeats the murder by abandonment that Rivers had committed upon his Captain. Liu even goes so far as to relate Coleridge to Rivers, concluding that the growing friendship of the two poets displays a “type” of “Romantic friendship” in Coleridge’s relationship to the William and Dorothy “family” (282). There is, in *The Borderers*, a thematic dimension of the inevitability of Wordsworth devoting himself to his craft and his mission, knowing that it will isolate him and condemn him, much like the ancient mariner. As Rivers explains to Mortimer after Mortimer has abandoned Herbert,

To day you have thrown off a tyranny

That lives but by the torpid acquiescence

Of our emasculated souls, the tyranny
 Of moralists and saints and lawgivers.
 You have obeyed the only law that wisdom
 Can ever recognize: the immediate law
 Flashed from the light of circumstances
 Upon an independent Intellect (III, iv, 26-33).

Whether we read Rivers and Mortimer as Coleridge and Wordsworth, or as two facets of Wordsworth's consciousness, the play demonstrates how the two operate on each other, creating a vicious version of the "solitary" we will meet in other Wordsworth poems to come. The lines coming out of Rivers' mouth often sound clearly like the thoughts of a young poet speculating on his dedication to his art. On telling of the cries of his abandoned Captain, Rivers notes "[t]here is a power in sounds" (IV, ii, 49). A further reflection on the place of the poet in relation to his audience and time comes in Rivers' explanation of how the other crew members duped him into committing mutiny, and these sound very much like the thoughts later to be clarified, expanded upon, and expressed in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* and in Wordsworth's public positioning in general:

I had been nourished by the sickly food
 Of popular applause. I now perceived
 That we are praised by men because they see in us
 The image of themselves; that a great mind
 Outruns its age and is pursued with obloquy
 Because its movements are not understood.

I felt that to be truly the world's friend,
 We must become the objects of its hate.

(IV, ii, 150-157).

Anticipating negative reaction to *Rivers*, Wordsworth by February 1797 had worked on a preface to the play. Here again, we see that Wordsworth conceived of his work in dialogue with his imagined audience and even composed pieces of introductory explanation in anticipation of their reaction, and to control their reception. Even though the play finally made its way into print late in the poet's career, this preface did not until well after the poet's death (it was finally published in 1940 as part of the *Poetical Works*). The essay reveals some further details of Wordsworth's developing sense of himself, even though, like so many other writings of this period, it remained a private reflection. In his discussion of *Rivers*, Wordsworth sometimes seems to be "thinking out loud" about his own potential and recent crisis, and even looking forward to his own future retirement from active society:

Let us suppose a young man of great intellectual powers,
 yet without any solid principles of genuine benevolence.
 His master passions are pride and the love of distinction –
 He has deeply imbibed a spirit of enterprise in a tumultuous
 age. He goes into the world and is betrayed into a great
 crime. – That influence on which all his happiness is built
 immediately deserts him. His talents are robbed of their
 weight – his exertions are unavailing, and he quits the

world in disgust, with strong misanthropic feelings (*Prose* I:76).

And by citing Rousseau (*Prose* I:76-7), discussing his observation that a child more often takes pleasure in destroying than creating (“will tear in pieces fifty toys before he will think of making one”), Wordsworth implies that Rivers is essentially a child, and Wordsworth himself may just have passed through a stage that moved him from child to adult.

Coleridge, who had recently completed his own tragedy *Osorio*, also tried to help Wordsworth get his play produced. As he wrote to his publisher Joseph Cottle in November of 1797:

I have procured for Wordsworth’s Tragedy an Introduction to Harris, the Manager of Convent-garden [*sic*] - who has promised to read it attentively and give his answer immediately - and if he accept it, to put it in preparation without an hour’s delay (*STC Letters*, 1:358).

Wordsworth himself made a trip to London with Dorothy, as well, and he even worked on some suggested revisions to the play, but to no avail. By December 1797 the project was dead: the play was not produced or published, despite Coleridge’s enthusiasm and help, and remained unpublished until 1842.

The last major piece begun during Wordsworth’s “silent” period, *The Ruined Cottage/ The Pedlar*, has a complicated composition history. He began in the Spring of 1797 with the story of Margaret, and by the time Coleridge arrived at Racedown in June of that year, Wordsworth had something to share with him; as Dorothy wrote, “[t]he first

thing that was read after he came was William's new poem *The Ruined Cottage* with which he was much delighted" (*Letters* I:189). But Wordsworth started re-working the poem, revising it right through the time of the *Lyrical Ballads* and on up to 1804, although it still did not get published until 1814 as Book I of *The Excursion*. *The Ruined Cottage* was a vast improvement over *An Evening Walk*, *Descriptive Sketches*, *Salisbury Plain*, or *The Borderers* (in other words, the strict chronology of Wordsworth's works); that is, *The Ruined Cottage* fits into a conception we have come to know as "Wordsworthian." Johnston summarizes the impression of the first audience when he writes "'The Ruined Cottage' is the first of Wordsworth's poems that can be called 'major' without qualification" (510); Hartman summarizes the impression of the second audience: "The great Wordsworthian myth of Nature is . . . conceived" (135). Sheats (136) suggests it is in Spring 1797 that the "Racedown crisis" comes to an end and Wordsworth emerges spiritually regenerated and searching for ways to express that regeneration;¹⁴ *The Ruined Cottage*, he points out, is "the first poem Wordsworth included among the works of his maturity" (137). Thus, we can see that this poem is central and transitional to Wordsworth's poetic maturity, to his achievement of a poetic style or voice of his own, appearing to be the first truly great poem when viewed chronologically, but also one of the great poems when viewed retrospectively, that is when considering the whole of his accomplishment, either by later critics or by Wordsworth himself. And we remember, too, that because this poem was not published for another 17 years or so, some version or versions of it operated only at the coterie level for a long time. Wordsworth's coterie audience became aware of the poem, and people like Dorothy, Mary Hutchinson, Coleridge, and Lamb shared some early version or

fragments and began to think highly of it, contributing to the cultural conversation on a small scale as a promotion of Wordsworth's talent even as other publications were yet to appear (*Lyrical Ballads, Poems, in Two Volumes*, etc.).

As Blank points out, "Much of the critical work involving *The Ruined Cottage*, *The Pedlar*, and book 1 of *The Excursion* has centered around which version (and versions within versions) is artistically or narratologically superior, and most of this debate centers around the Pedlar's role relative to Margaret's tale and the poet's response to both the tale and the Pedlar's gloss" (110). To be sure, working through the narratological relations was what occupied Wordsworth in his various revisions of the poem. Wordsworth worked at this poem from its inception, quickly transforming it from a lyrical ballad into an allegory of story-telling and poetic power. Keeping clearly in mind Bakhtin's emphasis on the relation of speaker and listener in dialogue, we can interpret the versions of *The Ruined Cottage* and *The Pedlar* as literary enactments of the poet's own power and position.

Surely it is not in telling a story of unemployed weavers and an abandoned, then widowed, then dead female near-vagrant that Wordsworth achieves some originality – he and his contemporaries had, after all, already told similar stories.¹⁵ Wordsworth's originality derives from telling those stories with a freshness and attention to concrete detail, and from an insistence on the appropriateness of using the language of the rustic people, either by quotation (i.e., in their own words), or by adopting the language of the common folk for his own stylistic purposes. *The Ruined Cottage/ The Pedlar* was a crucial step along the way to that originality, especially as it records an end stage of Wordsworth's "conversation with self" of the previous five years, but also remains a

work for the coterie alone until 1814. Our primary interest in this poem is drawn to the pedlar and his story-telling power, which we read as a version of Wordsworth's sense of the poet's power and place in society. Butler summarizes the poem's (or poems') evolution:

Begun in 1797 as a stark story of Margaret's decline and death, *The Ruined Cottage* in 1798 acquired a history of the Pedlar who narrates her tale, as well as a tranquil conclusion. Wordsworth separated the Pedlar's history from the main poem in 1799, and his sister copied surplus Pedlar passages as an addendum to *The Ruined Cottage*. In 1802 these overflow passages became a separate poem about the Pedlar's mental development; in 1803-1804 this account of the Pedlar and the story of Margaret were recombined. The Wordsworths used the title *The Pedlar* in 1802 to signify just the history of the Pedlar but in 1803-1804 to mean the combined work (Butler xii).

What began as basically *The Ruined Cottage: A Lyrical Ballad* evolved into a struggle for poetic authority, and the composition history shows that struggle.

The poem quickly advanced from that "stark story," and by the 1798 MS. B version, we have a very "busy" opening with three people referred to in the opening lines: the "him" who "on the soft cool grass / Extends his careless limbs" and dreams (9-10, 13); the first-person narrator who is defined in opposition to this imagined "him" ("Other lot was mine" [17]); and, by line 36, the "aged Man" we will come to know as the pedlar.

The entire MS. B version consists of two Parts, running to 492 lines. Significant in this version, the pedlar is given a short history (lines 47-107) among the Cumbrian hills and endowed with obviously poetic powers:

To him was given an ear which deeply felt
 The voice of Nature in the obscure wind,
 The sounding mountain and the running stream.
 To every natural form, rock, fruit, and flower,
 Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
 He gave a moral life; he saw them feel
 Or linked them to some feeling. (MS. B 77-83)

A bit further on, we encounter one of the vivid images in this poem, and one that illustrates the pedlar's receptiveness to impressions from nature:

As I stooped to drink,
 Few minutes gone, at that deserted well
 What feelings came to me! A spider's web
 Across its mouth hung to the water's edge,
 And on the wet and slimy foot-stone lay
 The useless fragment of a wooden bowl;
 It moved my very heart. (MS. B 142-146)

So, from a "lyrical ballad" about Margaret, the poem has already developed into an exploration of story-telling, and in particular the introduction of the figure of the pedlar has allowed Wordsworth to bring in assertions of his own powers, both of receptivity to the world around him, and also of expression through story.

By a year later, Wordsworth had removed the lengthy history. Much of the rest of the poem remained largely unchanged (MS. D runs to 538 lines, but remains a two-part poem), but he added another 46 lines at the end that pick up on the power of the poet-figure, this time especially his effect on his listener. In both early versions, this recognition is part of the poem, as in this line of direct address: “I have heard, my Friend . . .” (MS. B 485). Now, at the end of MS. D, Wordsworth adds

The old Man ceased: he saw that I was mov'd;
 From that low Bench, rising instinctively,
 I turned aside in weakness, nor had power
 To thank him for the tale which he had told
 The old man, seeing this, resumed and said,
 “My Friend, enough to sorrow have you given,
 The purposes of wisdom ask no more;
 Be wise and cheerful, and no longer read
 The forms of things with an unworthy eye.”

(MS. D 493-496; 507-511)

From there, the pedlar provides the Wordsworthian compensatory wisdom: the mutable things of life and death are indeed sad, but looking upon the beautiful images of nature can ease the burden. By transforming the story of Margaret’s life and death into a series of images, the Pedlar (and Wordsworth) do indeed construct a myth of Nature and of time that subsumes individual narrative and, indeed, all of history. *The Ruined Cottage/ The Pedlar*, then, move beyond the simple recording (“quoting”) of heteroglossic voices (Margaret’s, our narrator’s, the pedlar’s), which is what many of the “lyrical ballads” do,

and explore the power of voices in *dialogue* as a further development of Wordsworth's poetic style.

Wordsworth did continue to work on the poem through 1804, restoring and greatly expanding the background to the pedlar. MS. E, by now referred to as *The Pedlar*, runs to a total of 883 lines, and Part I of the poem contains so much of this background that the poem now consists of three Parts. Much of the background material is obviously autobiographical in nature, with the young pedlar growing up in Hawkshead, for example; however, Wordsworth does change the pedlar into a Scotsman. As he continues to work on this piece into the early years of the nineteenth century, we can see that Wordsworth is probably revising it with his own childhood and youth in mind.

Just before we turn to Wordsworth's first published work in five years, the *Lyrical Ballads*, we should have a look at another unpublished project begun in early 1798 (Reed 215), which weighed on Wordsworth's conscience for the rest of his life: *The Recluse*. Conceived in dialogue with, or even at the urging of, Coleridge, the idea of *The Recluse* was a product of the year (1797-1798) of intense association between Coleridge and Wordsworth. It was the clearest expression of how ideas and voices negotiated in dialogue took on a weight and a meaning for Coleridge and Wordsworth that affected their views not only of each other but of themselves. The role for the young poet is the culmination of the faith placed in his talents and prospects by those around him, first sister Dorothy, then Raisley Calvert, and later Coleridge and other poets. *The Recluse* would be the crowning achievement of the poet whose calling, whose inheritance, whose talent and whose destiny was to create just such a poem. Indeed, Coleridge's letters record an emerging series of conversations that practically constitute an enlistment

campaign of over a year's duration. It began with Coleridge imagining a great poet, whose requisite qualities he believed he and Southey lacked: "I think, that an admirable Poet might be made *by amalgamating [Southey] and me*. I think too much for a *Poet*; he too little for a *great Poet*" (*STC Letters* I:294). Of course, epic was still seen as the ultimate test of the great poet, and Charles Lamb had even challenged Coleridge to produce such a sustained effort in a letter of 10 January 1797:

Coleridge, I want you to write an Epic poem. Nothing short of it can satisfy the vast capacity of true poetic genius. Having one great End to direct all your poetical faculties to, and on which to lay out your hopes, your ambition, will shew you to what you are equal. By the sacred energies of Milton, by the dainty sweet and soothing phantasies of honeytongued Spenser, I adjure you to attempt the Epic. Or do something more ample than writing an occasional brief ode or sonnet (85).

Coleridge would like to pick up the challenge, but, characteristically, he comes up with the following "plan of action" (or, excuse for inaction) in a letter to his publisher Cottle in April 1797:

I should not think of devoting less than 20 years to an Epic Poem. Ten to collect materials and warm my mind with universal science. I would be a tolerable Mathematician, I would thoroughly know Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Optics, and Astronomy, Botany, Metallurgy, Fossilism, Chemistry,

Geology, Anatomy, Medicine – then the *mind of man* –
 then the *minds of men* – in all Travels, Voyages and
 Histories (*STC Letters* I:320).

This scheme encompasses what was eventually expressed as the plan of *The Recluse*.

Coleridge, as he gets to know Wordsworth better, sees his friend's talents and transfers the ambition of writing the great epic to him. In June 1797 he writes to John Estlin to say how impressed he is with Wordsworth : “This is a lovely country – & Wordsworth is a great man” (*STC Letters* I:327). The following month, in a letter to Southey, one of the most famous expressions of his relationship to the still nearly-unknown poet:

“Wordsworth is a very great man – the only man, to whom *at all times & in all modes of excellence* I feel myself inferior – the only one, I mean, whom I *have yet met with*” (*STC Letters* I:334). His estimate of Wordsworth's worth can be summarized in this admonition to Cottle in March 1798: “The Giant Wordsworth – Go love him!” (*STC Letters* I:391). Coleridge had convinced himself that Wordsworth was the man to create the great poem, and by this time he had convinced Wordsworth of it too. In an astonishing display of confidence, Wordsworth on 26 April 1798 sits for a portrait (*DW Journals* I:16), surely a sign that he believed he would have a wide enough reception that people would want an image of him recorded.

Wordsworth must have been caught up in Coleridge's enthusiasm to announce such an ambitious plan, even to friends. He seems otherwise such a careful young author (note, for example, the fact of his obscurity as a “radical” during this time) that to promise “pictures of Nature, Man, and Society” would seem foolish. The ambitious nature of the project is laid out by Wordsworth in a letter to James Tobin, 6 March 1798:

I have written 1300 lines of a poem in which I contrive to convey most of the knowledge of which I am possessed.

My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society.

Indeed I know not any thing which will not come within the scope of my plan (*Letters I:212*).

The poem was to be the great philosophical poem that Coleridge himself would have liked to compose, but that he became convinced only Wordsworth was capable of writing. This is interpellation on a grand scale: the conception of this poem was intimately entwined with Coleridge's notion of Wordsworth's talents and potential: only *this poet* was capable of producing such an ambitious poem, and the poem would itself be the proof of the poet's greatness. And yet it seems that this role was as much created by Coleridge as anyone, or, more accurately, by the two men in dialogue with each other. Coleridge was enthusiastic about Wordsworth's talents ever since the two of them first met, and almost immediately portrayed himself as inferior to Wordsworth.¹⁶

The 1300 lines of poetry that Wordsworth had produced were a part of what Coleridge thought should go into *The Recluse*. Ultimately, as we know, *The Recluse* was never completed, and Wordsworth never published anything under that title. However, he was composing a great deal of poetry, and perhaps saw some of it making its way into *The Recluse* (Gill 144). And he did work for some years at what we know as *The Prelude*, and he did publish *The Excursion*, both conceived as parts of *The Recluse*.

Wordsworth's conception of himself as poet, molded by his conception of the place of Shakespeare and Milton in relation both to their own time and to all time, was such that the notion being urged upon him of being *the poet* to write *the great*

philosophical poem in English must have been flattering. As his career actually did unfold, and he replaced the negotiated, dialogic sense of his project and identity with a more monologic style and sense of himself, the shadow of *The Recluse* project lay over him for many more years, finally causing him to justify his other poetic activity as a replacement for that project. For ultimately, we are left with a “Prospectus” for the plan, an unpublished *Prelude* to it, and an installment, *The Excursion*, published in 1814 (and therefore to be discussed in a subsequent chapter).

Now, let us turn from the recently-begun but not-soon-to-be-completed (*The Ruined Cottage* and *The Recluse*) to some work that was soon to be published and that constituted one of the revolutionary volumes in English literary history: *The Lyrical Ballads*.

IV. Dialogue with Readers, Real and Imagined: *Lyrical Ballads*

Much of the poetry on which Wordsworth was working from March to May 1798 would ultimately end up in the *Lyrical Ballads* volume. In order to frame my discussion of this influential book, let me set the terms both biographically and bibliographically. To review my construction of Wordsworth’s life: a young man, orphaned in childhood, was being prepared for one of a few occupations; he actively rejected those choices, fancying himself a radical and a poet; his choice was further supported by a firm belief in *inheritance* or *birthright* – taken both literally (i.e., money owed his father at his death) and figuratively (i.e., Wordsworth’s growing conception of his role as poet); upon graduation from college, he undertook two trips to France and witnessed events of both the early joy and the late barbarism of the French Revolution; he also fathered a child during a liaison with a French woman, Annette Vallon; back in England, the young man

prepared two poems for publication in 1793, partly to justify the expense of time and money during his college years; after these poems appeared, the young man suffered a crisis variously described as emotional, spiritual, or moral and he lay silent for five years, but he was circulating among writers, engaging in dialogue about poetry and ideas, searching for poetic style and authority, and he was himself actively composing several pieces that remained unpublished for a variety of reasons; the feedback he received from friends and family was consistently encouraging, and was confirmed in 1795 by an endowment left by friend; late in this period (1797, at the age of 27) the young man seems to have matured as a poet and as a person, and he was living in a harmonious situation with his sister Dorothy, near the most influential and supportive of his poetic friends, Samuel Taylor Coleridge; and, finally, all of these forces converging at this moment in the young man's life had convinced him that he was uniquely talented and capable of undertaking a poetic project of huge proportions – *The Recluse*.

These are the pertinent features of Wordsworth's life and development as we approach the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in September 1798; these help us understand the contents of the publication, and what Wordsworth's particular vision and talent might be. But once again, we are guilty of a retrospective criticism that has the advantage of, especially, the Cornell Wordsworth series, which allows us to construct just such a biography of poetic development. The problem is that such a biography is an artificial construct (as all biographies must be) and that it is constructed by scholars long after the facts of publication and public presentation – in other words, we construct a dialogue in the *present* and project it *backwards in time*. There are forces of intentionality and historical accident at work at the time of these productions and publications that form an

interesting and revealing counter-narrative of biography: the emergence of “William Wordsworth” as a public poet in his own time. Let us take a moment to assess some of these forces as they help us contextualize the *Lyrical Ballads* project.

As early as March 1798, the Wordsworths and Coleridges were talking of a trip to Germany. In a letter to James Losh of 11 March, Wordsworth writes:

We have come to a resolution, Coleridge, Mrs. Coleridge, my Sister and myself of going into Germany, where we purpose to pass the ensuing two years in order to acquire the German language, and to furnish ourselves with a tolerable stock of information in natural science (*Letters* I:213).

But how to pay for it? Both poets, but especially Wordsworth, had several poems in hand, and they sought to publish some of these in order to finance the trip to Germany. For example, Coleridge suggested to his publisher Cottle in March (Cottle 165-167) that his tragedy *Osorio* might be published with Wordsworth’s *The Borderers* in one volume and versions of *Salisbury Plain* and *The Ruined Cottage* in another (we can already begin to see the shift in production between the two poets). Wordsworth started to pitch Cottle, too, encouraging him on 9 May to visit:

I say nothing of the Salisbury plain 'till I see you, I am determined to finish it, and equally so that You shall publish I have lately been busy about another plan which I do not wish to mention till I see you (*Letters* I:218).

This other “plan” may be the beginnings of the *Lyrical Ballads* project. Cottle did visit (Reed 238), and returned to Bristol almost certainly with the poems that would make up *Lyrical Ballads* although the details of printing (what poems, what order, etc.) were still up in the air (Gill 149). In June, around the fourth, Coleridge wrote to Cottle with a sense of the “ground rules”:

Wordsworth and I have *maturely weigh'd* your proposal, & this is our answer – W. would not object to the publishing of Peter Bell *or* the Salisbury Plain, singly; but to the publishing of *his poems* in two volumes he is decisively repugnant & oppugnant – He deems that they would want variety &c &c – if this apply in his case, it applies with tenfold force to mine. – We deem that the volumes offered to you are to a certain degree *one-work*, in *kind tho' not in degree*, as an Ode is one work – & that our different poems are as stanzas, good relatively rather than absolutely: – Mark you, I say *in kind tho' not in degree*.- (*STC Letters* I:411-12).

Besides the clear sense of the shift in dominance in the Coleridge-Wordsworth relationship, this letter reveals the fact that several poems are still under consideration by Cottle, and it expresses some of the principles that were adhered to when *Lyrical Ballads* appeared. As Johnston summarizes these, “[t]he only conditions they insisted upon for a new volume were anonymity (mostly Coleridge’s idea) and joint publication (mostly Wordsworth’s)” (568).

As we turn to discussing the *Lyrical Ballads* volume, we keep in mind the conversation paradigm at two levels: on the first level, poets are engaged in a dialogue with their unknown readership, a dialogue that takes some interesting turns over the next few years in Wordsworth's case; on the second level, the poems deal with features of speaker/auditor (poet/audience) relationships and anxieties (much as the genesis of *The Ruined Cottage/ The Pedlar* revealed a working through of the role of poet to audience). At this second level, some poems can be read as *allegories of writing and reception*. As such, *Lyrical Ballads*, for Wordsworth, records the stages of his maturing style.

First, though, for the present discussion, let us consider the dimensions of the dialogue between reader and poet. For the reader of the first edition of this new volume *Lyrical Ballads*, the opening words in the "conversation" with the unknown poet(s) would be the "Advertisement," the five-paragraph critical statement written, we believe, by Wordsworth, added late to the volume, and replaced in subsequent editions by the fuller "Preface." The very presence of the "Advertisement" argues a recognition on the part of the author(s) that there is an idealized "Reader" who will engage with the book and therefore engage in the dialogue. The first four paragraphs of the "Advertisement" repeatedly appeal to an illusion of freedom on the part of the reader, and encourage that reader to lay aside prejudices and let the poems speak for themselves, appealing to their "natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents" (*Prose* I:116). The poems are, indeed, "considered as experiments . . . written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure" (*Prose* I:116), and the style may "not exactly suit [the] taste" of readers of "superior judgment" (*Prose* I:116). These are

bold aims. Wordsworth argues for a re-definition of “poetry,” recognizing the heteroglossic stratification of social language and “experimenting” with bringing representative layers into his poetry, and by extension, into the poetic tradition. The fourth paragraph of the “Advertisement” provides a transition from telling readers how to recognize prejudices to how to overcome them, with the mention of Reynolds observing how long and disciplined is the acquiring of taste. The sense here is that readers of superior judgment, on the one hand, and some number of “inexperienced readers,” on the other, will be most likely to understand and appreciate the experiments of the *Lyrical Ballads*; the large group of “common readers” in between, those who have begun but not yet spent enough time forming their poetic taste, are the most likely to form “erroneous judgments” about the merit of the present volume. This is precisely the audience Wordsworth wants to address and whose taste he wishes to cultivate.

There follows a final paragraph that mentions five poems specifically, beginning a dialogue with the reader in anticipation of that reader dismissing or misconstruing those poems. “The Thorn” and “The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere” are singled out as poems that might require some clarification: the comments about “The Thorn” immediately draw attention to the narrator of the poem, and those about the “Ancyent Marinere” address the reader’s anticipated reaction to the archaic spellings and vocabulary. Of the other three poems, “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” “Expostulation and Reply,” and “The Tables Turned” (referred to simply as “those [lines] which follow [“Expostulation and Reply”]) the comments are aimed at explaining the *truth-value* of the stories developed in the poems (we are reminded of some of the notes Wordsworth felt he ought to include in his two previous publications). For “Expostulation and Reply” and “The Tables Turned,”

this is merely an insistence by the anonymous author on a biographical fact. In “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” though, there is again that sense that the author anticipates disbelief from the reader and so provides these remarks.

Several features emerge from the “Advertisement” both in terms of Bakhtin’s dialogism, and the true “experimental” nature of the volume. Coleridge and Wordsworth felt that the collection was heteroglossic to the point of strange; that is, it contained several different voices, and that some of those voices would be discordant to the readers’ ears or tastes. This is the containment function of the “Advertisement”: the attempt by the authors to control the readers’ reactions. However, as Mayo points out, many of the potentially discordant features, the things that might look like “experiments,” were actually in common circulation during the time:

Once the Ancient Mariner has gone his way, the other verses in the volume follow a more or less familiar course for 1798. In general, the drift is in several directions only – towards ‘nature’ and ‘simplicity,’ and towards humanitarianism and sentimental morality. Without discriminating too precisely between these categories, the reader of that day would tend to construe most of the contents of the *Lyrical Ballads* in terms of these modes of popular poetry, with which he was already familiar (Mayo 490).

So, Coleridge and Wordsworth are presenting “alien” voices, characters, and situations, and they are trying to keep readers engaged by addressing this feature of

the volume directly. Was it specifically *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* about which they were concerned? It is, after all, the most foreign-looking production in the collection. Or was this the beginning of Wordsworth's campaign for the language of rustic and "low" characters to be actually incorporated into poetic language? I believe Wordsworth was fully committed at this time to a more democratic view of poetic subjects and style, and that the "Advertisement" was the beginning of an argument intended to move these types of poems out of the popular magazines and beyond sentimental amateur productions and into the realm of what he thought of as "legitimate" poetry.

As the first-time reader turned to the poems themselves, the mysterious, powerful "Rime" must have made a deep impression – although, as some of the reviews below emphasize, that deep impression was not always a positive one. Still, the poem does differ sharply in tone and matter from those that follow – it would be conceivable that a reader might attribute all the remaining poems, by both Wordsworth and Coleridge, to a single author, but the "Rime" stands apart as generically, tonally, and imaginatively different, even though there is no strict commonality among the poems in the collection. There is a wide range of voices and conversations in the *Lyrical Ballads* collection, a collection Johnston describes as follows:

[F]ive sets of "lines" in which he could expand upon his appreciation for natural beauty, but say very little by way of explaining or applying its significance; ten ballads or other narratives in which the presence of the narrating

subject is minimal, especially by way of offering explanatory comment on the human suffering he describes. Instead of fully integrating these themes in a single large poem, Wordsworth could hope, by the artfully juxtaposed arrangement of his poems, that the reader would supply the necessary “thought,” “thinking,” or “reason” variously alluded to throughout the volume – in a word, its philosophy (578).

Perhaps, though, it may be more complicated than that, and thinking of the poems as conversations highlights the participants in a speaking situation, and allows us to group Wordsworth’s contributions to the volume into four main categories that I will discuss in order of their movement from furthest distance outside the poet inwards towards the consciousness of the poet himself. This analysis will allow us to better understand how the handling of characters’ voices, the conceptualization of auditor, and the presentation of poetic voice all contributed to Wordsworth’s emerging style. By examining these four categories in the order below, we see that *Lyrical Ballads* effectively reviews the poet’s own engagement with social languages, and the variety of strategies for presenting them, culminating in the poem with the most intimacy between poet and reader: “Tintern Abbey.”

In the first, most removed group are poems spoken by the character herself, or simply reported as directly as possible to us as auditors: “The Female Vagrant,” “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” “The Mad Mother,” and “The Forsaken Indian Woman” (which is, however, set up by an extensive, explanatory headnote that has the effect of a narrative

intrusion). The second group moves a little further towards the poet by including an active receiver-figure within the story: “Simon Lee,” “The Thorn,” “The Last of the Flock,” “The Idiot Boy” (which would fall into category one except for the long narrative intrusion lines 322-356), and “Old Man Travelling” are structured as conversations with the auditors actively participating in the poem. “The Convict” may be an anomaly in that it looks like a conversation, but the “conversation” is in fact an apostrophe based on the observer’s imaginative response to the convict and his plight. As such, it shares some features, too, of the third group, which I consider to be those instructive poems that illustrate the first principles of a Wordsworthian view of Nature: “Anecdote for Fathers,” “We Are Seven,” and the obvious poetic conversations “Expostulation and Reply” and “The Tables Turned” (the two poems themselves operating as a kind of “conversation”).

The final category I will use to discuss the poems includes those pieces that sketch out the features of the *Recluse*-like poet Wordsworth is himself striving to be by this time in his career. Curiously, these all share a title-paradigm that situates these poems at a particular place and/or time (some are also, therefore, the longest titles of the collection!) and may be a lingering feature of Wordsworth’s productions within the picturesque tradition: “Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite,” “Lines written at a small distance from my House, and sent by my little Boy to the Person to whom they are addressed,” “Lines written in early spring,” “Lines written near Richmond, upon the Thames, at Evening,” and “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey.” In my view, the first two groups of poems emphasize the heteroglossic nature of Wordsworth’s poetic project, a fundamental part of his poetic style at this time; the last

two categories, moving, as they are, closer towards the narrative voice of the poet, show his emerging monologic poetic style and authority.

In the first group, the poems are more or less presented directly, as with “The Female Vagrant” in which the “narrator” only appears at the very opening (“(The Woman thus her artless story told)”) and closing (“She ceased, and weeping turned away, / As if because her tale was at an end / She wept; – because she had no more to say / Of that perpetual weight which on her spirit lay”) as a pair of quotation marks around the woman’s telling of her story. The quotation strategy operates as well in “The Mad Mother,” where the first stanza is devoted to setting up the mother’s address to her infant son – in this case, the quotation is literally opened at the beginning of the second stanza, although curiously it is never closed (accidentally, according to Cornell editors Butler and Green). In the first instance, the female vagrant’s story’s impact is shifted directly to us as readers. But in the second poem, the poetic power is shifted: we are, in effect, *overhearing* a conversation between the mad mother and her (presumably preverbal) infant child. This is an important scene, for the projection of story and desire by the speaker onto the unanswering but intimately related auditor becomes a familiar vehicle for Wordsworth’s working out of poetic utterance and its reception. Further, it relates his poetic and psychic interests to Bakhtin’s insistence on the dialogic model lying at the heart of any communicative act and also inhabiting the intersection of language and identity.

“The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman” provides a slight variation from the conversational scene of “The Mad Mother.” In this case, the idea of quotation is rendered moot by attributing the words directly to the Indian woman, rather than through

the consciousness of a poet. The potentially confusing “alien” nature of the setting and utterance are addressed through the headnote that sets up the story by providing mostly factual information about the “Northern Indian” customs that explain the context of the woman’s utterance. In this poem, as well, the woman turns to address her child, in this case absent. Again the poem enacts the Wordsworthian anxiety of intimate auditor somehow removed or incapable of response; again the speaker projects or imposes her own thoughts onto that auditor:

When from my arms my babe they took,
 On me how strangely did he look!
 Through his whole body something ran,
 A most strange something did I see (33-36).

But in this poem, the audience of the child extends to the (also absent) audience of the whole group, and expresses a further dimension of a writer’s anxiety:

Oh wind that o’er my head art flying,
 The way my friends their course did bend,
 I should not feel the pain of dying,
 Could I with thee a message send.
 Too soon, my friends, you went away;
 For I had many things to say (45-50).

Loss of audience, in this case, means death.

The final poem in this first group is “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” one of the poems singled out by the Advertisement. This poem is told in the third person, but again the narrator is relatively uninvolved, merely relating the weird legend from

Warwickshire, and providing the punctuating moral at the very end: “Now think, ye farmers all, I pray, / Of Goody Blake and Harry Gill” (127-128). But a fascinating feature emerges if we look at the story as allegory of writing and reception – this poem enacts the dynamic of Wordsworthian poetics as enunciated later in the “Preface” to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. That is, the curse uttered by Goody Blake is so completely understood by the receptive audience of Harry Gill that he spends the rest of his life cold, a perfect illustration of the transmission of “passion” via language; in other words, a sympathy is set up between the speaker and the auditor – which is precisely the goal of Wordsworth’s poetics as expressed in the “Preface” a couple of years later.

The next set of poems deals with a clear poet-like figure embedded in the action of the poem. That poet-figure is the primary auditor/observer, and may be the one who carries away a “lesson,” or turns and tries to convey one to us. “The Thorn” is an example of this type of poem, and the most complex because it is structured as a conversation between the retired sailor who narrates the story and the poet-figure who is his auditor, neither of whom is named nor very uniquely identified. The speaker’s situation is further explained by the Advertisement in a paratextual note: “[It] is not supposed to be spoken in the author’s own person: the character of the loquacious narrator will sufficiently shew itself in the course of the story.”¹⁷ We have to ask, “Was it sufficient?” The loquaciousness of the narrator may well “shew itself” sufficiently, but the identity of the narrator seems, according to the author of our “Advertisement,” to be expected to emerge “sufficiently” from these lines three-quarters of the way through the poem:

For one day with my telescope,

To view the ocean wide and bright,
 When to this country first I came (181-183).

The second character in this poem, the one who asks the sailor about Martha Ray's story, is a more passive type: the sailor directly narrates events and the questioning poet-figure interrupts: "Now wherefore thus, by day and night, / In rain, in tempest, and in snow, / Thus to the dreary mountain-top / Does this poor woman go?" (78-81). The sailor/narrator fills a role similar to that of the poet-figure in "Simon Lee" as he shifts the burden of moral significance to his auditor: "I cannot tell; I wish I could; / For the true reason no one knows" (89-90); or, more fully, "I'll tell you every thing I know; / But to the thorn, and to the pond / Which is a little step beyond, / I wish that you would go: / Perhaps when you are at the place / You something of her tale may trace" (105-110).

A poem like "Simon Lee" continues the model of the poet-figure, but unlike "The Thorn," it is narrated by a single character who relates what he has heard about Simon in his (Simon's) neighbourhood. In this poem, though, not only is the narrative voice involved in the action of the story – he does, after all, sever the root with which the old man has been struggling – but there is an extended address to the reader which, again, focuses attention on the issues of conversation and reception with which Wordsworth is concerned, and that he will more systematically address in the "Preface" two years later:

O reader! Had you in your mind
 Such stores as silent thought can bring,
 O gentle reader! You would find
 A tale in every thing.
 What more I have to say is short,

I hope you'll kindly take it;
 It is no tale; but should you think,
 Perhaps a tale you'll make it (73-80).

That Wordsworth addresses the reader at this point indicates a sensitivity to, and an anxiety about, the reader's state of mind at this point in the poem. There is a further apologetic tone in lines like "What more I have to say is short, / I hope you'll kindly take it." But there is also the insistence that the reader's imagination is a vital, even a necessary, part of the artistic equation as Wordsworth is starting to conceive it. We see the continuation of the Wordsworthian strategy of shifting a poem's significance and moral weight along a chain from subject to perceiving narrator-figure to, ultimately, us as readers.

"The Last of the Flock" is paradigmatic of this type of poem as it is introduced for 15 lines by the poet-figure himself, who describes the odd situation of seeing a full-grown man walking along the road with a lamb in his arms and weeping openly. Then he asks the man a question – "My friend / What ails you? Wherefore weep you so?" – and from there the man's story fills the rest of the poem, again as a quotation, so the poem reads as a record of a conversation between the two. "Old Man Travelling" opens in a very similar mode, with the narrating poet-figure encountering the old man on the road. The bulk of this short poem (16 of the 20 lines), however, is devoted to the narrator's descriptions arising from observing the old man – the old man is objectified, and the poem records the observer's imaginative responses. The old man's words come in only in those last four lines.

“The Idiot Boy” is easily Wordsworth’s longest poem in the collection. It deals with the most transgressive “alien” voice among his poems in the collection. The story begins immediately and is presented in a direct third-person way. One of the first things we notice is that there seems to be a private language between Susan and Johnny, between mother and son:

To this did Johnny answer make,
Both with his head, and with his hand,
And proudly shook the bridle too,
And then! his words were not a few,
Which Betty well could understand. (72-76)

Again, we see an example of this primal communication scene of mother and child, as the reader has already encountered in “The Mad Mother” and, in a variation (because the child is absent), “The Forsaken Indian Woman.” Then, about three-quarters of the way through, a direct address is made by the heretofore unidentified narrating voice. For nine stanzas a first-person interruption begins with a survey of possible outcomes to Johnny’s ride. It reminds us of the address in “Simon Lee”:

O reader! Had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle reader! You would find
A tale in every thing.

But here, it is not the *reader* who offers the rich imaginative possibilities; it is the *writer* who offers several, and then turns to an invocation of his muses to inspire him to express “[b]ut half of what to him befell” (350). In other words, Wordsworth explores in this

associate with the poet: images and experiences from nature, the power of the imagination, the egotistical sublime, the poet's role.

Four other poems in *Lyrical Ballads* present the reader with lessons drawn from experience, and thereby illustrate the power of nature that is becoming more of a feature of Wordsworth's maturing style. "Anecdote for Fathers, Shewing how the Art of Lying may be Taught" uses a conversation between adult and child to introduce a child's logic – which is to say, no logic at all. The poet-narrator muses on his present moment, but thinks upon a pleasant past as well, another "typically" Wordsworthian situation; he objectifies the mental dynamic by asking the child which of the two places he prefers: "My little boy, which like you more, / . . . 'Our home by Kilve's delightful shore, / Or here at Liswyn farm?'" (25, 27-28). The child answers right away, "'At Kilve I'd rather be / 'Than here at Liswyn farm'" (35-36). The poet-narrator then interrogates the boy, trying to get a rational explanation for his choice. In desperation to get this adult to stop asking for his justification, the child comes up with a "reason" that is no reason at all: "'At Kilve there was no weather-cock, / 'And that's the reason why'" (55-56).

The other poetic conversation with an adult interrogating a child is, of course, "We Are Seven," the next poem in the collection. Here, the adult gets even more exasperated at the little girl than does the narrator-poet in "Anecdote for Fathers":

'But they are dead; those two are dead!

Their spirits are in heaven!'

'Twas throwing words away; for still

The little Maid would have her will,

And said, 'Nay, we are seven!' (65-69)

In this poem, however, an underlying thematic element works into Wordsworth's conception of himself: the memorializing impulse the little girl enacts in continuing to count her dead siblings among her family members. Wordsworth the emerging, striving poet craves to be remembered with the same naïve power, especially when we read "We are Seven" in opposition to, say, *The Ruined Cottage*:

"we die, my Friend,
Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
And prized in his particular nook of earth
Dies with him or is changed, and very soon
Even of the good is no memorial left." (MS. D 68-72).

The final two poems in this group summarize the perspective on rationality illustrated by "Anecdote for Fathers" and "We are Seven." The pair of "Expostulation and Reply" (itself containing a dialogue) and "The Tables Turned" (the *second* answer to Matthew's "Where are your books?") pushes a Wordsworthian agenda that values the rustic, the traditional, the sensual over the rational represented by books.

The final grouping of poems is the set of five poems all beginning with "Lines." Having experimented in the other poems with speakers at varying distances from the action described and in different combinations of speaking, reporting, conversing, and so forth, Wordsworth speaks from the first person as a poet in these five. Further, having considered in dramatized conversations the philosophical import of his poetry, Wordsworth most clearly expresses both his place in the English literary tradition and a kind of poetic credo in these "Lines." Bakhtin says of the poet's search for a unique style:

The language of the poet is *his* language, he is utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it, he makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its unmediated power to assign meaning (as it were, ‘without quotation marks’), that is, as a pure and direct expression of its own intention (“Discourse in the Novel” 285).

“Without quotation marks”: this aptly describes Wordsworth’s achievement of full poetic voice in these poems. The exploration of rustic subjects and language that has been presented largely through quotation or dialogue in the majority of the *Lyrical Ballads* occasionally gives way to a unified, authoritative voice that either proceeds with assertion or, if addressing an other, does not wait for (or care for?) a response. Again, we are at the point of substituting “real” listeners with idealized addressees.

In “Lines Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-tree,” Wordsworth creates a “second self” of the unknown genius, memorialized only by the pile of stones and the speaker’s own memory:

-----Who he was
 That piled these stones . . .
 I well remember. – He was one who own’d
 No common soul (8-9, 12-13).

But this person, for all his deep feeling, lacks several elements that Wordsworth knows he needs: expression, audience, and community. The “Lines” also contain the germ of the *Recluse* philosophy as expressed in *The Prelude*:

The man, whose eye

Is ever on himself, doth look on one,
The least of nature's works. . . (51-53)

The poem that links to this sentiment the most directly is “Lines Written in Early Spring,” a clearly meditative poem in the first person. This one, too, anticipates the yet-to-be-produced *Prelude* with its clearer expression of the connection of nature-love-man:

To her fair works did nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it griev'd my heart to think
What man has made of man (5-8).

One of the “Lines” poems directly engages the sense of literary past and tradition, using the trope of the river as a representation of the English literary heritage, specifically Collins as indicated by Wordsworth’s note to line 30. Here, as with the early *Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* (and the “Lines” are among the oldest in the *Lyrical Ballads*, composed in 1789), a particularly self-conscious Wordsworth steps into the river of poetic inheritance to test the waters.

The last two of these “Lines” bear some key similarities in terms of my main argument. The “Lines Written at a Small Distance from my House . . .” are again spoken in the first-person by what we recognize as the poet-figure. In this one, Wordsworth uses the device of directly addressing his sister via Basil Montagu (here called “Edward”). In terms of dialogue or conversation, this is the scene at the heart of Wordsworth’s poetic psychology: himself as poet addressing Dorothy or some abstracted representation of her. The poem, as Gill says, “no less than the more complex ‘Tintern Abbey’ published in the same volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, expresses some of the fundamental convictions on

which the whole of W's [*sic*] poetry is based" (*Oxford Wordsworth* 688) and, because it expresses them so directly, the poem functions as an assertion of an emerging Wordsworthian poetics, summarizing, for example, the lessons learned in "We Are Seven" or "Expostulation and Reply":

One moment now may give us more
Than fifty years of reason ("Lines," 25-26).

The "Lines" known as "Tintern Abbey" provide the final example within this category, and, of course, provide a powerful conclusion to the *Lyrical Ballads* volume in its entirety. Wordsworth again over-specifies time and place in the title, again enunciates the value of nature, again speaks in the first person, and again addresses directly an auditor who is not expected to reply – this is not really a reported conversation. In this case, the fact of the return to a place he had seen earlier in his life crucial to the poem, and the fact that he is returning with an intimate – with sister Dorothy – is not only crucial to the poem, but to Wordsworth's identity as man and as poet. The palimpsest of the scene before him laid over the scene in the past provides solace as the sequence is projected into the future:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food

For future years (63-67).

The sustaining element of the poem through this compression of past/present/future defines the attitude towards Nature in “Tintern Abbey” as a force that will counteract the deadening influences of solitary existence in the city.

But more than that, the presence of the ideal reader construct “Dorothy” sustains. “Tintern Abbey” remarkably re-creates a Bakhtinian “conversation” or dialogic in which there is implied a dialogue between the speaker and the “Friend,” his “dear Sister.” The “real-life” auditor who has been, I argue, one of the representations of “audience” in Wordsworth’s mind, figures as a nexus of representations as direct addressee, abstracted version of public audience, and shadow of former self:

For thou art with me, here, upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! Yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister! And this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her (115-124).

The extension of the experience on into the future, and particularly the expectation on the speaker’s part that the auditor will remember and reflect on this present experience,¹⁸

drives the concluding movement of the poem, in the fashion of what Blank calls “Wordsworth’s poetic life-insurance policy” (129):

. . . and in after years,
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
 Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
 Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies . . . (138-143).

Nature is a healing force, and our speaker impresses this fact upon our auditor – in other words, there is a lesson to be learned here, and passed from speaker to auditor.

Additionally, though, is the experience and the memory of the experience, a common feature of the emerging Wordsworthian poetic, and something he will try to enunciate more fully in the “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). And this is the poetic life insurance: the addressee, referred to as “dear Friend” or “dear Sister,” never as “Dorothy,” creates a dialogic space for the reader to fill, ensuring, in this case, that the poet’s thoughts and admonitions survive:

Nor, perchance,
 If I should be, where I no more can hear
 Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
 Of past existence, wilt thou then forget
 That on the banks of this delightful stream
 We stood together; and that I, so long
 A worshipper of Nature, hither came,

Unwearied in that service. . . (147-154).

In this poem, written in stately blank verse reminiscent of an ode, Wordsworth presents to the public the first fully-fledged example of his own authoritative style, with an artful balance of subject-matter, language, and form. A volume that appears so heterogeneous, that contains so many disparate voices, that is largely about voice, language, and dialogue, culminates in an assured, ahistorical, assimilative example of a poetic style. The poem that concludes the *Lyrical Ballads* volume, this anonymous book of “experiments,” has been seen since its first publication as a new and valuable contribution to the English poetic tradition. For the purposes of the present study, it illustrates how Wordsworth posited an imagined reader based on his imagined real readers, often embedded into the poems themselves as addressees. “Tintern Abbey” also exemplifies Wordsworth’s maturing style. As Mayo points out in his essay “The Contemporaneity of *Lyrical Ballads*,” Wordsworth’s lasting contribution is not the *types* of poems he writes – these were common in the journals of the time; his enduring originality lies in a unique and indefinable cluster of qualities:

their vastly superior technical mastery, their fullness of
 thought and intensity of feeling, the air of spontaneity
 which they breathe, and their attention to significant details
 which seem to the reader to have been observed for the first
 time (493-4).

This is *style*.

We shall see in chapter 5 below what some of the contemporary reactions were; for now, suffice it to say that, looking forward throughout Wordsworth's career, the public reception of "Tintern Abbey" alone was going to have to sustain his reputation. But just before we leave the *Lyrical Ballads*, let us also recognize, with the advantage of literary history's hindsight, that it is hard to imagine a single volume, not a collection or anthology *per se*, that opens with *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and closes with "Tintern Abbey"! All of which is not to say that the contemporary reader of 1798 or 1799 would have been paying attention to all these representations of conversations or dialogues. My critical perspective here leads me to consider just such dimensions of the poems, and, of course, to largely factor out the Coleridge contributions to the volume. But speaking of the contemporary audience, the next turn in the discussion of the conversation emerging between William Wordsworth and the reading public is surprising, given the apparent "reception-anxiety" embedded in many of the poems: rather than wait somewhere in England for the reviews to come in, Wordsworth leaves the country. But the anxieties do, naturally, continue, and the composition that takes place in Germany in that winter of 1799, and the poems that are ultimately published, marvelously illustrate those anxieties. Let us briefly turn to the sojourn in Germany, before examining the impressive drive toward consolidating his own role and image as poet in which Wordsworth engaged from 1800 onwards.

Chapter 4: German Interlude 1799

“Wordsworth, poet of Englishness par excellence, was conceived in France and born in Germany” (Kenneth Johnston in *The Hidden Wordsworth* 631).

In the Bakhtinian framework of a poet working out a poetic style, Wordsworth’s time in Germany is interesting because he was clearly separated from his own culture, and yet he also made significant progress in the development of his own style and poetic authority. It is further worth considering the interruption in the dialogue, into which he and Coleridge had just entered with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*; in other words, they had started a conversation, but then left without waiting for any responses. Considering the prominent position that volume holds today, it is difficult to imagine that this is what happened. The volume had, of course, been organized and published to raise money for just this purpose, since Coleridge wanted to learn German and study philosophy; his wife Sara and the Wordsworths were originally planning to accompany him. But given the delays in getting the book into the hands of readers, William, waiting with Dorothy in London for its release, spent the middle of September 1798 arranging financial details with his brother Richard and requesting that Cottle transfer Wordsworth’s interest in *Lyrical Ballads* to J. Arch of London – this in the days before their departure with Coleridge from Yarmouth on 16 September.

They all three landed in Hamburg on the 19th of September, where they stayed for a few days. Coleridge introduced himself to people like the Klopstocks and Professor Ebeling, a Classics scholar at the local Academy (Reed 249-253). But then on 23 September, upon the recommendation of Victor Klopstock, Coleridge left for a reconnaissance of Ratzeburg, returning four days later but only briefly: on 30 September

1798, Coleridge set out for an extended stay at Ratzeburg with his traveling companion John Chester (a Nether Stowey neighbour and Sara's substitute on the trip), leaving William and Dorothy in Hamburg to arrange their own, cheaper accommodations. William writes at length to Tom Poole on 3 October 1798, his first letter from Germany, of initial impressions and early plans:

We have however been treated with unbounded kindness by Mr. Klopstock the brother of the poet and I have no doubt this city contains a world of good and honest people, if one but had the skill to find them Coleridge has most likely informed you that he and Chester have settled at Ratzeburg. Dorothy and I are going to speculate farther up in the country (*Letters* I:229-230).

And then, at the end of the letter, a short note that highlights the positive associations of the previous year near Coleridge in Somerset, and by contrast the growing sense of isolation and rootlessness in Germany:

I have one word to say about Allfoxden: pray keep your eye upon it. If any series of accidents should bring it again into the market we should be glad to have it, if we could manage it (231).

On the same day, William wrote to Henry Gardiner, a merchant from Norwich whom they had met, also mentioning the intended plan for the Wordsworths to move: "The place of our destination is yet undetermined, but we intend to fix on some pleasant village

or small town” (231). This letter to Gardiner contains the only mention of the *Lyrical Ballads* in Wordsworth’s correspondence from Germany:

I do not know what is become of my poems, that is, who is their publisher. It was undecided when I came off, which prevented my sending you a copy, but you will see them advertized and so will learn where you may get them.

Lyrical ballads with a few other poems, is their title (232).

At this point, let us pause to review the situation. Wordsworth and Coleridge had put together a collection of their poetry, amid a great deal of instability as to exactly what poems were to go into the volume, last-minute changes and additions, and with the stated aim of merely making a bit of money for the trip to Germany. They published the volume anonymously and justified the assortment of poetry, an assortment not unrecognizable to its audience, as “experiments.” Then they lost contact with the English publishing world and seemed not to pursue any feedback on the volume by way of reviews until their return some months later (April 1799 for the Wordsworths, July 1799 for Coleridge).

The Wordsworths settled on Goslar, in Braunschweig (or Brunswick). As if to underscore the poets’ ignorance of their volume’s performance, it was while they were *en route* from Hamburg to Goslar, on 4 October, that the second issue of the *Lyrical Ballads* was published in London (Reed 254). In Goslar, William and Dorothy lived modestly, and they suffered through what was one of the coldest European winters in memory. Early in their stay they could tell that the lack of contact with German-speaking people willing to help them acquire the language was impeding their progress along the lines on

which the trip was originally conceived. As they wrote to Coleridge around the middle of November,

Goslar is an old decaying city at the foot of the Hartz Mountain[s] – provisions very cheap, and lodgings very cheap; but no Society – and therefore as [William] did not come into Germany to learn the Language by a Dictionary, he must remove: which he means to do by the end of the Month Dorothy says – ‘William works hard, but not very much at the German’ (*Letters* I:233).

What he was working on was more poems, for this is the period in Wordsworth’s career when he felt he had to, as he puts it in a letter to Coleridge in December of 1798, “write in self-defence” (*Letters* I:236). Surrounded by the “alien” language, he is reduced to the intimacies of dialogue with Dorothy and “conversation” with himself and his poetic language. The production here in Goslar is central to Wordsworth’s body of work. Blank writes, “[i]f we wish to understand Wordsworth at all, we will have to come to terms with the feelings expressed in the Goslar poems as well as the origin of these feelings” (146). Johnston breaks down the output in Goslar into four categories of poem: “(1) his first drafts of ‘the poem on the growth of my own mind,’ or ‘the poem to Coleridge’ (what we know as *The Prelude*, still conceived as part of *The Recluse*); (2) the Matthew poems, on a village schoolmaster figure, essentially William Taylor, but incorporating features of other older men who befriended the boy Wordsworth; (3) the Lucy poems, on the death of a young woman or girl who is the speaker’s love or inspiration, and who must be Dorothy in psychological terms, though not literally; and (4) some more ballads of the

kind he wrote in the spring, again focusing on lost or abandoned women” (637). We must consider these poems, as well as the feelings expressed in them, and speculate on the origins of those feelings; further, Johnston’s categories are a helpful starting point for the discussion. However, given our present approach, I would like to develop the argument a little more along the lines of *conversation* by analyzing the poems for their speakers, their apparent auditors, and any comments or themes that emerge expressing Wordsworth’s self-consciousness about these issues (what Newlyn calls *reception-anxiety*). Many who comment on the Lucy poems try to identify who or what “Lucy” might represent; for example, Coleridge suggested Lucy=Dorothy, with the assumption that Dorothy was William’s inspiration, and that therefore in some of the poems he was lamenting the loss of that inspiration. Annette Vallon and Mary Hutchinson are other possibilities; Blank (152) suggests it is more proper to think of Lucy as Wordsworth, as the growing sense of his subjectivity that is becoming Wordsworth: “If, then, we are to make an identification with Lucy, as is the fashion of many of my worthy critic-predecessors, I would say that Lucy can be none other than a projection of Wordsworth himself” (155). And Kenneth Johnston offers this reading: “If the ‘poem to Coleridge’ is about ‘the growth of my own mind,’ [the Lucy] poems to Dorothy are about the loss of her inspiration. Lucy is Wordsworth’s Muse . . .” (643).

I do not want to deny any of these interpretations, but the present study leads me to the view that *Lucy is an abstract representation of Wordsworth’s readership*. For while we see that all of these poems spring from a feeling of loss, most of them, except for the ballads, also circulate around a conversation with an intimate auditor. We might agree with Coleridge and see the Lucy poems as somehow being about Dorothy. I have,

however, shown above how the real Dorothy is also representative of Wordsworth's ideal audience; then, in the Matthew poems, Wordsworth displays relationships of young narrator and teacher/school-master, also significant in the evolution of his verse and his conception of audience; and, of course, *The Prelude* has its origins in a series of "spots of time" addressed to Coleridge. Here in Germany, by addressing poems to Dorothy and to Coleridge, Wordsworth is, in effect, "guaranteeing" their reception: they form the basis of his reading public; they represent that public to Wordsworth. But one other feature of these conversations is particularly relevant: the variations Wordsworth provides with absent auditors. Lucy, whoever she is, is dead and gone; the Matthew poems often posit an epitaph of some kind, as in "Lines Written on a Tablet in a School" or the group of them called by Gill "Five Elegies"; and, of course, "the poem to Coleridge" (the beginnings of *The Prelude*) is prompted by Coleridge's absence. Johnston goes so far as to suggest that the lines of poetry in the letters to Coleridge form a compelling lure to remind Coleridge of their great times at Alfoxden and to get them reunited by "reminding Coleridge of the poet and the poetry he loved and admired, because his admiration was necessary to Wordsworth's self-creation" (639). Ambivalent feelings towards Dorothy, feelings of their father's loss stirred by the time in Germany, the separation from Coleridge: on the personal level, these feelings produced some of Wordsworth's most powerful and memorable poetry. But further, I see them as Wordsworth's working through of some of the anxieties he must have felt as a writer – especially as a writer who had had mixed but encouraging reviews five years previously, but had not published since, and who had then placed an anonymous, co-written volume before the public, and in a cavalier move left the country without waiting to see what some of the actual

reactions might be. In other words, Wordsworth rehearses the possible outcomes of what he must hope to be an emerging *cultural conversation*, and the Lucy poems, and others written abroad in Germany, reflect the growing anxiety over the reception of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Two possible questions on his mind might be “Will the book find a fit audience?” or “Will the book fall upon deaf ears?” The first anxiety is expressed in the poem “Lines written on a Tablet in a School”⁶⁶

If Nature, for a favorite Child,
 In thee hath temper'd so her clay,
 That every hour thy heart runs wild
 Yet never once doth go astray,
 Read o'er these lines...” (1-5)

In other words, an “ideal reader” (“favorite Child”), a disciple of Wordsworthian nature worship, is directly addressed as the desired audience for this poem. The second possibility seems likely represented by the lines from [“Three years she grew in sun and shower”] – curiously, a situation the reverse of the ending to “Tintern Abbey” where the poet/speaker has died, but the auditor/reader has survived – here, the poet is left to reflect on the loss of the potential vessel for carrying thought on into the future:

She died and left to me
 This heath, this calm and quiet scene,
 The memory of what has been,
 And never more will be. --- (39-42).

The poetry written in Goslar, especially the Lucy poems, records the young poet Wordsworth anticipating possible receptions of his work, and moving, in his conception

of audience, further outwards from the intimate sphere – specifically, writing “to” Coleridge (*Prelude/Recluse*) or Dorothy (*Evening Walk* or “Tintern Abbey”) – to an imagined public audience that will, he hopes, ultimately replace the coterie and “fill in” the rhetorical space for a reading public created by his poetry.

At the same time that he was composing a great deal of good poetry, Wordsworth also articulated, in his few letters from that winter, the beginnings of the poetic principles laid out in the “Preface” to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). In late November or early December 1798, he wrote to Coleridge of Burger’s poetry: “It seems to me, that in poems descriptive of human nature, however short they may be, character is absolutely necessary, &c.: incidents are among the lowest allurements of poetry” (*Letters* I:234). On 5 February 1799, he wrote to Josiah Wedgwood and included some detail of his attempts to learn German. In this letter, Wordsworth expresses the sensitivity to language that makes a comparison to Bakhtin irresistible. Writing from Germany, and keenly aware of the “alien” language, Wordsworth expresses the semantic richness of language. The requirement of the competency of the auditor, and the qualities of language as a vehicle not only for thoughts but also for feelings, indicate his appreciation of the living complexity of language, and also seem to anticipate some of the discussion of the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” statement from the “Preface” that was to be published in another year:

I mean by learning the language not merely the knowing
that ‘Liebe’ is German for ‘love’, and ‘darum’ for
‘therefore’ &c but *the having your mind in such a state that
the several German idioms and phrases without any act of*

thought or consideration shall immediately excite feelings analogous to those which are excited in the breasts of the natives. Unless our minds *are* [*sic*] in this state, what we call knowledge of languages is a wretched self-delusion; words are a mere dead letter in the mind (*Letters* I:249-50, emphasis added).

Wordsworth conceives of the basic Bakhtinian conversation situation as the core of communication, and in this case thinks of translating from one language to another in that exchange between participants. Bakhtin himself expresses the situation in a strikingly similar way:

The [poetic] word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (“Discourse in the Novel” 276).

Both recognize that the transfer not only of denotative meaning but a level of semantic context is the level one hopes to attain, but it requires a sympathy between speaker and auditor that, in his own case, Wordsworth worries he will not attain. The same basic conception is at play in the poet-reader model he envisages at this

time, and that he will enunciate in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). That is, Wordsworth already looks to “low and rustic life” in his search for a “more permanent” language, but he realizes he must have readers with “healthy” minds if he is to engage them and, indeed, improve their affections and tastes.

And, while Wordsworth may not have directly expressed his anxiety over the reception of *Lyrical Ballads* to many, he did continue to look forward in terms of publication; that is, he took for granted that he would continue to publish. He was obviously in conversation, by letter, with Coleridge over his compositions, both new and old. In what appears to be the last letter from the Wordsworths before they disappear into the south of Germany for about two months, William writes a long letter to Coleridge on 27 February 1799, mostly about settling in Goslar but also mentioning both new composition and recent or planned revision:

For the 2 poems ‘How sweet where crimson colours['] &c
and ‘One day the darling of my heart’, I do not care a
farthing. Of the rest we will talk when we meet. Wishing
not to be in debt when I return to England I have lately been
employ’d in hewing down Peter Bell, with another dressing
I think he will do. He has risen in my esteem. Heaven
knows there was need I also took courage to devote
two days (O Wonder) to the Salisbury Plain. I am resolved
to discard Robert Walford and invent a new story for the
woman (*Letters* I:256).

Peter Bell, of course, did not get published for some time, even though it was so clearly linked to this “lyrical ballad” phase of Wordsworth’s career. By the time it and the *Salisbury Plain* poem did get published, they represented something else within Wordsworth’s overall presentation of his career.

Based on the original aims of the trip, it is usual to view it as a success for Coleridge, who did indeed learn some German and studied with the foremost philosophers and natural scientists of the time at Göttingen, and a failure for the Wordsworths, who did not learn German, suffered through one of the coldest winters on record, and felt very much isolated from both Coleridge and society in general. In Germany, Wordsworth was separated from his tradition, his homeland, his native language, and from the person most influential as a poetic contemporary – but he had the representative of his “ideal reader” with him. This scene, a writer separated from other powerful voices yet feeling compelled to write, helped him shape his own style. A Wordsworthian pattern of wresting gain from apparent loss continued to emerge. The “writing in self-defence” impulse resulted in many of his most influential poems (for example, “Ruth,” “Nutting,” or “There Was a Boy”), as well as some of his most original and enduring (the “Lucy” poems). More critically, as these poems illustrate, he achieves a mature and authoritative style during this period as his sense of personal identity aligns with his sense of poetic identity. Bakhtin offers one of his wonderful figurative formulations that helps explain this phenomenon: “poetry . . . sees its own language surrounded by other languages, surrounded by literary and extra-literary heteroglossia . . . [but it] behaves as if it lived in the heartland of its own language territory” (“Discourse in the Novel” 399).

And in the years immediately following, the payoff continued and the careers of the two poets truly diverged, as Wordsworth's production soared while Coleridge's inversely stalled. Wordsworth would remain in dialogue with Coleridge, both the person and his works, practically throughout his life, but the physical absence from Coleridge accelerated and confirmed Wordsworth's discovery of his style and poetic authority.

Chapter 5: Lyric Poems/ Disputed Poetics: 1800-1814

We have looked at the career of William Wordsworth with the paradigm of “conversation” shaping our discussion of his formative years as a writer, up to and including first publications in 1793; a silent period of five years; and then the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. For the first phase of the analysis, we described Wordsworth’s development as poet in terms of a “conversation with tradition,” in which he recognizes the heteroglossic nature of language and then absorbs, imitates, and modifies the voices and forms of English and European poets from Greek and Roman right up through Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and up to his dialogic engagement with the loco-descriptive genre popular when he began composing seriously. Publication of *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* initiates the next phase in the sense that these public statements mark Wordsworth’s entry into more of a *cultural conversation*; in other words, his own poetic language now enters the public dialogue. Curiously, though, Wordsworth falls silent for five years after that, as he tests the assumptions of his early development and political fervour against personal and political realities and responsibilities. He also continues to work on his poetic style through a series of works that remain unpublished during this time. After collaborating with Coleridge for a year, a joint publication, 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, exhibits a range of narrative and poetic styles, voices, and subject matter, and also at least one example in which a fully integrated Wordsworth expresses a fully integrated poem (“Tintern Abbey”). Subsequent composition in Germany in 1799 marks both a working through of reception-anxiety in many of the poems, as well as a consolidation of Wordsworth’s sense of purpose and possibility as a writer.

But for the next fifteen to twenty years, as he presents himself more and more as a public writer, the cultural conversation critically assesses the “Wordsworth project,” both poetic and, from 1800 onwards, theoretical as well. During this time, Wordsworth’s reputation moves beyond a coterie to a broader public, although not necessarily with good results, as we shall see. His confidence in his potential, authority, and poetic style, forged during the period 1793-1798, encourages him to present a number of pieces to the reading public that challenge their notion of who or what the subject of poetry might be. His statements of poetical principles begin in earnest during this period, too, beginning with the first version of the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. Unfortunately, those principles get dismissed as either at odds with his own best poetry, or as a “system” that threatens the establishment within the publishing industry, and there follows a sustained debate over Wordsworth’s reputation and contribution to poetry – a debate that rages until at least 1819 or even later. It was also a time of significant change in his personal life, with new connections and family as well as threats to old relationships – gains as well as losses.

The reception of *Lyrical Ballads* became known to Wordsworth in the months after he and Dorothy returned from Germany. They landed at Yarmouth on about 26 April 1799. From there, they proceeded north to Sockburn-on-Tees to stay with the Hutchinsons. Wordsworth soon began writing letters with two main thrusts: first, there are several letters to his brother Richard and others settling the accounts of his travels in Germany; and second, letters about the related matter (because it was related to his sense of his financial independence) of the sales and copyright of *Lyrical Ballads*. On the first front, he wrote to his brother, for example, on 13 May, “I wish you would write to me

immediately letting me know what money you have received on my account . . .”(Letters I:257). On the second front, we note that around the same time, he wrote to Cottle:

[t]he day before I left England I wrote to you to request that you would transfer your right to the *Lyrical Ballads* to Mr. Johnson, on account of its being likely to be very advantageous to me: desiring you to draw for the money [for] which I was indebted to you, upon my brother in London. I had not time to receive your answer so I do not know how the poems have been disposed of. Please let me hear from you immediately (Letters I:259).

A reply from Cottle explained some of the complications of the copyright, and Wordsworth wrote again to Cottle on 2 June, lamenting the loss of a connection with Johnson, who he thought could better move sales of the volume (Letters I:262-3). The second issue (1798) of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* had been printed for J. and A. Arch. On a sheet in the Forster Collection (fol. 9) following this letter from Wordsworth, Cottle wrote:

Before the receipt of Mr W’s letter, I had sold all the copies of the Poem to Mr Arch. A Reason for non-compliance, which satisfied Mr W. This was a happy circumstance for Mr W, as it secured to him, incidentally, the Copyright of the Lyrical Bals, as stated in my Recollections of S T Coleridge (Letters I:n262-3).

And upon receiving yet another reply from Cottle, Wordsworth wrote back on June 24, “You tell me the poems have not sold ill. If it is possible, I should wish to know *what number* have been sold” (*Letters* I:264). So we can see that the somewhat cavalier attitude towards his production that Wordsworth may have presented as the group went off to Germany seems clearly now to have given way to a much more aggressive attempt to determine not only sales, but also the status of his copyright.

We must assume that during the same period, that is from their return to England in April of 1799 and through the summer until Coleridge’s return from Germany in mid-July, Wordsworth read some of the reviews of *Lyrical Ballads*. He twice mentions reviews in his correspondence, first that in *The Monthly Review* for May 1799 which, he writes to Cottle, he has not seen (*Letters* I:267), and, of course, his comments to Cottle on the Southey review in the *Critical Review* for October 1798, which he had seen. The reviews that Wordsworth did read we must consider to be part of the larger cultural conversation in which he was now more thoroughly engaged. Publication, even anonymous publication, initiates this conversation, and the reviews provide feedback beyond the intimate sphere of Dorothy, Coleridge, and other close friends and family.

The Southey review opens with a quotation from the Advertisement to the volume, in particular the suggestion that the poems are to be considered as experiments. The first poem he discusses is “The Idiot Boy,” which he claims is the “most important” poem (as *experiment*) in the collection. After a lengthy quote from the poem, he concludes “[n]o tale less deserved the labour that appears to have been bestowed upon this” (308). Wordsworth’s challenge to established poetic language and subject clearly was going to meet with some resistance. Southey then dismissed “The Thorn” and

“Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” before turning to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, effectively dismissed as an affected waste of talent with the famous statement “[i]t is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity” (309).

Southey then turns to some poems that treat of “serious” subjects, luckily “the better part of the volume” (307-9). These include “The Foster-Mother’s Tale,” “The Dungeon,” “Lines upon the Yew-tree Seat” (sic), and “The Female Vagrant,” but especially “Tintern Abbey”:

[T]he author seems to discover still superior powers in the Lines written near Tintern Abbey. On reading this production, it is impossible not to lament that he should ever have condescended to write such pieces as the Last of the Flock, the Convict, and most of the ballads. In the whole range of English poetry, we scarcely recollect any thing superior to a part of the following passage [quotation of ll. 66-112 follows] (310).

Southey’s bias is revealed in his concluding remarks on the book:

The ‘experiment,’ we think, has failed, not because the language of conversation is little adapted to ‘the purposes of poetic pleasure,’ but because it has been tried upon uninteresting subjects. Yet every piece discovers genius; and, ill as the author has frequently employed his talents, they certainly rank him with the best of living poets (310).

This is not altogether a dismissal of *Lyrical Ballads* by Southey, although his criticisms do reflect a certain traditionalist bias: that is, he thinks of the *experiments* as failures. And yet, when he writes to Cottle that he has read this review, Wordsworth is very defensive: “He knew that I published those poems for money and money alone. He knew that money was of importance to me. If he could not conscientiously have spoken differently of the volume, he ought to have declined the task of reviewing it” (*Letters* I:267-8). It is as if he stopped reading the review halfway through, before Southey turned to the pieces he *did* admire. In any event, Southey defined two key dimensions of the cultural conversation around *Lyrical Ballads*: first, that combining the variables of subject matter, language, and poetic style was a complex formulation, and any one of them might strike a reader as poorly suited to poetry; and, the Advertisement and its statement that these poems were *experiments* became a universal term in the dialogue.

Of the nine reviews published in Reiman, many are mixed in their criticisms of the *Lyrical Ballads*, but none is downright dismissive. Four of them (those in the *Monthly Mirror*, *New Annual Register*, *British Critic*, and *Anti-Jacobin Review*), in fact, are quite positive in their responses. The remaining five *all* mention *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as a weakness or failure in some way, which is, no doubt, why Wordsworth considered eliminating that poem from future editions. Southey’s criticism above is representative, as many other reviewers picked up on the “German romance” element of the poem: “We are not pleased with it; in our opinion it has more of the extravagance of a mad german poet, than of the simplicity of our ancient ballad writers” (*Analytical Review* 8). The *Monthly Magazine* review, short as it is (the following quotation is the entire notice), singles out Coleridge’s poem:

The author of “*Lyrical Ballads*,” has attempted to imitate the style of our old English versifiers, with unusual success; “*The Ancient Mariner*,” however, on which he particularly prides himself, is in our opinion, a particular exception; some of his pieces are beautiful, but others are stiff and laboured (664).

Burney’s review in the *Monthly Review* is extensive, commenting on every poem in the volume, and praising it overall, yet it is very blunt about the *Rime*: “the strangest story of a cock and bull that we ever saw on paper: yet, though it seems a rhapsody of unintelligible wildness and incoherence . . . there are in it poetical touches of an exquisite kind” (714).

Besides the frequent criticism of the *Ancient Mariner*, no real consensus of the poems emerges at this early date. Some reviewers are affected by poems like “The Mad Mother,” “The Idiot Boy,” “The Thorn,” and “The Female Vagrant”; others condemn them for their sentimentality. Some critics think the anonymous poet has achieved the simplicity for which he says he strives, and praise the purity of expression; others condemn the diction and consider the experiment a failure. Curiously, given the place it has held in the English literary tradition for the past 150 years, “Tintern Abbey” gains only a couple of specific mentions. In addition to Southey’s comments above, the *Monthly Review* discusses the poem, if only because that review goes through the volume poem by poem: “The reflections of no common mind; poetical, beautiful, and philosophical: but somewhat tintured with gloomy, narrow, and unsociable ideas of seclusion from the commerce of the world” (717). These observations seem particularly

perceptive, given our retrospective sense of Wordsworth and his poetry. But clearly the audience of 1798 found just as much of interest in “The Last of the Flock,” “The Old Man Travelling,” “Expostulation and Reply,” and other poems.

The single most common feature of the reviews of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* is the quotation of, or reference to the Advertisement: seven of the nine reviews of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* make mention of the Advertisement, and the two that do not are the above-quoted eight-line notice in a comprehensive list of new publications in the *Monthly Magazine* (664), and another short notice on the publication of the *second issue* of the first edition. This latter notice, however, was published in April of 1800 and therefore was not part of the early dialogue that Wordsworth could have considered upon the initial reception of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Three of the mixed reviews specifically reject certain poems as “failed experiments,” directly responding to the point in the Advertisement that addresses the reader, and suggests “[t]he majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments” (*Prose* I:116). Therefore, the mixed praise comes out like this: the experiment has failed “because it has been tried on uninteresting subjects” (Southey in the *Critical Review* 310); “We hope, that by this time, [the author] is convinced of the failure of these ‘*Experiments*,’ but we recommend them to the curious, as the failures of a man of genius” (*New London Review* 793); or the conclusion to Burney’s article in the *Monthly Review*: “So much genius and originality are discovered in this publication, that we wish to see another from the same hand, written on more elevated subjects and in a more cheerful disposition” (717). None of these reviews outright rejects the poems. The Advertisement, along with the fact of publication in the first place, brought the cultural conversation to an abstract or

theoretical level where challenging the definition of “poetry” and potentially shaping the taste of the public were the goals or desired ends. That these reviewers so specifically and universally “answered” the challenge of the Advertisement encouraged Wordsworth to further articulate the terms of the debate, and he did by prefixing a statement to most of his publications. In this first instance, for example, the *New London Review* ridicules the very notion, raised in the Advertisement, that the word “poetry” could be in dispute, and therefore issues a challenge: “we trust to [the author’s] cultivated taste, and his poetical acquirements, to tell us *what is poetry*” (792). Wordsworth, of course, takes up that challenge in the “Preface” to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. The cultural conversation is complicated from this point on, as Wordsworth introduces a theoretical dimension to the discussion. This discussion re-defines poetics and to a large degree creates a “Romantic era,” but it also, in a sense, places Wordsworth’s own works in dialogue with his theory. Encouraged and supported by his coterie, he saw the two levels of the public discourse as complementary: the theory explained the poetry, and the poetry illustrated the theory.

But the other reaction that began with the first *Lyrical Ballads* and its Advertisement was the way the principles stated in the prose prefix were used *against* Wordsworth by the reviewers. He seemed to be setting up an excuse on the one hand (“these are experiments, not really poems”), and arguing an ambiguous simplicity on the other; the simplicity was in both diction and subject-matter, and the critics and reviewers considered all of these as challenges to terms within their domain: “What is poetry?” “What is the diction of poetry?” “What is an appropriate poetic style?” and “What is appropriate subject-matter for poetry?” Now that the germ of the debate over a new

poetics had been enunciated, hostile critics became overly zealous to master Wordsworth's poetics so they could carefully watch for the numerous places and poems that did *not* illustrate that poetics.

In the meantime, there were personal connections to attend to, personal decisions to make, as William settled on the terms by which he would live and write. After returning from Germany, he knew that he wanted to be in the Lake District, so he took steps to ensure that came to pass. It was also time for him to start thinking about marriage and a family, and over the next few years he established his extended sense of a coterie in the Lakes. These facts all help us to understand Wordsworth's emerging sense of poetic authority, based largely on *place* and on the support of his coterie, and also to recognize the extent to which that coterie entered into the "family business" of producing and promoting Wordsworth's books. Coleridge returned to England in mid-July 1799, and headed for Nether Stowey. William and Dorothy's brother John returned to England around the same time, after a near-two-year absence aboard the Duke of Montrose, although they did not hear of his arrival until nearer the end of August (Reed 272). Wordsworth then went to work coaxing both Coleridge and Cottle to come visit the north of England, offering to accompany them on a walking tour. That tour came together around the end of October, and on 27 October 1799, the three of them set out from Sockburn with Wordsworth and Coleridge on foot and Cottle on horseback. John Wordsworth joined the group a few days later, and they toured for a few days in the north of England, with Cottle parting their company around 30 October. After that, the two Wordsworths and Coleridge continued for a couple more days, most significantly, for the two Wordsworth brothers, re-discovering the Lake District: Bowness, Windermere,

Hawkshead, and ultimately Rydal and Grasmere. By the time John departed from the tour around 5 November, Wordsworth had formed a plan for either building a house (with John's help), or renting a cottage, in Grasmere. Wordsworth and Coleridge lingered in the Lakes, with Coleridge finally returning to Sockburn by 21 November. Wordsworth himself returned to Sockburn about a week later, presumably having been involved in arranging for the rental of the cottage at Town End, Grasmere, for he and Dorothy departed Sockburn on 17 December and arrived in Grasmere, which was to be their home until 1813, a few days before Christmas 1799. In a long letter to Coleridge at the end of December, Wordsworth gave a detailed account of their journey from Sockburn in the middle of winter. He also mentioned his eagerness that his brother come for a visit: "We are looking for John every day" (*Letters* I:275). He also writes briefly to Coleridge about the *Lyrical Ballads* and its reception, concluding the letter with a jest that highlights the fact that the volume was originally published anonymously: "take no pains to contradict the story that the L.B. are entirely yours. Such a rumour is the best thing that can befall them" (281). As for the reviewers' side of the cultural conversation, Wordsworth thought that encouraging the perception that Coleridge was the sole author may better guarantee the volume's positive reception than acknowledging it as his own.

All Wordsworth's attention and energy after his return to England were aimed at assessing and consolidating his position financially, artistically, and now, with the move to Grasmere into the cottage we now know as Dove Cottage, domestically as well. The period of 1800-1805 is one of the most productive of Wordsworth's entire career, and an important factor in this productivity is the place of his domestic maturity and stability. He achieves a neat coordination of his personal need to be restored to the Lake District from

which he came, with a public persona (almost an *anti-persona*) of Lake Poet, minstrel, recluse. At first, just having a home with Dorothy, being close to Coleridge, and having brother John as frequent visitor created the kind of cohesive home that Wordsworth had never had. The Hutchinson family also became part of this “intimate sphere,” and, of course, William eventually married Mary Hutchinson. We see that William Wordsworth maintained his coterie readers all his life, and, indeed, drew strength and advice from them. But more than that, their presence allowed him to create rhetorical spaces of imagined readers in his poetry to be filled by real readers who shared a sympathy with the writer; further, by doing so, they “held” those spaces until such time as those ideal readers were created. Wordsworth’s challenge throughout his career was to find or convert enough readers to fill those spaces they were invited to fill. The coterie or “intimate group” would hold those spaces by “default,” so to speak, but Wordsworth needed to establish a larger audience to ensure his place in posterity. Thus the coterie fulfilled several functions: actual small readership; trusted group of critics; and model of ideal readership.

Now, in 1800, as he monitored the sales and reception of *Lyrical Ballads* and considered publication of the Goslar poems, and other new compositions, he was, as Gill puts it, “act[ing] to make his life as a man and as a poet coherent in all its parts. He had chosen his vocation” (Gill 173-4). He continued to work, incidentally, towards the promotion of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Through Coleridge’s connection, some poems from the first edition made it into Daniel Stuart’s newspapers *The Morning Post* and *The Courier*, further drawing them into a cultural conversation. Coleridge was providing Stuart with copy for the newspapers, but occasionally ran short of original material as deadlines

approached, so turned to previously published material, or, later, to new material written by Wordsworth. This served to keep the poetry in dialogue with the public. For example, in the 2 April edition of the *Morning Post* appeared “The Mad Mother” with this note (probably written by Coleridge):

It has been the habit of our Paper to present our Readers with none but Original Poetry; but we have been so captivated with the following beautiful Piece, which appears in a small volume entitled *Lyrical Ballads*, that we are tempted to transgress the rule we laid down for ourselves. Indeed the whole Collection, with the exception of the first Piece, which appears manifestly to have been written by a different hand, is a tribute to genuine nature (Woof 151).

This serves as another positive review, in effect, following the conversation already established in categorizing the *Ancient Mariner* as of a different quality. Three other poems appeared in *The Courier* during April, accompanied by “suitable puffs,” and one of these (“The Female Vagrant”) occupied three columns (Woof 151). Like many of the reviews that published long quotations from the book, these newspaper appearances of poems served to put the poetry itself in the hands of readers who might then be motivated to seek out the entire volume.

Meanwhile, encouraged by the modest success of *Lyrical Ballads*, and with a store of new poetry including the Goslar poems and several others written on his return to England, Wordsworth was ready for further publication. The result was the 1800 edition

of *Lyrical Ballads*, a two-volume collection comprising the 1798 publication, re-arranged and slightly altered, in volume I, and a volume II made up of Wordsworth poems.

Further, there was an extensive “Preface” after the original “Advertisement,” and the author was clearly named and he was one: William Wordsworth. On the surface, these details can look damning if we assume a clear intent on Wordsworth’s part. However, a look at the genesis of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* shows that was not the case. Still, whether purely intentional or purely coincidental, or some variation in between, this volume contributed greatly to the creation of William Wordsworth. This William Wordsworth was the author of many poems from the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* that had received high praise. He had announced in that volume that he and Coleridge were “experimenting” with poetic diction, subject-matter, and approach. The “nature poetry” he was known to have produced, as well as his personal circumstances and associations, were aligning him more and more with the “Lake School” of poetry that critics saw as centred around Southey, Coleridge, and now Wordsworth. Given the terms of the public dialogue, this was to be a liability in many quarters.

Wordsworth’s own letters (*Letters* I:297, 303) indicate that his first preference for a title for the new publication was “*Poems in Two Volumes*, by W. Wordsworth,” and Coleridge’s own letters suggest he was not displeased with this strategy. As he wrote to Southey on 10 April 1800: “Wordsworth publishes a second volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, & *Pastorals*. He meditates a novel – & so do I – . . .” (*STC Letters* I:585). Of course, at this time, Coleridge’s poem *Christabel* was considered to be part of the new composition for publication, and all indications are that the project was, for awhile, conceived of as similar to the joint labour of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Eventually, however, the new

second volume became known solely under Wordsworth's name, and that acted retroactively, in a sense, to establish his identity and his imagination as the driving force behind *Lyrical Ballads*. In other words, the anonymous first edition, which Wordsworth had suggested was rumoured to be Coleridge's (the "best thing" that could happen to it), now asserted his own authority over the project, and he was so successful that the legitimate role Coleridge had in the *Lyrical Ballads* was somewhat diminished from here on as the volume became more and more identified with Wordsworth. Wordsworth, perhaps wanting to avoid a reaction to *Christabel* like the one some reviewers gave the *Ancient Mariner*, and concerned that Coleridge was having trouble finishing the poem, at some point persuaded Coleridge that *Christabel* would be dissonant with the rest of the collection. Here is how Coleridge expressed the decision to Josiah Wedgwood in a letter of 1 November 1800: "my poem grew so long & in Wordsworth's opinion so impressive, that he rejected it from his volume as disproportionate both in size & merit, & as discordant in it's [sic] character" (*STC Letters* I:643).

Dropping *Christabel* from the edition led to one of the most fortuitous substitutions in literary history. Wordsworth had begun the pastoral poem "Michael" in the Fall of 1800 (Reed *Middle Years* 20) and now worked hard to complete it in order that it take the place at the end of volume II. It is a central poem in the Wordsworthian mythology, as Gill relates: "This is an English pastoral. Every schoolboy knew where sheep grazed in Theocritus and Virgil. Now Wordsworth re-sites the pastoral on the Lake District hills" (*A Life* 182). Wordsworth, in dialogue with the ancient pastoral tradition but also in touch with the heteroglossic possibilities of the social dialects of Cumberland farmers and sheep herders, accomplishes much in this poem of great power. Coleridge

was not as convinced as to its importance, praising “Ruth” or “The Brothers” in correspondence with others, and perhaps unconsciously rejecting the *Christabel* replacement, as in this letter to Humphry Davy of 2 December 1800: “Wordsworth has nearly finished the concluding Poem [“Michael”]. It is of a mild unimposing character; but full of beauties to those short-necked men who have their hearts sufficiently near their heads” (*STC Letters* I:649). Coleridge is again very perceptive, as he identifies one of the “voices” in which Wordsworth speaks. This is the “simple” voice announced in the “Advertisement” to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and expanded upon and theorized in the 1800 “Preface.”

Further, we might allegorize the poem as another example of Wordsworth’s anxiety about the value of his work, and about the vagaries of the public’s reception. The heart of the poem is the trust the father places in the son, as expressed here to Isabel, the mother:

The land

Shall not go from us, and it shall be free,
 He shall possess it, free as is the wind
 That passes over it. We have, thou knowest,
 Another Kinsman, he will be our friend
 In this distress. He is a prosperous man,
 Thriving in trade, and Luke to him shall go,
 And with his Kinsman’s help and his own thrift,
 He quickly will repair this loss, and then
 May come to us again (254-263).

Luke, about whom there is so little detail in the poem, and who does not utter a line himself, ultimately fails to hold up his side of this “contract,” a mighty blow to the old man’s spirit, but something he seems to have coped with by continuing to visit the sheep-fold on which he and Luke had begun work, but on which the old man now seemed incapable of working:

And 'tis believed by all
 That many and many a day he thither went,
 And never lifted up a single stone.
 There, by the Sheep-fold, sometimes was he seen
 Sitting alone, with that his faithful Dog,
 Then old, beside him, lying at his feet (473-478).

In an allegory of writing and reception, then, the old man and his toils stand for the poet and his work, and the son represents that intimate audience, the coterie that is particularly sympathetic to the poet, partly because the poet has actually shaped the response of that audience. *Michael* enacts a particularly painful possibility: What if even that audience was to abandon me? *Michael* becomes, in effect, the poem that Coleridge thought the “Lucy” poems might be: Michael imagines a loss equivalent to the loss of Dorothy, the figure of the “intimate” audience.

Even with the rejection of *Christabel* from the second volume, Coleridge was still involved in the publishing of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) right through the process, corresponding with publishers Biggs and Cottle, for example, with details about the ordering of poems (*STC Letters* I:593). Part of the strategy for ensuring the success of the volume required both Wordsworth and Coleridge to be involved in the production stage,

right through the printing. The rearrangement of the first edition's poems into volume I of this new edition not only emphasizes Coleridge's continuing involvement in the *Lyrical Ballads* project, but also exhibits what was to be a strongly "Wordsworthian" impulse: to revise, to rearrange, to categorize the work as an emerging and growing whole.

<i>Lyrical Ballads</i> Contents – 1798	<i>Lyrical Ballads</i> Contents – vol. I 1800
The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere.....1	Expostulation and Reply - - - - 1
The Foster-Mother's Tale.....53	The Tables turned; an Evening Scene, on the same subject - - - - 4
Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite.....59	Animal Tranquillity and Decay, a Sketch - 7
The Nightingale, a Conversational Poem...63	The Complaint of a forsaken Indian Woman - 9
The Female Vagrant.....69	The Last of the Flock - - - - 15
Goody Blake and Harry Gill.....85	Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite - - - 21
Lines written at a small distance from my House, and sent by my little Boy to the Person to whom they are addressed.....95	The Foster-Mother's Tale - - - - 25
Simon Lee, the old Huntsman.....98	Goody Blake and Harry Gill - - - - 29
Anecdote for Fathers.....105	The Thorn - - - - - 38
We are seven.....110	We are Seven - - - - - 54
Lines written in early spring.....115	Anecdote for Fathers - - - - 59
The Thorn.....117	Lines written at a small distance from my House, and sent by my little Boy to the Person to whom they are addressed - - - - 64
The last of the Flock.....133	The Female Vagrant - - - - - 67
The Dungeon.....139	The Dungeon - - - - - 83
The Mad Mother.....141	Simon Lee, the old Huntsman - - - - 85
The Idiot Boy.....149	Lines written in early Spring - - - - 92
Lines written near Richmond, upon the Thames, at Evening.....180	The Nightingale, written in April 1798. - - 94
Expostulation and Reply.....183	Lines written when sailing in a Boat at Evening - 101
The Tables turned; an Evening Scene, on the same subject.....186	Lines written near Richmond, upon the Thames 103
Old Man traveling.....189	The Idiot Boy - - - - - 107
The Complaint of a forsaken Indian Woman.....193	Love - - - - - 138
The Convict.....197	The Mad Mother - - - - - 145
Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey.....201	The Ancient Mariner - - - - 155
	Lines written above Tintern Abbey - - - - 201

Table 1. Poems from first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* as re-ordered for 1800 (adapted from *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems 1797-1800*, eds. Butler and Green).

The first notable change is that one poem, “The Convict” (which fell just before “Tintern Abbey” in the 1798 edition), was cut from the publication (and, in fact, was never restored). Another change we notice is that “Lines written near Richmond, upon the Thames, at Evening” has been split into two poems: “Lines written when sailing in a Boat at Evening” and “Lines written near Richmond, upon the Thames.” But the most significant change in the order of the poems was to effectively switch the opening and closing, except for “Tintern Abbey” which remained in the final position. *The Ancient Mariner* (no longer *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, showing some sensitivity to the criticism of the supposedly affected spellings and plot of that poem) moved to next-to-last, just before “Tintern.” At the same time, a block of four poems, “Expostulation & Reply” and “Tables Turned,” “Old Man Travelling,” and “The Complaint of the Forsaken Indian Woman” that, along with “The Convict,” had immediately preceded “Tintern,” was moved to the opening of the book. This would, of course, radically alter the response to the book of the first-time reader of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 as compared to the first-time reader two years previously. A 1798 reader had been immediately immersed in the weird and supernatural world of the mariner; an 1800 reader experienced the book in a different way. That 1800 reader would have seen a clear enunciation of principles at work in the first four poems; the poems work very well to assert the idea of “experiments” in simplicity of subject, if not of diction. Would this prove sufficient to prepare the naïve reader for the *Mariner*? It is difficult to say. Certainly, reading this collection two hundred years later, the rearrangement led to a dramatic climax, with two of the most enduring poems of the Romantic period completing the first volume. To the reader in 1800, the rearrangement of the poems certainly worked to *contain* the *Ancient Mariner* to

some extent – the introductory poems established a more Wordsworthian “voice” for the volume. To “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth attached a note this time: “I have not ventured to call this Poem an Ode; but it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and in the impassioned music of the versification would be found the principal requisites of the species of composition.” Depending on how we look at it, the effective climax of the 1798 edition was either *doubled* in the rearranged volume I of 1800 (both the *Mariner* and “Tintern Abbey”), or the effect of “Tintern Abbey” was *heightened* by its contrast to the Coleridge contribution. Either way, the final poem in volume I was carefully placed for maximum effect – Wordsworth always had a good sense of what poem to put last.

So, while Gill concludes that “Wordsworth’s treatment of Coleridge over *Lyrical Ballads* 1800 was certainly unfeeling” (187), Johnston recognizes the necessary dynamic between the two men: “[Wordsworth’s] determination to take control of his life as a poet was complemented by Coleridge’s unconcern. This was Wordsworth’s show and Coleridge knew it, stepping aside to let his friend have full sway” (724). It is, of course, impossible to sort out exactly why things happened the way they did, and exactly how purposeful Wordsworth was in this project to assert his public identity, but Coleridge appears either to have been unconcerned, or he actually wished to assist in the promotion of his friend, whom he respected so highly as a poet. We have seen comments of this kind from Coleridge before, and even now, in the letter to Wedgwood, for example, he unstintingly praises the only poet whom he considers capable of executing *The Recluse*: “Wordsworth’s second Volume of Ly. Ball. will, I hope & almost believe, afford you as unmingled pleasure as is in the nature of a collection of very various poems to afford one individual mind” (*STC Letters* I:646). So Coleridge was still devoted to the public

promotion of Wordsworth. The upshot of all these negotiations was the ultimate release of the two-volume *Lyrical Ballads*, with one author identified, and Coleridge's contribution relegated to a note that there are "five poems by the author's 'Friend'."

Of course, the other crucial element of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* was the "Preface," part of Wordsworth's attempt to control the reception of the publication but also part of his self-fashioning as well as a statement of the poetics of *The Recluse* project. This "Preface" appeared first in 1800, was expanded in 1802 and again in 1805, and was published in all subsequent printings of *Lyrical Ballads*. Further, the "Preface" may be part of a strategy by Wordsworth to justify spending time and energy on shorter poems – and to whom would he have to justify that? Why, Coleridge. While tolerant of Wordsworth's production of shorter lyric poems, Coleridge also anticipated work on the grand project: "I grieve that 'The Recluse' sleeps" (*STC Letters* I:575), he wrote to William in February 1800. The 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* with its aggressive "Preface" clearly announced the appearance in the contemporary literary dialogue of a single author, in fact the author of the "Advertisement" at the beginning of the 1798 edition, and it laid out an ambitious poetics, ultimately aimed at a project on the scale of *The Recluse*.

Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* is often read as a radical statement of a new "Romantic" poetics. And, given its historical timing and the amount of controversy it generated, it does partly fulfill this function as a kind of Romantic manifesto. It was an attempt to promote and make public the dialogue on poetry in which he and Coleridge had been engaged for years now, and the influence of Coleridge (or the "symbiosis" of the two of them, to use McFarland's 1981 term) is noticeable as another instance of the

ongoing dialogue between the two poets. As Coleridge wrote to William Sotheby in July of 1802:

It is most certain, that that P[reface arose from] the heads of our mutual Conversations &c. – & the f[irst pass]ages were indeed partly taken from notes of mine / for it was at first intended, that the Preface should be written by me – and it is likewise true, that I warmly accord with W. in his abhorrence of the poetic Licences, as they are called, which are indeed mere tricks of Convenience & Laziness (*STC Letters* II:811-812).

In fact, much of it is not that radical but grows from the theories and debates of the day: “[M]any of its aesthetic, psychological, and sociological suppositions are quite commonplace . . . based often on the associationist psychology of Locke and Hartley or on the primitivistic theories of culture and literature which are characteristic of the Scottish ‘Common-sense’ philosophers” (*Prose* I:112). But our focus here is not so much the poetic theories themselves, but how Wordsworth’s theories exhibit his keen awareness of what Bakhtin would later call the heteroglossia of social language, and his bold attempt to bring humble stories, characters, and language into the central cultural definitions of what “poetry” could be:

[A] certain latitude for heteroglossia exists only in the ‘low’ poetic genres – in the satiric and comic genres and others. Nevertheless, heteroglossia (other socio-ideological languages) can be introduced into purely poetic genres,

primarily in the speeches of characters. But in such a context it is objective. It appears, in essence, as a *thing*, it does not lie on the *same* plane with the real language of the work (“Discourse in the Novel” 287).

The reactions of many critics throughout Wordsworth’s career certainly support this assertion: they don’t think he is serious. Conditioned to relate “low” characters and their speech to “low” poetic genres, they read his works as such and demean them. The commonplace that Wordsworth had to “educate” his audience arises from this prejudice. He did employ the strategy of presenting heteroglossia through the speeches of characters, thus treating it more as an “object.” But his great challenge was to make people (critics and readers) see his poetry as *serious*, even if it was using these rustic features.

Wordsworth opens his “Preface” with some rhetorical strategies that indicate this is an addition to the dialogue begun with the “Advertisement” to the first edition, then continuing through the poems themselves as exemplars of the “experiments” he identified, and also engaging with the sales and reception of the work as elements of this dialogue. This quotation from Klancher (139) illustrates the view that the “Advertisement” was insufficient, or that the poems simply did not illustrate what the “Advertisement” says they will:

In order to be *perceived* as representing the real language of men, Wordsworth’s poems require the further, extraordinary step of a theoretical Preface – a second metalanguage to theorize the conditions of the first. The

[“Preface” and its] 1802 Appendix shows that no modern audience could distinguish ‘real’ language from its counterfeit without such a preface (Klancher 139).

The “Preface,” then, partly serves as a gloss on or an expansion of the “Advertisement,” in the sense that the “advertisement” did not apparently prepare the readers adequately to appreciate the poems, or that there was a “disconnect” between the “Advertisement” and the poems. So Wordsworth sees a need to expand, to clarify that connection. The ultimate aim of such a clarification would be not only a better understanding of his poetic project, but also a bold reiteration that the “real” language of many of the poems was not an affectation, nor merely “quotation.” The “Preface” makes clear that Wordsworth intends to incorporate such language into his own style, and not simply present it as the reported speech of others. Unfortunately, he got himself entangled in a web of justification, inconsistency, and possibly even charges of a kind of dishonesty – and he would not get untangled for some twenty years. But this is the heroic dimension to Wordsworth’s struggle to assert his own poetic authority in his own style.

He sounds confident yet humble early in the “Preface”: “I have pleased a greater number, than I ventured to hope I should please” (*Prose* I:118). But can he be sure that, having “pleased” some number of readers, they have accepted his “experiments”? The overwhelming response of the critics, whether they liked the poems or not, was that the experimental use of “rustic” diction was the weakest feature of the *Lyrical Ballads*. His next rhetorical strategy was to sound something of the “reluctant hero,” pressured into generating this essay: “Several of my Friends are anxious for the success of these Poems . . . on this account they have advised me to prefix a systematic defence of the theory,

upon which the poems were written” (*Prose* I:120). He makes it sound as if these “friends” are the ones who really want to ensure his popularity, and to promote a new “system.” We hypothesize that the “friends” are the members of his coterie audience, who *do* wish to ensure his success – here is an early example of Wordsworth invoking his coterie in order to support or justify his presentation to the public. Ironically, Wordsworth’s insistence in the “Preface” on principles that may have been overlooked or excused in the earlier “Advertisement” laid the groundwork for his undoing in the critical press over the next twenty years. This phrase “systematic defence” will haunt Wordsworth, as we will see in subsequent reviews. That he characterized his theory, and the poems in the volume, as rigidly illustrating this “system” left him open to attack.

He goes on to make some of the assertions for which the essay is famous. An essential one, both to his poetics and to this argument, has to do with his justification of “low” subjects and language. People in “low and rustic life” are closer to the “essential passions” of life, and speak a “plainer and more emphatic language”: “in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature” (*Prose* I:124). Wordsworth argues for the inclusion of middle- and lower-class characters and subjects in literature, in order to open up the art to the richness of social language in dialogue. At this point in his career, he sees these characters and subjects as novel in the popular literature. His most radical suggestion is not only to portray these people, but actually to incorporate their language into poetry as well:

The language too of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men

hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the action of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly such a language arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation” (*Prose* I:124).

Based on his eighteenth-century assumptions about linguistic origins, this statement presents the language of the rural countryside as purer and closer to the origins of language – not heteroglossic, but rather a pure, monoglossic social language that will work as a corrective when brought into the corrupted, heteroglossic discourse of the higher classes and of the literary arts. Always attuned to social dialects, as many poets would be, Wordsworth actually asserts that he (and, by extension, others) will create a heteroglossic poetic style that puts these dialects into dialogue with each other. It is in this way that Wordsworth most clearly relates to another nineteenth-century genre: early

in his career, he had the ear and the democratic spirit of a novelist. But it is also here that he again opens the way for his attackers: Does he really adopt this language in his best poetry? How far does he take his “purifying” of dialect from its “defects”? Do all poets and critics agree that the rustic are closer to the essential passions of life?

Wordsworth continues with his discussion, writing some more about style and his rejection of the “poetic diction” of his time in his pursuit of something more true. He recognizes the risk here; he is challenging the received conventions of taste: “Now these men [the petty critics] would establish a canon of criticism which the Reader will conclude he must utterly reject if he wishes to be pleased with these volumes” (*Prose* I:132). As Newlyn puts it, “[h]e saw that the provisionality of literary tradition – its openness to the modifications and revisions of successive generations of reader-writers – made his own work vulnerable to misreading” (92). Therefore, Wordsworth’s strategy was to ensure that he educated his own readership. Wordsworth’s confidence comes through in choosing to illustrate his principles largely with examples from his own verse. This is the potentially dangerous revolutionary tone of the essay: the old rules, and by extension the old readers (especially the critics), must be tossed out and a new Reader put in place. This is why Wordsworth’s poetic project, as first enunciated in the “Advertisement” and now extended in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, is as much a theory of reading as it is of anything else. But this position was also contentious on a political level. Hess emphasizes that Wordsworth’s poetry and now theory threatened the existing publishing “infrastructure” and relates some of the critics’ reactions to the political situation between France and England: especially the notion of a “system” of

poetry smacked of Jacobinism, as opposed to good solid English values of plain “genius” (474-6).

There is a statement in the “Preface” that sounds perfectly Bakhtinian, if not post-structuralist. It occurs when Wordsworth is trying to explain how the pleasure we take from metrical language chiefly “derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it take their origin: *It is the life of our ordinary conversation*” (*Prose* I:148, emphasis added). This passage seems a clear recognition of the relation of self to other, and suggests that the great force in life is the drive to resolve, to harmonize, to reconcile differences of all kinds. And at the conclusion of the statement he uses the image of the everyday conversation, which I am suggesting is at the core of Wordsworth’s poetry and poetic theory.

As the essay progresses and Wordsworth, for example, admits that he may have committed some examples of false phrasing, he alludes to the bind into which he has put himself by placing his reputation in the hands of the Reader. First of all, there is an element of mistrust, and a necessary superiority that the poet holds and to which the reader ought to submit:

the Reader ought never to forget that he is himself exposed to the same errors as the Poet, and perhaps in a much greater degree: for there can be no presumption in saying that it is not probable he will be so well acquainted with the various stages of meaning through which words have

passed, or with the fickleness or stability of the relations of particular ideas to each other; and above all, since he is so much less interested in the subject, he may decide lightly and carelessly (*Prose* I:152).

This is the beginning of the principle by which the very commitment, seriousness, or power of the poet becomes a criterion for judging the poetry. At the same time, Wordsworth also distrusts the professional critics; he therefore has to hold out hope for a reading audience that is either naïve or can be “dis-educated”: “I have one request to make of my Reader, which is, that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of others” (*Prose* I:154). He proposes a new way of reading, and at the heart of this new way of reading was Wordsworth’s sense of his “intimate group” of readers, those who granted him “unconditional empathy” and a complete trust. As he tries to extend that reception to the reading public, “Wordsworth’s aim was thus to transform an anonymous public into a sympathetic readership, whose credentials for understanding him were as sound as his family’s and friends’” (Newlyn 105). Despite this conflicting sense of how much he can count on the Reader, Wordsworth signs off with an appeal to the reading public to be his final arbiter:

From what has been said, and from a perusal of the Poems, the Reader will be able clearly to perceive the object which I have proposed to myself: he will determine how far I have attained this object; and, what is a much more important question, whether it be worth attaining; and upon the

decision of these two questions will rest my claim to the approbation of the public (*Prose* I:158).

Certainly Wordsworth's critics did take him to task for not understanding his audience, or for not being consistent, or for egotism, for at least the next fifteen years.

Klancher suggests one of the reasons:

[I]t is no wonder that middle-class readers and reviewers of 1800 resented having what seemed to them freely chosen preferences painted as a narcotic reflex. Reviewers objected bitterly to Wordsworth's 'system,' his 'metaphysic' that ensnared modern readers in a remorseless cultural and social determinism (Klancher 137).

So what was potentially "revolutionary" about the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) was partly the argument, but also partly the challenges it posed to the sites of power of the day – the structures of relationship in the formation of taste (and the sales of books dependent on that taste). Further, critics, particularly, as well as perceptive readers did see the inconsistencies between the poetry itself and the stated theory. Others reacted against the challenge to the established "poetic diction," what I have identified as

Wordsworth trying to ensure a heteroglossia of poetic language:

Many critics wrote of Wordsworth's treatment of low subjects as a kind of poetic miscegenation, miscoupling his high poetical talents and high philosophical themes with the language and subjects of low culture (Hess 476).

And beyond this apparent discrepancy there was the presence of both the “*poetry* conversation” and the “*poetics* conversation,” even more clearly articulated here in the “Preface.” Any critics who wanted to sabotage Wordsworth’s reputation could easily make the argument that the theoretical statements about simple diction were not borne out by the best of Wordsworth’s poetry. The cultural conversation would continue for years with these principles forming the basis of the debate, and it was continued largely because Wordsworth himself kept writing prefaces and essays to defend himself.

Another element of the attempts to control the reception of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) was a curious promotion scheme suggested by Coleridge: “By my advice, & at Longman’s expence, copies with appropriate Letters were sent to the Dutchess of Devonshire, Sir Bland Burgess, Mrs Jordan, Mr Fox, Mr Wilberforce, & 2 or 3 others – I dictated all the other Letters while W. wrote the one to Mr Fox” (*STC Letters* I:665). The full list of these eight influential public figures whom Coleridge tried to encourage into a cultural dialogue on the *Lyrical Ballads*, with the “2 or 3 others” included, was Dorothy Jordan (actor), Anna Letitia Barbauld, “Monk” Lewis, and five political figures: Sir James Bland Burges, William Wilberforce, Charles James Fox, John Taylor, and Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire. John Wordsworth delivered the letters to Longman in London at the end of January, assuring his brother that Longman “told me that they will *all* be *faithfully* sent to the *great men & women* now I do request that if they answer these letters you will have the goodness to let me know what they say” (*JW Letters* 82-83). Coleridge referred to the responses in his letter to Tom Poole of 13 February 1801: “Wordsworth has received answers from all but Mr Fox – all respectful & polite, but all written *immediately* on the receipt of the Poems, & consequently

expressing no Opinion. His reputation as a Poet is high indeed in London” (*STC Letters* I:676). So, while this may have been an inspired promotion strategy, it is impossible to gauge the extent to which these readers’ responses may have influenced the reception of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). The veracity of Coleridge’s last comment that Wordsworth’s “reputation as a Poet” is high in London is uncertain: upon what does he base his conclusion? Still, the intimate group was doing what it could to promote the new book, another example of how the “family business” worked to support William.

Coleridge, presumably, was ensuring that friends did not ignore the new publication just because it had the same title as the first edition, as is evident in this letter to Poole, 19 January 1801: “The *Lyrical Ballads* will be published by the time this Letter reaches you – for my sake, & Wordsworth’s, & your own, you will purchase not only the new Volume, but likewise the second Edition of the First Volume, on account of the valuable Preface” (*STC Letters* I:665). Further, he was promoting Wordsworth, his new poetry, and the “Preface” to other of his correspondents, like Godwin: “Have you seen the second Volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*, & the Preface prefixed to the First? --- I should judge of a man’s Heart, and Intellect precisely according to the degree & intensity of the admiration, with which he read those poems” (*STC Letters* I:714). Coleridge’s brother-in-law Southey got involved, too, promoting the new poems to his circle, as in this letter of August 1801 to Grosvenor C. Bedford: “If you have not seen the second volume of Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*, I counsel you to buy them, and read *aloud* the poems entitled *The Brothers*, and *Michael*; which, especially the first, are, to my taste, excellent. I have never been so much affected, and so *well*, as by some passages there” (*Southey Life* 159-60). Recalling the mixed review Southey published in reaction to the

first edition, this is high praise. We start to see that, among the coterie audience, *Lyrical Ballads* is becoming known and is on its way to being a kind of touchstone of one's poetic allegiance. On the more public side, Wordsworth's brother John, about to set sail, was able to report from Portsmouth on 22-23 April: "The L.B. are in almost every Booksellers shop in Portsmouth – which has surprized me because they deal as little in new books at Portsmouth as an[y] town in England of its size" (*JW Letters* 119). The intimate group, and especially Wordsworth and Coleridge, had done what they could to promote *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) through readers they thought of as having a particular kind of influence – and we note these were not readers who had contact with rustics and "shortnecked" readers; now it was available to public consumption, and at the hands of the reviewers.

For the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, there were actually few reviews, possibly because, as Coleridge seems to have anticipated, the re-use of the same title discouraged readers from sampling this substantially different book. Of the three reviews we can find, none is particularly negative.

First to appear, the *British Critic* review of February 1801 (written by John Stoddart) engages directly with the "Preface" as a guide to understanding the poetry: "This Preface, though written in some parts with a degree of metaphysical obscurity, conveys much penetrating and judicious observation" (131). Further, the author praises Wordsworth for his originality of style: "Whatever may be thought of these Poems, it is evident that they are not to be confounded with the flood of poetry, which is poured forth in such profusion by the modern Bards of Science The author has thought for himself" (131). Finally, the review singles out a few poems for high praise, naming "The

Brothers,” “The Cumberland Beggar,” and “Michael” as poems “of the highest order,” but also having this to say about what we might call some of the “Lucy” poems: “But the most singular specimens of unpretending, yet irresistible pathos, are [“Strange fits of passion I have known” and “She dwelt among th’ untrodden ways”]. In artlessness, they strongly remind us of Burns; but perhaps go beyond him in delicacy” (134). Thus, this review responds to the simplicity of the “Lucy” poems, comparing them to Burns’s work, but also recognizes a poignant purity that perhaps Burns’s style does not present.

The *Monthly Mirror* review of June 1801 is somewhat positive, but does have a couple of significant complaints. The first will become a common strain in Wordsworth criticism for the next twenty or so years: an avowed aversion to the new “school” of poetry. The other criticism seems more an idiosyncrasy of this particular reviewer: a dislike for all the “tales of woe”. Perhaps this reader had been exposed to too many similar poems in the popular journals (see Mayo). The review also quotes all of “We Are Seven” and part of “The Cumberland Beggar” as examples that are “admirable, as are many other [reflections] in this most fascinating publication” (689). Further, there is an interesting observation about poems like the “Lucy” poems and “Nutting”:

Energy of thought, pathos of sentiment, and exquisite discrimination in selecting whatever is picturesque in imagery, or interesting in nature, are the distinguishing characteristics of these poems: yet an obscurity too often arises, from a romantic search after simplicity, and there is a studied abruptness in the commencement and termination of several pieces, which makes them assume an appearance

of mere fragments. Where we meet with a complete poem,
 like that entitled ‘The Brothers,’ our gratification is
 proportionably complete (687).

The differing responses to the “Lucy” poems from these first two reviewers emphasize Susan Eilenberg’s point that “the Lucy poems leave conspicuous room for voices other than that of the poet. They leave room particularly for the reader, who is invited to supply his interpretation in place of the story the poet refuses to tell” (110). It just depends on whether a particular reader is willing to engage with the poem at that level or not. In a sense, reactions like these make very clear that the readers feel confronted with a poem that they do not yet know how to read or to appreciate – this was to be Wordsworth’s main challenge throughout the next twenty years’ debate over his success or failure. His poetic style, begun in address to Dorothy and other intimates, then positing a sympathetic “ideal” reader, would only gain widespread acceptance through a negotiation process that saw Wordsworth adjust or modify his writing, at the same time that he aggressively attempted to educate that “ideal” readership.

This *Monthly Mirror* review further highlights the problem by its use of terms like “fragment” versus “complete poem.” We recall Marjorie Levinson’s discussion of the abrupt, half-line opening to “Nutting,” a poem included in this volume, and her admonition to imagine oneself a contemporary (1800) reader, which is exactly the perspective central to the present study:

By putting oneself in the position of a reader of *Lyrical
 Ballads* in 1800 – a reader who knew neither *The Prelude*,
 with its memorable definition and examples of the spot of

time, nor *The Excursion*, nor Wordsworth's directives as delivered in the 1814 Preface to that work – one gains a fresh formal perspective" (*The Romantic Fragment Poem* 62).

That is to say, "Nutting" and the "Lucy" poems would strike the reader of 1800 as radically different in form from anything he or she had seen before, and therefore, they seem to be representative of some of Wordsworth's formal challenges to the poetry of his day. And yet, this is Wordsworth at his most original, and he is involving the reader to a great degree. These are further examples, then, of poems that readers had to be *educated* to understand and appreciate.

Finally, the *Monthly Review* of June 1802 carried a very short notice referring back to its review of the first edition: "[W]e deem the present publication not inferior to its precursor; and . . . express our hope that this will not prove the last time of our meeting this natural, easy, sentimental Bard, in his pensive rambles through the wilds and groves of his truly poetic, though somewhat peculiar, imagination" (720). Overall, Wordsworth had reason to be encouraged by the reviews of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and the terms of the cultural conversation that had been established.

Sales were steady, too, and Longman called for another edition a year later. Wordsworth took the opportunity to make some additions to his "Preface." Working as he was on *The Prelude*, his autobiographical poem, at this time, it is understandable that one of Wordsworth's changes includes substituting *himself* for the class of rural folk that he had argued constituted the authority for his diction and subject matter: the poet is "a

man . . . endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature.” A bit later, however, Wordsworth writes,

[h]owever exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a Poet, it is obvious, that while he describes and imitates passions, his employment is in some degree mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. So that it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes . . . (*Prose* I:138).

As he goes on to explain how poetry is superior to all other branches of learning, Wordsworth attempts to have it both ways, arguing for an essential “humanity” that all men share:

The knowledge of both the Poet and the Man of science is pleasure Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge (*Prose* I:141).

In some ways, Wordsworth is getting at a truth about human understanding on which Bakhtin picks up later:

In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated

agreement or disagreement. To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other (“Discourse in the Novel” 282).

This is the reader-writer relationship Wordsworth desires. An emotion is transmitted to a receptive reader, who has a response similar to that the writer is trying to express. We came across this same formula above in Wordsworth’s letter from Germany explaining the depth of language acquisition he knew was necessary, but that he was not gaining during his stay in Germany. And it forms a crucial part of his aesthetic theory as expressed in the 1802 “Preface,” with the poet in the pivotal “translator” role between nature and the reader. Johnston traces thirteen ways in which Wordsworth distinguishes the poet from the common man in this preface, even though the poet is supposed to be “a man speaking to men”: he is “more like a superman speaking to men” (766). This marks a shift in, and an addition to, the theory of art in the “Preface” from a mimetic one to an expressive one. I say “addition to” because, as Johnston perceives, the effect of the additions to the “Preface” in 1802 is to offer two theories, whether Wordsworth was conscious of it or not: his poetry should be valued because he, the Poet, says it should, but he also tries to keep available a class of rural workers for a potential public readership, a further or alternate authority. Though logically inconsistent, this strategy or

effect initiated a “multi-voicedness” that helped Wordsworth in some ways to reach various readerships, but for which also some perceptive critics took him to task most severely. This multi-voicedness does become a prominent feature of Wordsworth’s popularity, especially as his style matures into a more monologic voice.

Of course, the other significant addition to the “Preface” is the “Appendix to the Preface,” on “what is usually called POETIC DICTION.” It first appears for this 1802 edition and in all subsequent editions of *Lyrical Ballads*. Klancher writes, “[t]o the 1800 Preface and its historical determinism, the 1802 Appendix adds Wordsworth’s account of cultural production and its formative power” (Klancher 138). It furthers his theory of language based on primitivistic origins, corrupted by “poeticisms” as time went by, and has to be read as another strategy to defend Wordsworth’s use of the simple language of ordinary men. Again, this part of the “Preface” is important to much of the negative criticism that follows Wordsworth’s next few publications, as reviewers take him to task either for adhering too closely to these principles of simplicity (for being a slave to his “system”), or for failing to follow his own theory and rules.

Lyrical Ballads 1802 was published 16 June. It was not heavily promoted by Longman (Johnston 782), but there was some newspaper publication that kept the title, and Wordsworth’s name, before the public for awhile. Stuart’s *Morning Post* published nine poems from the new edition between January and August 1802, almost all including the volume’s title and Wordsworth’s name (Johnston 783), and it is from this time that we can be sure Wordsworth himself submitted some of the poems for publication (Woof 152). Even if the journals were not promoting the cultural conversation by reviewing the

volume, Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* was kept alive in that conversation by other channels of transmission.

After the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), there followed a period of three years or so that further solidified Wordsworth's personal and poetic identity. The sense of domestic stability continued – the group around Wordsworth that included his sister, brother John, the Hutchinsons, and, of course, Coleridge, was fundamental to the poet's identity and production. Wordsworth was composing poems, many of which continued his campaign for raising the status of simple, natural things by using birds, flowers, trees, and more as an occasion to explore the imagination or the poetic tradition. The production of this period included many of the short, lyric, “nature” poems that would later contribute to that very powerful part of the Wordsworth myth. Of course, as we shall see in reviews below, these poems' very simplicity and humbleness did not sit right with a whole “school” of the critics. But the life and the art do intersect, and these years mark a marriage, the birth of Wordsworth's first children – events that might put a person into a state of mind receptive to the wonder of life and nature. Some of these productions have a bare simplicity reminiscent of Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, for example. But much of the public was not ready for this. Gill puts his finger on the “problem” when he writes,

Wordsworth's lyrics of 1802, and others which followed up to the publication of *Poems, in Two Volumes* in 1807, are certainly distinctive – and queer. Teetering on the facile, they are easily parodied or, worse, overlooked in favour of the more evidently weighty verse. But they were of the greatest importance to Wordsworth and the pride he took in

them undoubtedly underpinned the affirmation he now made (196).

As far as Wordsworth was concerned, these shorter poems ought not to work against the seriousness and profundity of the imagined *Recluse* project; rather, they should complement it. As usual, Wordsworth was getting feedback on these compositions from the intimate sphere of family, in the first instance, as exemplified by this letter from John to William 16 April 1803: “I am much obliged to you for the poems which Mr Cook brought me I like the Cuckow the Sparrows Nest the Butterfly the Celandine the first part of the leech gatherer very much indeed & particularly the Cuckow- the other poems I do not like so well as the Lyrical Ballads” (*JW Letters* 140). John’s reference to “the leech gatherer” brings to our attention one of two poems that did not quite fit the “happy lyrics of 1802”: “Resolution and Independence” (the title ultimately given to “The Leech Gatherer”), the other being the ode that came to be the “Intimations Ode.” Both were begun at this time, but not completed. Both express anxieties about authorship, death, posterity, and reception (discussed below), and “[i]n them we hear indeed the voice of the *Recluse* bard” (Johnston 775).

The other happy event in Wordsworth’s life at this time was his marriage to Mary Hutchinson. By the end of February 1802, it was known among the intimate sphere that William and Mary intended to wed (Reed *Middle Years* 149). Of course, any plans Wordsworth had to marry necessitated his resolving what to do with some of the other important women in his life: Annette and daughter Caroline in France, and sister Dorothy at home. Annette had been corresponding with both William and Dorothy, and now the Peace of Amiens between England and France of 27 March 1802, opened France to travel

again. It appears that William was up front with Mary about the former lover in France and the offspring of that union. In fact, he and Dorothy journeyed to France that summer in order to see Annette, and to confer a small annuity on Wordsworth's illegitimate daughter Caroline Wordsworth. As for Dorothy herself, after a few months of worrying what was to become of her – at one point, she entertained the thought of joining the Coleridge-Southey household at Keswick – she was ultimately provided for by William, and accepted as a sister by Mary, and lived the rest of her days with her brother and sister-in-law and their growing family. Even so, when William and Mary were wed on 4 October 1802, Dorothy's emotions were so conflicted that she could not attend the ceremony.

A further bit of good news came to the Wordsworth siblings that summer of 1802. The claim against Lord Lonsdale on behalf of father John Wordsworth was, it now appeared, going to be honoured by the new Lord Lonsdale. Richard Wordsworth submitted an itemized account amounting to over 10,000 pounds and, although it took a further two years to settle the claim at 8,700 pounds, the spirit of good faith must have made the Wordsworth survivors confident that they would, indeed, inherit what was due to their father. Wordsworth had benefited from the faith others had placed in him and his talent; now it must have appeared that financial security would finally be achieved as well.

Wordsworth wrote little in 1803, but some of the short pieces he had recently been working on, notably sonnets, were published in newspapers. The first, "Calais, August 1802" was published in the *Morning Post* for 13 January 1803, unsigned, but with a headnote that the lines were by "one of the first poets of the present day" (Reed *Middle*

Years 207). A couple of weeks later, the paper announced it had received a dozen “Sonnets of a Political Nature” by “one of the first Poets of the age,” and when two of them were published, they were signed “W.L.D.”: he had used these initials in 1795 to denote “Wordsworth Libertati Dedicavit” (although now he might just as well mean “Wordsworth Lake District” [Johnston 792]). By October, *The Courier* ran “Anticipation,- A Sonnet. By Wm. Wordsworth, Esq.” Once again, these served to keep the work, and the name, in front of the public. Over the next several years, Wordsworth would write hundreds of sonnets, and what is more, they began to be appreciated by the critics even while the lyrical ballads of simple and rustic observation were being condemned. The lyric, personal poetry for which Wordsworth is now popularly known attracted some initial praise, but was still to be hotly contested in the cultural arena. However, one accepted form of lyric poetry was the sonnet, and from 1803 onwards, Wordsworth started to spend more effort on this traditional form, and ultimately on cycles or groups of sonnets. This is not to say that writing sonnets automatically means writing “conservative” poetry – in the hands of the Romantic poets, sonnets could be radical statements (Shelley’s “England in 1819” would be a good example). It is the sense that the sonnet is a lyric form with a long history, and that, as such, it lends an air of “legitimacy” to Wordsworth’s work, which we consider here.

We know, too, that Wordsworth was always thinking of ways to group or categorize his poems for publication, so it is instructive to keep the commitment to the sonnet form, with its history of publication in cycles, clearly in mind from here on. Galperin sees Wordsworth’s fascination with sonnets and their groupings as characteristic of a larger personal and professional movement away from asserting individual authority

and towards adopting a more conservative persona: “it is in the *groups* of poems, particularly the sonnets, that the authority customarily associated with romanticism – notably its mythopoeic tendency – is most clearly contested” (217). This becomes a crucial part of the project to rehabilitate Wordsworth’s poetic persona in the years to come. I see him as adopting a second main poetic “register” that adopts a very traditional form and diction,¹⁹ but also becomes more and more conservative politically over the years. This is actually a conscious strategy. Wordsworth has achieved a personal, authoritative style, but it adopts a dialogic approach with a heteroglossic poetic language that meets great resistance from some quarters. He does not abandon that part of his poetic project, but rather supplements it with a more “traditional,” “safe,” monologic style in the sonnet form, first of all, and then other forms as well. His emerging sense of the organizing and collecting of his poetry also took into account the presentation of a new persona through the sonnet form, and the publication that next appeared after this phase of Wordsworth’s composition, *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), included a mixture of lyric pieces and sonnet groupings, thus establishing at least two public poetic registers.

The year 1804 saw a great deal of composition, as Wordsworth entered “the most steadily fruitful period of his whole career” (Gill 229). Not only did he complete the “Intimations Ode” and the “Ode to Duty,” but he worked steadily on *The Prelude*. As stressed above, because *The Prelude* was not published in Wordsworth’s lifetime, it does not form a significant part of his emerging conversation with his culture. However, as a part of *The Recluse*, and simply because he was expending so much energy on it, we need to take stock of Wordsworth’s work on the autobiographical poem. Johnston suggests outright that *The Prelude* is Wordsworth’s answer to the question “What is a Poet?” that

he posed in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* (811). And the answer is “the *Recluse*-poet,” a “philosophical poet,” someone who is the rightful heir to, especially, Milton. But the further reason for me to mention *The Prelude* in what is my closest possible approach to an emerging chronological portrait of Wordsworth’s public persona, is that he conceives of the long epic poem as addressed to one individual: Coleridge. Among the intimate sphere, the poem was long known as “the poem to Coleridge.” As Gill notes, both the 1799 and 1805 versions of *The Prelude* “are addressed, very tenderly in places, to Coleridge, not as the only possible, but as the ideal, reader” (233). The first five books of the poem were among the pieces assembled for Coleridge in late 1804 for his voyage to Malta. Upon Coleridge’s request for “all Wordsworth’s poems,” the household produced a notebook with fair copies of those first five books, *The Pedlar*, forty-three sonnets “political and miscellaneous”; forty-one short pieces, including the “Ode to Duty,” “Resolution and Independence,” and “Intimations”; and *Peter Bell* (Curtis 5). In fact, Wordsworth had been for some time trying to get Coleridge’s specific reactions and criticisms to the epic poem, and in correspondence showed some impatience with Coleridge. Unfortunately, in a letter to the Wordsworths dated 19 January 1805, from Malta, Coleridge describes the loss of a fellow traveller: “I send this to you by way of Gibraltar (ah! What faint hopes of its arrival!) That good Man Major Adye! he is dead – and all his papers burnt as plague-papers . . .” (*STC Letters* II:1159). Unfortunately, as a note in the published version of the letters goes on to say, “These papers contained Coleridge’s ideas on the *Recluse*” (1159), and suggests how deeply Wordsworth would have felt their loss.

Thus far, then, what we know as *The Prelude* truly is conceived as a dialogue between the two poets, addressed directly to Coleridge and “overheard” as private “conversation” among the coterie. The conversation between Wordsworth and Coleridge is vital to Wordsworth’s conception of himself as poet. But at this point he was not planning to publish the work until *The Recluse* was completed, and the first part, the autobiography tracing the growth of his own mind, was also too “egoistic” to be considered at this point. Wordsworth may have been starting to feel the burden of Coleridge’s faith in him as the only writer capable of writing the new philosophic epic.

About this time in early 1805, the happiness and security of the preceding five years was shaken. After the marriage, after the arrival of his first two children (John on 18 June 1803, and Dorothy [“Dora”] on 16 August 1804), after the poetic production, Wordsworth suffered a grievous loss as the “significant group” was sundered: John Wordsworth drowned when his ship went down on the night of 6 February 1805. Some might consider this event a factor in Wordsworth’s “decline,” as it roughly puts a period to the poet’s most creative and productive years. This brother whom he loved was one member of the most intimate circle on which Wordsworth depended and upon which, I suggest, he based his conception of his relationship to his audience. Because John was one of coterie of real readers, he figured as one of Wordsworth’s ideal readers, and, of course, he was a member of the family group dedicated to promoting William’s work and ensuring his place in literary history.

In fact, as one of John Wordsworth’s final pieces of correspondence to his brother shows, he was offering his own criticism right to the end. A letter from John to William dated 24 January 1805, contains the younger brother’s final comments, this time on some

of the poems destined for the *Poems, in Two Volumes* collection in 1807, but at the same time mentioning that he would like to see more of them:

I should have liked very much to have seen the poetry you have written (which I have not seen) – in the Lyrical Ballads my favorites are the Mad mother part of the Indian Woman and Joanna The poem of the wye is a poem that I admire but after having read it I do not like to turn to it again I think the Lyrical Ballad[s] taken alltogether far superior to the last poems (*JW Letters* 155-156).

Such was Wordsworth's grief that the poem "When, to the attractions of the busy world," which is addressed to John for the final 45 lines and invokes the brother as an ideal of the wholly sympathetic audience ("Nature . . . / who loved us both . . . / Was with thee; and even so didst thou become / A *silent* Poet" [77-80]), did not get published until 1815.

As the mention of "the last poems" by John Wordsworth suggests, William had many poems that had largely circulated among his coterie, including *Peter Bell*, "The Leech-Gatherer" (later entitled "Resolution and Independence"), "Alice Fell," many sonnets inspired by his trip to France in August 1802, "I wandered lonely as a Cloud" (perhaps his most popular poem today), several poems inspired by an 1803 trip to Scotland, "The Solitary Reaper," and many poems to the Celandine, the Daisy, "The Kitten and the Falling Leaves," and so forth. Quite a body of work, but he was reluctant to publish anything because he felt he should be finishing *The Recluse*, in part to honour his now-dead brother. But as *The Recluse* looked less and less likely to be completed soon, Wordsworth realized he should get something before the public.

As he had insisted with previous publications, he wanted to make sure he made some money by the venture. In a letter to John Taylor of 19 June 1806, Wordsworth writes: “Since I came home I have culled from my Manuscripts about 140 pages of verse which I have some thoughts of publishing next Spring, if I could make it worth my while I mean in a pecuniary view” (Curtis 11). He expressed a similar aim in a letter to Walter Scott later that year: “Any Poetry which I like, I wish for in [pocket] size . . . I am going to the Press with a Volume which Longman will find easy to convey to you; it will consist entirely of small pieces and I publish with great reluctance, but the day when my long work will be finished seems farther and farther off, and therefore I have resolved to send this Vol: into the world” (*Letters* II:1:96). Not only does this letter suggest Wordsworth’s continuing concern for the material conditions of the publishing industry (make a book small and easy to carry so people will buy it and carry it with them), but it also alludes to the anxiety about *The Recluse* weighing on Wordsworth’s mind, creating a situation in which the shorter poems would be viewed by the coterie as a continuing distraction from the “more important” work.

As usual, the “family business” became totally absorbed in the project once it was underway: Dorothy and Mary Wordsworth, along with Sara Hutchinson, copied poems, and Coleridge assisted with printer’s copy. Soon they realized that, as material was transcribed, one volume eventually grew to two: “For the one-volume plan Wordsworth expected to print around 160 pages . . . [but] he had more material than could fit within one volume” (Curtis 17). The “volume” for Longman that he mentioned to Scott seems quickly to have doubled in size, as Wordsworth wrote to Thomas Wilkinson later the same month, “I have in the press a poetical publication that will extend to a couple of

small volumes, 150 pages or so a-piece . . . “ (*Letters* II:1:105). Wordsworth himself, always involved in the production of his volumes, was at work on organizing the poems to help ease and guide the reader’s response. Even though the famous classification system of the poems was still some years away, we recall Wordsworth’s fascination with sonnets and sonnet cycles dating from about 1803. Curtis writes about a similar “classifying” urge Wordsworth exhibits with this volume: “To overcome the problem of presenting sixty to seventy poems in a single run, as he had done in *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth developed the method of presenting ‘a few at once’ so as to guide the reader’s response by the surrounding context” (Curtis 36-37). Wordsworth recognizes the challenges the reader faces, but he also begins to *create* the different “registers” of his style by this organization – in effect, a taxonomy of reception. The result was seven sections of poems, plus the one-poem section of the “Intimations Ode” which completed the collection, initiating the monumentalizing tradition begun “by his order” that the “Ode” come last in every collection of his verse (Johnston 777). Volume One opened with an untitled grouping of 17 short poems, among them “She was a Phantom of delight,” “To the Small Celandine,” and the “Ode to Duty.” The second classification is “Poems, Composed During a Tour, Chiefly on Foot,” and includes only five poems, “Resolution and Independence” falling last. “Sonnets” follow, broken into two main groups: “PART THE FIRST – MISCELLANEOUS SONNETS” and “PART THE SECOND – SONNETS DEDICATED TO LIBERTY.” Volume Two then presents three main categories: “Poems Written During a Tour in Scotland,” “Moods of MY OWN MIND,” and “The Blind Highland Boy, with Other Poems.” Thus Wordsworth tried, perhaps not entirely successfully, “to aid the reader’s response to his poems” (Curtis 38)

in this, his last independent collection of newly published short poems. That statement alone is astounding: by 1807, much of the poetry by which an undergraduate, for example, would know Wordsworth, was published. What followed during the next 43 years, and it was substantial, to be sure, was supplementary, re-presented, longer (*The Excursion*, for example), or in prose.

Poems, in Two Volumes was “announced in the *London Sun* as published ‘this day’ on April 28, 1807” (Curtis 33), inviting another discussion in the cultural dialogism of Wordsworth’s career. It was a vital component of Wordsworth’s self-fashioning and continuing sense of poetic identity. Even though he was committed to *The Recluse*, publishing *Poems, in Two Volumes* clearly identified him with shorter, lyric pieces, as well as two groupings of sonnets. It seemed partly a statement to the coterie that, if progress on *The Recluse-poem* did not seem to be fast enough, the *Recluse-poet* had nonetheless been very busy. He also did not feel compelled to preface this collection with any elaborate theorizing or justifying. In terms of this study, its publication makes us reconsider that, to Wordsworth’s contemporary audience, with no knowledge of *The Borderers*, *The Ruined Cottage*, or *The Prelude*, his reputation to this point, whatever it was, was formed strictly on the basis of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800, 1802, and 1805) and its prefatory statements. One day, he still believed, he would offer the public his great philosophic poem, but in the meantime “what he was actually doing between 1798 and 1807 was identifying himself publicly with the lyric, and ennobling it in the hierarchy of genres by the claims he made in the Prefaces of 1800 and 1802” (Gill 202). The publication of the *Poems, in Two Volumes* really consolidated the image of William

Wordsworth as a “Lake Poet” in the minds of the public, a title he would more self-consciously confirm over the next decade.

Unfortunately, the public reception of *Poems, in Two Volumes* included some very negative reviews that really damaged Wordsworth’s reputation, and it took years to repair or recover from that damage. We can expect that Wordsworth’s coterie responded positively or supportively, as this reply to Lady Beaumont of 21 May 1807, indicates: “Though I am to see you so soon I cannot but write a word or two, to thank you for the interest you take in my Poems [in Two Volumes] as evinced by your solicitude about their immediate reception” (*Letters* II:1:145). However, in the public arena of the periodical press, there were a number of reviews of the publication, and they were almost all negative. By this time, Wordsworth himself was becoming sensitive to the criticism and claimed he was not reading the reviews. If this were absolutely true, we would have little reason to consider the reviews as part of a “conversation” between poet and audience. Yet, in his correspondence Wordsworth displays some knowledge of at least the major reviews and the major points of contention in the public debate, so I think it is safe to consider that this larger cultural conversation is, indeed, continuing, and with Wordsworth as a participant.

And it does unfold like a conversation, or more aptly, like a debate or simply an argument. For example, in the same way that reviews of *Lyrical Ballads* 1798 quoted or referred to the “Advertisement” with its insistence that the poems were “experiments,” these reviews often engage with the principles outlined in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800 or 1802), further indicating how the debate was framed as a continuing conversation. As Hess points out, reactions to the new publication break down into three

main types: 1) complaints about Wordsworth's poetic "system"; 2) the breach of decorum implicit in Wordsworth's diction and use of rustic characters and settings; and 3) the egoism displayed – and indulged – by the section "Moods of My Own Mind" (471). In fact, it is from here on that negative reviews often lament what Wordsworth espoused in the "Preface" as a "system"; in other words, he is identified as a "Lake Poet" and has further insisted on experimenting with humble subject-matter as well as simplicity of poetic diction, and many go on to condemn him for one or another of these traits. The contemporary reactions make it even more clear that the reviewers, at least, did not appreciate Wordsworth's attempts to open up poetic diction to a more varied and stratified social discourse. Further, some reviewers take him to task for not adhering to his own principles about simplicity of diction; and yet, the same critics, or others, condemn the simplicity where it is evident, accusing Wordsworth of being "childish" or "puerile." Many reviewers cast themselves as having had doubts about Wordsworth's poetry since the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, suggesting that those doubts are now confirmed with the productions of *Poems, in Two Volumes*.

Finally, a common feature of the reviews is a recognition of Wordsworth's genius, somewhere in the lament over wasting his considerable talents: "Part of what made Wordsworth seem so perverse to reviewers was his demonstrated ability to write in higher and more worthy modes, when not misled by the tenets of his own system" (Hess 478). In this vein, some critics take a patronizing approach that suggests they are the ones who can help Wordsworth overcome the "childish" tendencies he shows and create a more "manly" style; or, casting themselves as physicians, the critics can help the "diseased" poet to become "healthy" once more.

As an example, the first review published was the one by a young Byron in *Monthly Literary Recreations* for July 1807, which recognizes the apparent modest reputation of Wordsworth's last collection: "The volumes before us are by the author of *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection which has not undeservedly met with a considerable share of public applause" (661). After that, though, Byron, while he likes the patriotic sonnets, dislikes the subjectivity and simplicity of the poems gathered under "Moods of my own Mind": "[W]hen Mr. W. ceases to please, it is by 'abandoning' his mind to the most common-place ideas, at the same time clothing them in language not simple, but puerile . . . namby-pamby" (662).

Wordsworth then attempted to enter the dialogue with a pre-emptive strike against the *Critical Review* by writing to Francis Wrangham on 12 July, asking if Wrangham had any influence over the publisher, Mawman (a friend of Wrangham's). Wordsworth knew the reviewer Leatrice at the *Critical*, and knew that Leatrice hated Coleridge and all his friends. In true Wordsworthian fashion, he concluded his request by asserting that he was not overly worried about a reviewer's lasting influence, only that what he says might hurt sales. (*Letters* II:1:155). The rationale given here at the end of the letter we cannot take entirely straight, but it did employ the common Wordsworthian strategy of placing himself, and his faith in his posterity, above critical opinion. The letter is a curious record of Wordsworth's attempt to further set the terms of the public debate over poetic diction: Do the critics set the terms? Or can a poet or school of poets challenge accepted practices? Especially when that poet's drive to include heteroglossic variety of discourse in his work challenges the very nature of poetic diction? And can the aims be achieved by having the coterie attempt to influence the public dialogue? Although he failed to insert

himself at this point, Wordsworth had many more opportunities to enter into this true cultural dialogue.

In the event, the *Critical Review* was the next one before the public (August 1807), and it was very negative, ridiculing Wordsworth, and clearly identifying him as part of a coterie – in this case, labeled “the Lake School” – and condemning that coterie as a mutual admiration society. It admits Wordsworth’s talents, and suggests there are even some fine poems in the collection, but names not a single one; extracts of poems are all connected to negative comments. This one also takes Wordsworth to task for his seeming egotism, as exemplified by this lead-in to a suggestion: “We have now done with laughing, and earnestly entreat Mr. W. (if his feelings are not *too* fine to allow of his holding converse with minds of our gross unsentimental texture). . .” (313). The conclusion here is that Wordsworth is “debased” and “diseased” in his taste.

The next review appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, written by Francis Jeffrey and published in October 1807. This review initiated within the larger cultural conversation a sustained person-to-person “debate” between Jeffrey and Wordsworth that went on for some years, and during which Wordsworth produced some of his most influential critical work as attacks and counter-attacks. This long, influential, and considered review at least recognizes Wordsworth’s talent: “The Lyrical Ballads were unquestionably popular; and, we have no hesitation in saying, deservedly popular” (429). Perceptively, Jeffrey identifies two different audiences to which the *Lyrical Ballads* appealed: “[T]hey were enabled, not only to recommend themselves to the indulgence of many judicious readers, but even to beget among a pretty numerous class of persons, a sort of admiration of the very defects by which they were attended” (429). This statement

gets to one of the paradoxes of which Wordsworth himself was so aware, and which the “Preface” enunciates: his poetry, even though working somewhat against the prevailing taste, may gain a readership among the “fit,” that is, among the educated classes. In addition, Jeffrey suggests, *Lyrical Ballads* appealed to a more common readership *because of the simplicity of style*. But Jeffrey’s most powerful criticism, or rather prejudice, arises from his identifying Wordsworth as the leading practitioner of a new “school” of poetry, which Jeffrey appears to consider a threat. He writes as if the *Poems, in Two Volumes* confirms his worst fears of the poetry of the “Lake School,” especially disputing Wordsworth’s diction: “One great beauty of diction exists only for those who have some degree of scholarship or critical skill. This is what depends on the exquisite *propriety* of the words employed” (430). Of course, the elitism of this kind of attitude is precisely what drives Jeffrey’s criticism of Wordsworth’s work, and is precisely the kind of attitude towards reading and cultural valuation that Wordsworth consistently tries to overturn in his prefatory matter. Jeffrey goes on to attack both Wordsworth’s claim to originality, and his choice of subject matter: “[I]n point of fact, the new poets are just as great borrowers as the old; only that, instead of borrowing from the more popular passages of their illustrious predecessors, they have preferred furnishing themselves from vulgar ballads and plebeian nurseries” (431). Jeffrey at least identifies the strategy here, even if he misses the point: Wordsworth is pushing for a re-definition of poetic diction that digs deeper into the social strata of his own time, rather than merely borrowing from literary works and conventions going back in time to ancient Greece. But this is a flaw to Jeffrey, who picks up on the language initiated by Byron’s review that branded many of

the poems as “namby-pamby” and “childish.” And he, too, objects to the section entitled “Moods of my own Mind” as “some ineffable compositions” (434).

What is most striking, given its place today in the canons of both Wordsworth and a “Romantic period” in general, is the treatment of the “Intimations Ode.” As we have seen above, Wordsworth always thought highly of the poem and placed it last in this collection, and in every collection thereafter in which it appeared. While Byron made no mention of it at all in his review, Jeffrey claims not to be able even to understand the poem: “[T]he volume is wound up with an ‘Ode’ with no other title but the motto, *Paulo majora canamus*. This is, beyond all doubt, the most illegible and unintelligible part of the publication” (436). It seems that one of Wordsworth’s major challenges was to be educating his Readers on how to appreciate his “Ode.” As he rounded to a conclusion, Jeffrey praised the sonnets in this collection: “his sonnets are as much superior to the greater part of his other poems, as Milton’s sonnets are superior to his” (437). This recognizes the “double-register” structure of this publication and, indeed, Wordsworth’s public reception over the next several years, as he continues to draw praise for his sonnets, at the same time that he is condemned for his literary “effusions.” Overall, Jeffrey argues that the vices of Wordsworth’s poetry come from the too-strict application of his theory, this new theory from the “Lake School,” and that he is most successful when he breaks his own rules (when he is most “traditional”).

The next two reviews to appear were those in *Beau Monde* in October and in the *Satirist* in November – both very negative. The first ridicules many passages, and does not even find the sonnets redeeming, although “Resolution and Independence” is “tolerable.” The emphasis on feeling seems to trigger this negative response to the

poems, which are lumped together as “Childish”: “like a hysterical schoolgirl he had a knack of feeling about subjects with which feeling had no proper concern” (40). This review concludes “Mr Wordsworth has ruined himself . . . [by] imitat[ing] the lisp of children” (44). The *Satirist* review also ridicules the poems, comparing them to Mother Bunch and Mother Goose, and suggests that the author is too egotistical, although, like many of the negative reviews, this one applauds “some” of the sonnets.

In January 1808 a further review appears in *The Eclectic Review*. Like others, this one, written by James Montgomery, opens with praise for *Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth’s talents, but condemns the “system” that has led to such simple diction. In fact, referring back to “Tintern Abbey” as well as poems in the new collection, Montgomery essentially argues that Wordsworth’s best poems are those in which he disregards his system: “It is remarkable that we have not, among all the piebald miscellanies before us, a single example of that species of poetry, for which the author’s theory of diction and his habits of thinking peculiarly qualify him” (335). After admiring the sonnets, especially “On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic” as “a rare example of excellence either in Mr. Wordsworth or any other English Sonneteer” (336), this review also concludes with an admission of failure to understand or appreciate at all the “Intimations”: “The last piece in this Collection is simply styled ‘*An Ode*,’ and the reader is turned loose into a wilderness of sublimity, tenderness, bombast, and absurdity, to find out the subject as well as he can” (337).

There followed in the *Cabinet* for April 1808 another one of those reviews that admitted of Wordsworth’s genius, but found his “taste” wanting, and condemns pretty well the whole collection: “The present volumes probably contain a collection of the

greatest absurdities that, under the name of poetry, were ever offered to the public” (261). However, in a pattern we have come to see as a common one: the sonnets are praised, as is “Resolution and Independence,” “yet we hope Mr. Wordsworth, in making a *future* collection of his poems, will reject the greater part of the present volumes” (262). In fact, Wordsworth did the exact opposite for the next forty years, as he continually re-presented his entire body of work, always retaining the early work in *Lyrical Ballads* and *Poems, in Two Volumes*. His whole conception was monolithic, as collective volumes published from 1815 to 1850 presented early poems related to late ones, either within a new edition, or through various marketing strategies like adding a new volume to an already-published four-volume set. The goal was clearly to set up a comprehensive body or work worthy of representing the capabilities of the “*Recluse-poet*,” even if the poem itself were never to appear.

The *Annual Review* for 1808 carried a long review by Lucy Aikin, also negative, but displaying a very thorough and detailed knowledge of the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* with a good two pages devoted to summarizing its principles (14-15). Uniquely, this review criticizes Wordsworth’s insistence in the “Preface” that each poem has a “purpose” (18). Still, Aikin does not totally dismiss poems addressed to animals, at least (20) – “To a Butterfly” and “To the Cuckoo” are praised for their “exquisiteness of feeling” – and she, like so many others, praises the sonnets: “The Sonnets, a portion of which are dedicated to liberty, are formed on the model of Milton’s and have a certain stiffness – but they hold a severe and manly tone which cannot be in times like these too much listened to” (19). At least they escape the frequent charge of being “childish” leveled at many of the other lyrics. Aikin’s review concludes with an allusion to the

“Lake School” and assumes the tone of the high purpose of the critic: to try to get the poet’s productions in line with the public’s taste; she claims that “we were anxious to combat a system which appears to us so injurious to its author, and so dangerous to public taste” (21).

Of the remaining four reviews, the *British Catalogue* carried a short review in March 1809, mostly quotation, and all negative: the favourite pejoratives for this collection – “namby-pamby” and “puerile” – were both used (136). Two others, the *Literary Annual Register* (October 1808) and the *New Annual Register* for 1807 (published 1808) are nothing but notices, simply descriptive of what one might find between the covers of the volumes. The latter of these does lean towards the positive in its description: “The Minor Poets of the year are Mr. Wordsworth, who has given us two small additional volumes of ‘Poems,’ for the most part lyrical, and possessing his common ease and simplicity” (782). Finally, there appeared an entirely negative notice in the *Poetical Register for 1806-07* (816), but it did not appear until 1811, so, when trying to measure its effect on Wordsworth or his composing/revising, we must recognize that it comes late to the cultural conversation.

To summarize the public reception of *Poems, in Two Volumes*, we can say that, while the section “Moods of my own Mind” is almost universally picked out as bad, the sonnets are widely praised. Following on the double placement of authority in the “Preface” (the public is important, but the poetic genius also should be listened to), it might be that Wordsworth is now writing, in effect, with two voices: the simple and rustic on the one hand, and the patriotic and traditional on the other. The first strategy arises from Wordsworth’s desire to infuse poetic diction with a more heteroglossic “real”

language of men, and to restore an intimate, orally-based model of communication. The second strategy, however, works better for the actual conditions of publishing and reception in early nineteenth-century England, and creates a different persona of “Wordsworth,” one he will cultivate for the remaining part of his career. Both are authentic features of Wordsworth’s style, the first a result of his early commitment to republicanism and forging of a dialogic style, and the second a crystallizing of his style as he becomes more assured, more “monologic.” Some of his contemporary critics did, indeed, perceive this strategy and accused Wordsworth of being duplicitous; in his own terms, Wordsworth was counting on reaching “the People” by opting instead to appeal to “the Public.”

Wordsworth had taken a pretty sound beating in the press. We might pause to reflect on his “image” at this point: a young poet of promise, even genius, who enjoyed some success with the *Lyrical Ballads*, but whose theoretical statement, the “Preface” to the second edition of those *Ballads*, may have put some critical readers on guard. With this latest volume, critics question whether he has taken his “system” to an extreme. They question his taste and judgement, in effect wondering what perverse streak of character impels Wordsworth to choose subject matter that works against his talent and that prevents him from gaining a wider appreciation among the reading/ book-buying public. His egotism, his confidence in his poetic style, and the support of the coterie that he trusted, saw him through this period. Some years later, Henry Crabb Robinson wrote “W. always tho[ught] that he was robbed of his just fame & consequently of his just emolument by the Edinb. Rev.” (*HCR Reminiscences* 51). But as we have just seen, Jeffrey’s review was not the only negative review, nor even the only nasty one.

Two years after the publication of *Poems, in Two Volumes* a pamphlet appeared that marked the first *public* political Wordsworth. *The Convention of Cintra* was written in response to the treaty that ceased hostilities between France and Spain, a treaty that was concluded on 30 August 1808. Wordsworth, Southey and others in the Lakes area were concerned over the terms of the treaty, and England's part in it. Attempting to create some political pressure in October, they wanted to hold a "county meeting" but decided to write Lord Lonsdale for support first. When the idea of the meeting was abandoned because of Lord Lonsdale's opposition, Wordsworth, by early November 1808, decided to write a pamphlet. He went to work, with Coleridge's help, and by 6 December Coleridge enthusiastically wrote to Daniel Stuart, "Wordsworth has nearly finished a series of most masterly Essays on the affairs of Portugal & Spain . . ." (*STC Letters* III:134). But then a series of delays seriously changed the complexion of the project. By March it was still not completed, and Wordsworth took a new approach. He wrote to Daniel Stuart near the end of March 1809, complaining that most people were more interested in royal gossip than political debate anyway:

As I found the public mind so completely engrossed with the Duke of York and his Doxy, I thought it better to avail myself of that opportunity to add general matter to the Pamphlet [*The Convention of Cintra*], concerning the hopes of the Spaniards and principles of the contest; so that, from the proportion of space which it occupied in the work, the Convention of Cintra might fairly appear, what in truth it is in my mind, an action dwelt upon only for the sake of

illustrating principles, with a view to promote liberty and good policy; in the manner in which an anatomist illustrates the laws of organic life from a human subject placed before him and his audience. –

I confess I have no hopes of the thing making any impression. The style of thinking and feeling is so little in the Spirit of the age (*Letters* II:1:296).

Wordsworth had resigned himself to using the specific situation of the Spanish as an illustration of more general political principles – a strategy or approach that marks some of his most enduring poems, too.

Late in the process, Wordsworth started to worry about some statements he made as being potentially libelous, and this slowed down publication again. As he wrote to Daniel Stuart in early May 1809,

I have just been reading an old Magazine where I find that Benjamin Flower was fined £100 and imprisoned in Newgate four months . . . for a libel . . . upon the Bishop of Llandaff This has made me look to myself, and therefore I beg that, if my Pamphlet be not published, you would take the trouble of reading it over to see whether it may not be made a handle for exercising upon my Person a like act of injustice (*Letters* II:1:327).

This reminder of his own earlier radical response to the Bishop's *Sermon*, written during a phase in his career when Wordsworth lay silent publicly, now affected the more mature, more conservative poet's choices when faced with publication.

Coleridge was an ardent supporter of the *Cintra* essay, finally published 27 May 1809 (nine months after the treaty was signed). He puffed the pamphlet in his *Friend*, even though privately he, too, recognized that the topicality of the essay was largely lost. In a letter Coleridge wrote to Stuart 13 June 1809, he doubts the success of the pamphlet, partly because "[I]t will be impossible to rekindle an interest in the . . . Convention," partly because of DeQuincey's editing (especially his punctuation), and partly because of Wordsworth's style, which Coleridge suggests is too elevated for the common reader and attempts to sustain too high a pitch for too long. Even here, Coleridge cannot help himself, writing that the essay might have better served *The Recluse*:

I could not help feeling that a considerable part of is almost
a self-robbery from some great philosophical poem, of
which it would form an appropriate part, & be fitl[ier]
attuned to the high dogmatic Eloquence, the oracular [tone]
of impassioned Blank Verse" – i.e., *The Recluse* (*STC*
Letters III:214).

Although the idea that the essay ought to be re-cast into blank verse seems a bit odd at first blush, it was true that the specificity of the topic had become *passé* by the time the essay was published. The idea that revising the essay into poetry might serve some more general treatment of politics – and *The Recluse*, in its conception, was to cover just about every aspect of Man, Nature, and Society – does not seem that far-fetched.

Coleridge's comments on style are prescient, as evidenced by the first review of *The Convention of Cintra* to appear, in the August 1809 *Eclectic Review*. James Montgomery, the reviewer, writes that the essay forms "altogether a style of very peculiar gait and character, resembling nothing so nearly as the blank verse of the Westmorland triumvirate of Bards" (Reiman 338). He goes on to praise the overall thought, the "genius," that is evident in Wordsworth's writing. Indeed, Montgomery seems to get carried away with Wordsworth's zeal, as he writes of Wordsworth's conclusion to meet the threat of Bonaparte with 200,000 troops in order to restore freedom to Spain, Portugal, and all of Europe; and since he "cannot return to the littleness of criticism" after considering this plan, he concludes with a long quotation from the pamphlet itself (341). Another review followed in September in the *British Critic*, and this one was a bit more mixed, approving of the essay's general spirit, but complaining that the style occasionally runs to the wordy and obscure (137). *The Convention of Cintra* is helpful to our current understanding of Wordsworth's political thought, but it was not influential beyond the coterie audience in its own day.

It seems from a letter to DeQuincey from Dorothy of 1 May 1809, while *The Convention of Cintra* was still being prepared for the press, that Wordsworth had immediate plans to return to work he had previously begun:

My Brother has begun to correct and add to the poem of the White Doe, and has been tolerably successful. He intends to finish it before he begins with any other work, and has made up his mind, if he can satisfy himself in the alterations he intends to make, to publish it next winter, and

to follow the publication by that of Peter Bell and the Waggoner. He has also made a resolution to write upon publick affairs in the *Courier*, or some other newspaper, for the sake of getting money; not wholly however on that account for unless he were animated by the importance of his subject and the hope of being of use he could do nothing in that way (*Letters* II:1:325).

Actually, after the publication of *Cintra*, Wordsworth dropped all these projects for a time – *The White Doe of Rylstone* was not published until 1815, *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner* not until 1819, and he did not take up regular newspaper writing on political affairs at all. We might speculate that the vicious reviews of *Poems, in Two Volumes* left him smarting somewhat and simply more cautious about publishing.

Wordsworth had been almost universally disparaged in the reviews of *Poems, in Two Volumes*, which left him in a kind of professional limbo still dependent on a coterie reputation solely for true support. Certainly he would have reflected on how best to respond to these reviews in order to restore the public reputation that had started to build with the *Lyrical Ballads*. But he was about to suffer great losses in his personal life. His personal resiliency was no doubt sorely tested by, first, the estrangement from Coleridge, and then the deaths of two of his young children. The first of these threatened the defining dialogue in which he had been engaged with Coleridge for some years now, threatening the very meaning of *The Recluse*, which was as yet incomplete but which had spawned the “poem to Coleridge” – what we know now as *The Prelude*. The deaths of his children tested his personal faith. Ultimately, this period of his life resulted in the

publication not of *The White Doe*, or *Peter Bell*, or *The Waggoner*, but of *The Excursion*, which also publicly announced the philosophical poem *The Recluse*.

The Excursion was many things: it was now presented as part of the project that had been rumoured and known about at the coterie level for some years; also, because of the genesis of that planned philosophical poem and its close connection to Coleridge, the poem must be considered in relation to Coleridge and the relationship between the two poets; finally, and most central to our purpose, *The Excursion* represents another stage in Wordsworth's stylistic development, and in particular a great attempt at presenting the voices of several characters – a dialogic representation of heteroglossia – and the value of rustic voices and lives, through the “egotistically sublime” monologue of his own style. When the public reaction was still not positive, I believe he changed tactics, giving up on the fusion of these two opposed forces within a single work, and starting to more consciously separate his poetry of rustic life (more and more associated with the young Wordsworth) from poetry of public life (more and more what he was writing and revising in his maturity, especially, as we have seen, in the form of sonnets). His continual revision and re-collection of his works served this strategy as well, as the entire collected works could contain all voices.

The connection of *The Excursion* to Coleridge dated back to the beginning of their relationship, with the early version of *The Ruined Cottage*, a poem of which Coleridge always thought very highly. And, of course, the whole of *The Recluse* project was, for many years, also intimately tied to the relationship with Coleridge. We remember, for example, that Coleridge had the extant parts of *The Recluse* (five books of *The Prelude* and the latest version of the *Ruined Cottage/Pedlar*) on his trip to Malta in

late 1804, and had told Wordsworth that he would be sending his feedback on the epic poem, but wrote in January 1805 of all his papers being burned as “plague-papers” after a fellow-traveller died. From that point on, *The Excursion*, and even *The Recluse*, became defined more and more independently of Coleridge. Bursts of work on the poem in 1806 and 1808 (Reed) were followed by sustained work from late 1809 to Spring 1812, in the midst of which came the famous estrangement from his long-time friend.

The rift with Coleridge began late October 1810 after Coleridge traveled to London to stay with the Montagus. Coleridge’s own plan had been to stay with a doctor, originally in Edinburgh (*STC Letters* III:296), but Montagu had apparently insisted he stay with them. Before they left the Lakes area, Wordsworth had spoken to Montagu, suggesting that Coleridge’s habits would strain the relationship if he were under the Montagus’ roof. When they reached London, somehow Wordsworth’s warnings had turned into a “commission”: Montagu passed on a litany of complaints to Coleridge, most famously (or infamously) that Wordsworth called Coleridge a “rotten drunkard” and that he had been an “absolute nuisance” while staying with the Wordsworths at Allan Bank. Coleridge was, of course, deeply offended. When he wrote to Wordsworth, the latter became very defensive, blaming Montagu.

The breach that followed lasted a year and a half, during which the two poets did not communicate at all. Wordsworth was hard at work composing *The Excursion* during roughly the same period of time. Bakhtin argues that the self is defined in relation to the other in dialogue with another: Coleridge was Wordsworth’s supreme poetic “other”; he was one of the original “intimate group” and one of the original, real, individual auditors Wordsworth imagined as he composed. *The Recluse* was in jeopardy. The rift between

the two poets threatened the unfinished – and as yet unannounced – grand project that was to confirm Wordsworth’s poetic confidence and identity.

On the family front, Wordsworth’s household was growing, and so were the demands for money. By 1810, he had five small children to take care of as well as himself, his wife, and sister Dorothy. Trying to provide for his family, he wrote to Lord Lonsdale in February of 1812 expressing his frustration at being unable to gain a decent living from his writing, to which he had devoted his life. Specifically, he mentioned that his work had not been well received by the general public, and he referred to his continuing work on *The Recluse*, “much the most important part of my efforts,” which “cannot meet the public eye for many years through the comprehensiveness of the subject” (*Letters* II:2:2-3). He further mentioned his own uncompromising character in matters of politics, morals, and other things, insisting that this unbending quality was a necessary part of his genius. Such a statement points clearly to Wordsworth resigning himself to the fact that he will not enjoy huge public popularity. In a sense, Wordsworth in 1812 succumbs to a fear that he cannot “win” the public debate, and therefore seeks the security of an older system: one of patronage, where the poet’s genius is recognized by a benefactor. The letter is a request for an appointment to supplement the income from his capital and the sales of his works. It concedes that Wordsworth will not achieve popular sales success, but appeals to the author’s integrity and genius as signs warranting an “investment” in the way of a patronage appointment or pension.

Before he received a reply to that letter, he and Mary went down to London for the spring and early summer of 1812, leaving the Lakes around 20 April. This was a momentous stay. First of all, Wordsworth’s arrival in London brought to a head the

matter of the rift with Coleridge. After a couple of tense false starts, they salvaged their friendship, although not at the same level of intimacy as before, with the help of Henry Crabb Robinson. Also, it was on this trip that Wordsworth and Byron met for the first time, at dinner with Samuel Rogers.

The Wordsworths were much in the company of Crabb Robinson. He wrote warmly of Wordsworth that summer, as in this entry for 31 May 1812: “I found W. engaged in defending his own poetry. [This] he was in the habit of doing At Hamond’s was one of the Millers, a clergyman He estimated W.’s poems chiefly for the purity of their moral. W. on the other hand, valued them only according to the powers of mind they presupposed in the writer or excited in the hearer” (*HCR Reminiscences* 53). This observation supports the Bakhtinian “core” of Wordsworth’s theoretical platform: the engagement of speaker and hearer in a version of true conversation was the ultimate, but unreachable, goal of the poet. This model makes its way into *The Excursion* through the figure of the various monologues, ostensibly parts of a long conversation. The ideal of conversation is again echoed in Crabb Robinson’s assertion that “[i]t was delightful to hear Wordsworth speak of himself, when alone with him & he was under no apprehension of being misunderstood & consequently [mis]represented” (*Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, Etc.* 49). Not only did composition, and ultimately publication, take the audience further away from this close conversation; discussing the work, too, was subject to incomplete understanding or outright misunderstanding if pursued in written form.

The other profoundly influential event of the summer was the death of the Wordsworths’ daughter Catherine over the night of June 3-4. With William and Mary in

London, Dorothy had to make funeral arrangements, and the little girl (not yet 4) was buried with neither parent present. The parents had not received the news until a week later and did not return home until around the fifth of July.

When he got home, Wordsworth found that, in response to his letter to Lord Lonsdale, he had been offered 100 pounds a year as a gift, at least until a government post of some kind came available. He sat on this offer for awhile – it must have seemed an admission of defeat to accept this gift. Wordsworth had always had great faith in his abilities, and his potential contribution to “humanity,” but he also had a great deal of confidence in his ability to convince the reading public of his value as poet. He never doubted his talents, but his confidence in his ability to influence the public dialogue relating to his value was shaken at this point in his career. If he could not reach a large audience, then he had better take steps to ensure he could look after his family business.

Then, on 1 December 1812, son Thomas died of measles at six years old. Worries about his poetic reputation, while undoubtedly always in mind, were secondary to the health of his family in the face of these losses. Wordsworth’s money worries were eased somewhat when he accepted the offer from Lord Lonsdale late in the year (*Letters* II:2:56-58). Then on 6 March 1813, Wordsworth received a letter from Lord Lonsdale offering him the post of Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland and the Penrith district of Cumberland (Reed *Middle Years* 524), a position he did secure.

At this point, it is worth considering the charge that Wordsworth was becoming more “conservative,” or that he “sold out” by accepting these patronage appointments. Certainly, ever since about 1803 he had been critically evaluating the French Revolution and his own earlier, radical commitment. Family life, and now the loss of two children,

must have had a sobering effect and perhaps forced the poet to re-evaluate his faith. Still, I do not think Wordsworth was ever the complete reactionary that some thought him: his commitment to the poor, for example, never waned, it just took on new forms in his poetry. Connected to a possible growing conservatism in the poet, too, was his continuing desire for recognition. He knew, from the reviews, what the critics did not like, but he also knew to what they responded warmly. My argument is that he modulated his works, and re-presented them, in ways that allowed for conservative readers to praise substantial parts of the work, at the same time that he continually presented the readers with the earlier and the more challenging (that is, challenging in relation to the poetic *status quo*) of his works. Early in his career, this may have meant that he reached two different audiences; later, I believe his strategy paid off, and he was well received by the majority.

Wordsworth was hard at work completing *The Excursion* for 1813, especially in the latter part of the year when he was taking on the responsibilities of his new job as well. He completed, either by composing anew or by rewriting, most of the last seven books of the poem (Reed) during this period immediately after the deaths of his children, including Book III (“Despondency”) and Book IV (“Despondency Corrected”) – the two books in which he raises the questions of death and the meaning of life and the purpose of faith, and so on. Let us review some of the main features of this poem before proceeding to an investigation of its publication and reception.

We recall that *The Excursion* was conceived as part of *The Recluse*, and composed as it is of nine “Books” and around 9000 lines of poetry, it is substantial. There are several characters in the poem, men of poetical talent who resemble various facets of Wordsworth’s past or personality:²⁰ the Wanderer/Pedlar who seems to be the main

character of the poem and who has grown up in the Scottish Borders/ Lakes region; the “I” who is ostensibly relating the events and speech of the poem; the Solitary who has retreated to the Lakes region after being disillusioned by the French Revolution, and also by losing family members; and the Pastor, living in his parish and serving the locals, but also skilled with language. These characters interact through a series of dialogues, although they are actually more like long monologues in response to each other. Still, a significant feature of the poem is that it is structured in this dialogic, give-and-take, interacting form. The mature Wordsworth has, by this time, a mature, monologic style, but he works against that through the series of dialogues in *The Excursion*.

He also brings in “voices” of the English poetic tradition, much as he had early in his career, through the references and parallels to Goldsmith and others, especially Thomas Gray’s “Elegy in a Country Churchyard.” Many of the stories the Pastor is urged to tell come from this motif of an epitaph in a rural church graveyard, and we recall that Wordsworth wrote three “Essays upon Epitaphs” during 1809-1810, publishing the first of these in *The Friend* 22 February 1810, and reprinting that essay with *The Excursion* as a note to the whole of Book V. But even our loquacious characters evoke Gray, as in this example of the Wanderer early in the poem:

Oh! many are the Poets that are sown
 By Nature; men endowed with highest gifts,
 The vision and the faculty divine;
 Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse,
 (Which, in the docile season of their youth,
 It was denied them to acquire, through lack

Of culture and the inspiring aid of books,
 Or haply by a temper too severe,
 Or a nice backwardness afraid of shame)
 Nor having e'er, as life advanced, been led
 By circumstance to take unto the height
 The measure of themselves, these favoured Beings,
 All but a scattered few, live out their time,
 Husbanding that which they possess within,
 And go to the grave, unthought of (I, 77-91).

And of course, many of the stories of the rustics in the neighbourhood, the recently buried, the funeral processions, all invoke the atmosphere and theme of the Gray poem.

In addition to the Gray allusions and the device of telling stories sparked by the epitaphs on gravestones, *The Excursion* glosses Book V with the first of Wordsworth's "Essay on Epitaphs," which actually helps us to understand the tensions between specific-general, particular-universal, and dramatic voices-monologic utterance as expressed in the poem. As Sally Bushell points out, the "Essays" represent more than a fascination with a sub-genre of writing; they also contribute to Wordsworth's overall poetic theory. First of all, in the Dales setting of *The Excursion*, there is no pretension on the part of many who have died: epitaphs are simple, if they exist at all: "These Dalesmen trust / The lingering gleam of their departed lives/ To oral record, and the silent heart" (VI, 610-612). Second, an epitaph is necessarily a generalization, a distillation, of a life, and not a life itself. This distilling and generalizing is a feature of all poetry, but

especially something Wordsworth worked on all through his career. In the “Essay,” he describes the balance to be achieved in a perfect epitaph:

It will be found to lie in a due proportion of the common or universal feeling of humanity to sensations excited by a distinct and clear conception, conveyed to the reader’s mind, of the individual, whose death is deplored and whose memory is to be preserved The general sympathy ought to be quickened, provoked, and diversified, by particular thoughts, actions, images, – circumstances of age, occupation, manner of life, prosperity which the deceased had known, or adversity to which he had been subject; and these ought to be bound together and solemnized into one harmony by the general sympathy (*Prose II: 57*).

In order to achieve this balance between the specific and the general, the common humanity of the general is emphasized:

The character of a deceased friend or beloved kinsman is not seen, no – nor ought to be seen, otherwise than as a tree through a tender haze or luminous mist, that spiritualises and beautifies it (*Prose II: 58*).

Continuing with this tree metaphor, Wordsworth indicates his awareness of the pressure towards the monologic in the epitaph:

It suffices, therefore, that the trunk and the main branches of the worth of the deceased be boldly and unaffectedly

represented. Any further detail, minutely and scrupulously pursued, especially if this be done with laborious and antithetic discriminations, must inevitably frustrate its own purpose (*Prose II*: 58).

This seems a clear statement of the epitaphic dimension to Wordsworth's poetics, and to his own poetry. Given this value that he held, the amazing thing about *The Excursion* is that he constructed it as a series of dialogues and gave the characters in the poem any voices at all! And yet, he goes even further, with several statements in the poem that parallel earlier statements, as in the "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*, about the value of rustic folk, their lives, and their language.

In Book IV, for example, the Poet interrupts the Wanderer's exposition on the nobility of pursuing a study of all things in Nature and how they interrelate with this assertion:

The dignity of life is not impaired
 By aught that innocently satisfies
 The humbler cravings of the heart; and he
 Is still a happier man, who, for those heights
 Of speculation not unfit, descends;
 And such benign affections cultivates
 Among the inferior kinds; not merely those
 That he may call his own, and which depend,
 As individual objects of regard,
 Upon his care, from whom he also looks

For signs and tokens of a mutual bond;
 But others, far beyond this narrow sphere,
 Whom, for the very sake of love, he loves.
 Nor is it a mean praise of rural life
 And solitude, that they do favour most,
 Most frequently call forth, and best sustain,
 These pure sensations (IV, 352-368).

This passage not only reasserts the value of rural people and life, but also argues that anyone, no matter how “fit for speculation,” is a better person for “descending” to understand all people. This is how the increasingly conservative Wordsworth handles his continuing humanitarian and even democratic principles in *The Excursion*: he places the Wanderer and the Poet in dialogue, with the Wanderer asserting a position almost like the Great Chain of Being, and the Poet expanding on that with a statement more along the lines of Christian virtue, community, and love.

Even more startling is the later formulation of the English body politic as a “*maternal spirit*” in Book IX, “The Discourse of the Wanderer,” connecting all strata of society, the whole being mis-aligned when one part suffers or is mistreated:

Our life is turned
 Out of her course, wherever man is made
 An offering, or a sacrifice, a tool
 Or implement, a passive thing employed

As a brute mean, without acknowledgement

Of common right or interest in the end;

Used or abused, as selfishness may prompt (IX, 113-119).

As he tries to tie together church, state, and heart, the Wanderer continues to refer to the country as a “mother” (IX, 328), and one priority to ensure that all social strata are looked after by the state, and can contribute to it, becomes clear – universal education:

- so that none,

However destitute, be left to droop

By timely culture unsustained; or run

Into a wild disorder; or be forced

To drudge through a weary life without the help

Of intellectual implements and tools;

A savage horde among the civilized,

A servile band among the lordly free! (IX, 303-310).

Universal education will provide people with “intellectual implements and tools” that will prevent people being *made into* mere implements and tools, and this will ensure that the advantages Wordsworth seems to believe England enjoys relative to other European countries around this time will continue:

- The discipline of slavery is unknown

Among us, - hence the more do we require

The discipline of virtue; order else

Cannot subsist, nor confidence, nor peace (IX, 351-354).

The Excursion then moves from this note of English nationalistic feeling back into a realistic dialogic setting among the Vicar's family, as the party undertakes a picnic, and the whole concludes anticipating the next installment of *The Recluse* in order to assess just how much the Solitary has been "healed" by the several monologues and discussions of this poem. But Wordsworth has broken away from a single, monologic voice through the dramatic form of the poem, and he has managed to reassert many of the rustic values he has put forward over the years, and for which he has received a great deal of bad press from his severest critics.

By the start of 1814, the manuscript was being prepared for publication by the family, and a new plan seems to have been formed. Dorothy lays out the plan in a letter to Catherine Cookson of 24 April:

William is actually printing 9 books of his long poem [*The Excursion*] We are all most thankful that William has brought his mind to consent to printing so much of this work; for the MSS. were in such a state that, if it had pleased Heaven to take him from this world, they would have been almost useless. I do not think the book will be *published* before next winter; but, at the same time, will come out a new edition of his poems in two Volumes Octavo, and shortly after – Peter Bell, The White Doe, and Benjamin the Waggoner (*Letters* II:2:139-40).

Now, both Dorothy and William had said these kinds of things before, but this plan, it turns out, was actually pursued: *The Excursion* (1814) was quickly followed by the

Collected Poems and *The White Doe of Rylstone* in 1815, and a few years later by *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner*. This points to a more aggressive attempt to place before the public works, both new and old, by Wordsworth.

As usual, too, Wordsworth attached paratextual material to *The Excursion* by adding both a dedicatory sonnet and a preface. In preparation for publishing *The Excursion*, Wordsworth wrote to Lord Lonsdale in June to ask if he could dedicate the poem to his now-patron. Wordsworth's desire to achieve public acceptance, as well as the effects of the dialogues within *The Excursion* as discussed above, continued the "multi-voicedness" that he established in the 1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, and that I think he developed into a public voice that was increasingly more conservative, more "establishment," than his earlier persona. Bakhtin suggests this is a typical development when poetic style, as it matures and becomes more clearly an expression of a poet's own identity and voice, "often becomes authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative, sealing itself off from the influence of extraliterary social dialects" ("Discourse in the Novel" 287). The speakers in *The Excursion*, after all, are much more sober and sound more elevated in their speech than either the earlier "lyrical ballads" in which the voices of rustics were more directly reported, or in many of the shorter lyrics in *Poems, in Two Volumes* that strove for and achieved a stylistic monologism based on simplicity. An additional effect Wordsworth achieved by periodically publishing poetry written years before, and continually revising and rearranging the earlier poetry in his canon, was to sustain this sense of speaking with several voices over the whole of his later career.

He speaks of this intention in the “Preface” to *The Excursion*, using the now-famous figure of a Gothic church, with the still-unpublished (at the time of his writing this “Preface”) *Prelude*

as the ante- chapel . . . to the body [*The Recluse*] of a Gothic church. Continuing this allusion, [the poet] may be permitted to add, that his minor Pieces, which have been long before the Public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices (*Prose* III:5-6).

Wordsworth is building a monument with his works, and all pieces relate to each other: early and late, short and epic, unrevised and revised.²¹ Further, and applicable to Wordsworth’s career in particular, is the reality that a Gothic church would have been begun by one generation, but not completed for several more; Wordsworth’s work was awaiting a new generation of readers to complete what he began.

This “Preface” is fairly short, but one thing it does is announce to the reader the relation of the present piece to the grand design of *The Recluse*, making public what has long been circulating in private among the coterie members. He also honours the formative poetic dialogue of his career with Coleridge, “a dear Friend” to whom the author is “deeply indebted.” One paragraph engages directly with the cultural dialogue by addressing some of the negative reviews Wordsworth had received in the past when he

writes that he wrote with no “system” intended; rather, if the reader engages the work with a lively and open mind, the “system” will emerge from the work. This “Preface” reaffirms the relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge that had given rise to much of Wordsworth’s early and best poetry. It also argues for the value of the shorter, lyric pieces as forming a necessary part of the whole of the author’s work, a conception he consistently held to with the continual revision and re-publication of his works. In fact, he conceives of his collected works as a set of volumes in which a reader could invest and to which he or she could continually add; his care over the published appearance of his books was all part of his clear view of what the legacy would be, in actual, material terms.

The Excursion was released after a turbulent period in Wordsworth’s life. His relationship with Coleridge, a vital part of his poetic identity, had been threatened. He had suffered profound family losses. He attempted to articulate a new poetics that may have threatened the critics in their role as mediators of literary value in the publishing industry, and may have sparked the very negative reaction to his next volume. He had finally gone on the record with a statement on a political topic, *The Convention of Cintra*. His poetic style had achieved a monologic sureness, but he continued to be dedicated to the several strata of society. Now, as he again faced the public, he had a lengthy production to offer, and a clever way of balancing the monologic with the dialogic.

Chapter 6: Modest Popularity/ Guaranteed Posterity: 1814-1820

After the publication of *The Excursion*, and during the succeeding five or six years, the reputation of William Wordsworth gradually was secured through the cultural dialogue. A series of events, some intended by Wordsworth, others accidental, conspired to ensure a sustained exposure of the author's works and ideas to the public from *The Excursion* of 1814 to the *River Duddon* collection of 1820. One of the key factors ensuring Wordsworth's success was Coleridge's reappearance in the cultural conversation with his *Biographia Literaria* in 1817. This member of the intimate group, who had been a member of the Wordsworth "family" almost since the beginning of William's career, now re-entered the public dialogue and spoke strongly in support of the poet he had seen as the successor to Milton. Coleridge's devotion to Wordsworth never waned, although Coleridge, like some of the critics, was not convinced that the Wordsworthian definition of "poetic diction" was the accurate one. Still, this sustained exposure of Wordsworth to public scrutiny kept the cultural conversation going, and it was during this period that the attacks by Jeffrey gradually had less force and Wordsworth's reputation as a poet was established. Let us, first of all, see what the professional reviews made of *The Excursion* when it came out in 1814. Not as public an audience, but an intriguing one to consider given their place in the dialogue today, is that composed of the younger canonical poets Byron, Shelley, and Keats, so we will briefly review how they reacted to the poem and to the poet.

The Excursion was published with a short preface, largely concerned with announcing the poem as the middle part of what was conceived to be a three-part production – *The Recluse*. In describing this projected plan, Wordsworth takes the

opportunity to state his “philosophy” as articulated with Coleridge some years before. He alludes to *The Prelude*, as well: “That Work, addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to whom the Author’s Intellect is deeply indebted, has long been finished” (*Prose* III:5). Wordsworth also includes in this “Preface” the 165-line “Prospectus” for *The Recluse*, which depends on a trope of the “marrying” of Nature with the Mind of humanity, but also uses repeated phrases suggesting how the poet will engage in a dialogue with his culture:

and, *by words*

*Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted . . . (58-65, emphasis added)*

Wordsworth clearly sees himself as still engaged in a public dialogue, one in which he will speak a truth that will wake up the public and rouse them to action – ultimately, to regain Paradise: “Paradise, and groves / Elysian . . . why should they be / A history only of departed things, / Or a mere fiction of what never was?” (47-51). The Prospectus identifies Wordsworth as uniquely qualified to engage his culture with this aim of renovating the imagination, and looks forward to the whole of the great work that will promote this dialogue.

But he also uses the “Preface” to *The Excursion* to directly address the critics’ complaints about his “system,” again emphasizing his awareness that he is “in conversation” with his public, and that he is fully engaging the terms of the public debate:

It is not the Author’s intention formally to announce a system: it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself (*Prose* III:6).

So we can see that, even in such a short piece of prefatory material, the context of the “Preface” includes the coterie audience, the weight of *The Recluse* project, and even references to the critics’ reactions to his previous works.

There were twelve published reviews of the poem, and many very substantial. The common topics under discussion were, first of all, the announcement of *The Recluse* project – most reviews made reference to this part of the poem’s preface. As we might expect, given the reviews of previous works, the “system,” or the poetics of the “Lake School,” come under scrutiny as well: “Part of what made Wordsworth seem so perverse to reviewers was his demonstrated ability to write in higher and more worthy modes, when not misled by the tenets of his own system” (Hess 478). By this time, too, there is some concern over Wordsworth’s choice to live a life of seclusion, removed from the big cities. Specific to *The Excursion* are discussions over the character of The Wanderer/Pedlar, and an overall recognition of the religious tone of the piece. Bushell further identifies an overall trend towards conflating all the “dramatic voices” of the

poem into the monologic utterance of Wordsworth, the poet (Bushell 3), leading to an overall dismissal of the potential meanings of the voices in dialogue. Her re-reading of the poem opens the way to better understanding how Wordsworth was continuing to incorporate the voices and lives of rustics into his work, even as he became more conservative and directive. After *The Excursion*, which attempts to bring all social strata together in one epic production, this effect was achieved largely through his mixing of genres and his organizing of poems for future publications.

First out was Hazlitt's three-part review in *The Examiner* published 21 and 28 August and 2 October 1814. This is a thoughtful review, with several long quotations, and it is overall a positive review, though not without its oversights and criticisms. Like some other critics, Hazlitt identifies the "power" of Wordsworth's intellect: "In power of intellect, in lofty conception, in the depth of feeling, at once simple and sublime, which pervades every part of it, and which gives to every object an almost preternatural and preterhuman interest, this work has seldom been surpassed" (522). At the same time, Hazlitt does recognize the egotism, and the importance of the egotism, to Wordsworth's poetry: "He only sympathises with these simple forms of feeling, which mingle at once with his own identity An intense intellectual egotism swallows up every thing" (522-23). Statements like this make clear that Hazlitt was not attuned to the dramatic or dialogic elements in the poem; he is one of those critics who assumed that Wordsworth was writing with a monologic approach and style, not trying to achieve any additional meanings through having the characters in dialogue with each other. Hazlitt does complain about the form of the poem, again mis-interpreting Wordsworth's dramatic intentions by suggesting that the "load of narrative and description" is a bit too heavy.

But he does defend Wordsworth against the charge of being too “simple”: “The extreme simplicity which some persons have objected to in Mr. Wordsworth’s poetry is to be found only in the subject and the style: the sentiments are subtle and profound” (527). This last quotation from Hazlitt shows that he is aware that Wordsworth’s power was in the presentation and sometimes reconciliation of stylistic elements both low and high: one was simple (in Hazlitt’s analysis here, that was the subject and style), but the other was profound (Hazlitt says the “sentiments”). The Hazlitt review is balanced, supportive, and perceptive – even though it strangely ends with statements revealing of Hazlitt’s own prejudices about the meanness of country people, who hate each other and have none of the advantages of city folk.

In September appeared two short mentions, one in *Variety* (892) and the other in the *New Monthly Magazine* (797). Both gave short quotations, and both complained of the length of the poem. Another influential and positive review appeared in the October 1814 *Quarterly Review*, written by Charles Lamb, although he later complained that it was revised by editor William Gifford (825). Lamb perceptively outlines the features of the poem: the “groundwork” of the poem is a series of conversations in this “almost dramatic poem” (Reiman 830); though the poem is didactic, it also contains “most interesting” stories “such as the lovers of Cowper and Goldsmith will recognise as something familiar and congenial” (Reiman 826). Lamb continues by picking out Book IV, “Despondency Corrected,” as the “most valuable” part of the poem, and suggests that critics and the public have not fully appreciated Wordsworth’s contribution simply because of its “boldness and originality” – in other words, the audience is not quite ready to understand and appreciate this work. Near the end of the review, Lamb also invokes

the terms of the ongoing cultural debate over Wordsworth's talents and value: his originality, his insistence that "mountaineers" may be of a level of humanity with readers and critics of poetry, and his presentation of "childish" subjects and characters: "We think they do not apply in the same force as the one before us" (Reiman 831). In other words, Lamb argues in this public arena that even if readers accept the criticisms of Wordsworth's past publications, this poem simply does not exhibit the same features: overall, "Lamb's review is of importance for the very reason that it articulates the response closest to the one Wordsworth might have wanted for the poem and is the most sympathetic in trying to interpret the poem's intentions" (Bushell 34). Lamb's defense of the Wordsworthian project does, however, conclude with his prescient comments on the character of the Wanderer/Pedlar: "One objection it is impossible not to foresee. It will be asked, why put such eloquent discourse in the mouth of a pedlar?" (831). This question of the verisimilitude of Wordsworth's primary narrator in *The Excursion* did, indeed, bother other critics, and by raising it here, Lamb shows that he has been and continues to be an active and perceptive participant in the cultural dialogue over Wordsworth's enduring value. He is, after all, a member of the coterie, and he is the kind of ideal reader Wordsworth writes for ("hails") in *The Excursion*.

The character of the Wanderer/Pedlar is but one complaint raised in the *Edinburgh Review* of November 1814 by Francis Jeffrey, who begins famously, "This will never do" (439). Jeffrey's assessment of Wordsworth's drawing of the Pedlar's character runs thus, answering Lamb's anticipated objection: "A man who went about selling flannel and pocket-handkerchiefs in this lofty diction, would soon frighten away his customers" (453). Again, Jeffrey's review is long and detailed, and again he adopts

the stance of a physician to the poet's diseased patient: "The case of Mr. Wordsworth, we perceive, is now manifestly hopeless; and we give him up as altogether incurable, and beyond the power of criticism" (439). The work is, on the one hand, too dependent on "trite" incidents and "low" objects, but on the other hand Jeffrey complains that the style of *The Excursion* is too elevated to be representative of Wordsworth's "system." These attempts to "catch Wordsworth" at playing fast and loose with his own rules hint at a deeper distrust of the poet and his system: that he does not practice what he preaches, and is therefore suspect as being either aesthetically or ethically dishonest. Jeffrey goes on to complain that the poem seems to depend on common truths that Wordsworth has overwrought into "mystified phrases": "this is but the beginning of the raving fit" (444). Jeffrey basically passes judgement on the whole of Wordsworth's literary career as a failed enterprise, but one on which the poet will not give up or which he will not attempt to correct in any way. But even Francis Jeffrey, the critic who seems to have become the personification of bad reviews for Wordsworth himself, must conclude of the poet, "the truth is, that Mr Wordsworth, with all his perversities, is a person of great powers" (446). The further irony here is that Jeffrey has identified precisely the double-voiced structure I am examining: common truths, and simple characters and incidents at one level, but a majestic, controlling, assertive poetic style at another. Like many other critics of his day, Jeffrey's "ear" was attuned to both registers, but he found them discordant. History has shown, however, that Wordsworth's great triumph was to maintain both registers and appeal not exclusively to those who appreciated his early work, nor to those who responded positively to his sonnets, but to create an entire "Works" that presented a rich heteroglossia of social and poetical dialects.

Even though Wordsworth had long given up reading reviews of his own work (or so he claimed), the negative feedback, we can assume, got back to him from some source or other. After this first engagement between critics, William sought reassurances from the coterie of his family and friends. For example, in a letter to his brother Christopher, the clergyman, of 26 November 1814, Wordsworth even wonders if his brother has *received* the work from his publisher: “Not hearing from you I had some apprehensions (as the Booksellers are not the most attentive persons in the world to directions given them) that my intentions in sending you *The Excursion* might not have been fulfilled” (*Letters* II:2:170). The letter goes on to express a certain satisfaction that the poem has been received so positively among the clergy: “I hear from many quarters high commendations and not a few from the members of your Profession. Yesterday I had a letter from Sir George Beaumont in which he says the Bishop of London is enchanted with the *Excursion*, and indeed I hear but one opinion on the subject!” (*Letters* II:2:170-71). Wordsworth’s confident stance is also echoed in a letter to long-time friend Catherine Clarkson, to whom he wrote on New Year’s Eve [1814]: “I believe the poem *has* received a powerful band of fresh admirers, but not powerful as to the *Sale*” (*Letters* II:2:183). Other communication with friends and family consoled Wordsworth with assurances that the poem was well received among a select audience, and that it was selling reasonably well.²²

This more intimate level of conversation among his coterie went on between the first initial rush of reviews and those that followed after a couple of months in early 1815. At the same time, the gap allowed the later reviewers to assess what the first wave of critics had to say about *The Excursion*, and gives the latter reviews an air of being,

indeed, part of a conversation. For example, the *Eclectic Review* of January 1815 carried a review by James Montgomery that picked up on the debate over the credibility of Wordsworth's first speaker in the poem, the Pedlar: "It was one of the most daring experiments in modern poetry, to make a *quondam* Pedlar the hero of 'a literary work, that might live;' and we will venture to say it has been one of the most successful" (359). Montgomery's review is a positive one, and also long and detailed, giving several quotations and a summary of the plot book-by-book as well. The spiritual tone of the work seems very important to Montgomery, who describes Wordsworth's devotion to nature in a deistic way, and, in fact, later in the essay complains that Wordsworth's Christianity is not explicit enough (355). Montgomery applauds the work as "the fruit of long labour, experience, and meditation, directed by sovereign genius, and executed with consummate skill" (355). Wordsworth seems, from this reviewer's perspective, to have achieved his long-term goal of writing a "philosophical poem," for Montgomery praises the style as "more intellectual" than that of Wordsworth's contemporaries. But, like so many reviewers, he notes the inconsistency between that style and the one pronounced in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, stating simply that the style is "in contradiction to his own theory" (358), furthering the strain of reaction that accuses Wordsworth of aesthetic dishonesty – of trying to have things both ways.

A review by John Herman Merivale in the *Monthly Review* for February 1815 was non-committal, but clearly continued the cultural conversation as it quoted other reviews that had already appeared. Like some others, the review gives plot summaries of the nine books that comprise the poem, and provides many quotations. Merivale accuses Wordsworth of "affectation" in his insistence on simple subjects, but does grant that "we

are on the whole disposed to consider the blank verse of Mr. Wordsworth as one of the nearest approaches that has yet been made to the majesty of Milton We wish that Mr. W. would condescend to the imitation of his mighty master in points of yet higher importance!” (733).

In the middle of the larger cultural conversation came a personal interchange with one of his closest and most trusted readers, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge wrote to Lady Beaumont, on 3 April 1815, requesting that she return the fair copy of his poem “To William Wordsworth”; that is, the poem he composed immediately after hearing Wordsworth recite *The Prelude* in 1807. In this same letter, he responds to an apparent question of hers:

Of the Excursion, excluding the tale of the ruined Cottage,
which I have ever thought the finest Poem in our Language,
comparing it with any of the same or similar Length, I can
truly say, that one half the number of it’s Beauties would
make all the beauties of all his Contemporary Poets
collectively mount to the balance; but yet – the fault may be
in my own mind – I do not think, I did not feel, it equal to
the Work on the Growth of his own spirit (*STC Letters*
IV:564).

Lady Beaumont showed the contents of this letter to Wordsworth, who apparently took the comments on *The Excursion* as negative criticism. And, of course, Coleridge’s request for his own poem, and the comparison of *The Excursion* with *The Prelude*, raised

the whole issue of *The Recluse* project, referred to, of course, in the “Preface” to *The Excursion*, but still unfinished – and that which was finished, unpublished.

Wordsworth’s reply to Coleridge (22 May 1815) made it sound as if publication of *The Prelude*, or, indeed, of *The Recluse*, might be imminent:

Let me beg out of kindness to me that you would relinquish the intention of publishing the Poem addressed to me after hearing *mine* to you. The commendation would be injurious to us both, and my work when it appears, would labour under a great disadvantage in consequence of such a precursorship of Praise (*Letters* II:2:238).

Coleridge wrote back, trying to explain why he had asked for the return of the manuscript poem (he was “making a *Mss* Collection of *all* [his] poems, publishable or unpublishable” [*STC Letters* IV:572]) and went on to a long discussion of *The Excursion*: “But what did my criticism amount to, reduced to it’s [*sic*] full and naked Sense? – This: that *comparatively* with the *former* Poem the excursion, as far as it was new to me, had disappointed my expectations” (*STC Letters* IV:572-3). Coleridge then reviews what he had thought for years would be the plan of the entire project, including subject matter and the “Philosophical Poem” tag for genre or style. The general point here is that Coleridge is disappointed with *The Excursion* when compared to the plan of *The Recluse*, the unpublished *Prelude* and other earlier works – he is disappointed, we might say, that Wordsworth’s promise as a poet has not yet been realized. Other readers and critics, of course, reacted the same way to *The Excursion*, comparing it to the earlier published poetry. The public announcement of *The Recluse* in the “Preface” to *The Excursion*, as

well as this detailed reminder of the looming impossibility of completing the project, must have forced Wordsworth's hand on *The Recluse* project shortly after this exchange. Wordsworth had, however, already proposed an alternative in the same preface that for the first time publicly announced *The Recluse*: his entire collected work was a cathedral made up of all pieces of his poetic achievement.

Meanwhile, the more public cultural conversation continued as well. After a brief "puff" in the May 1815 *Belle Assemblée*, the May 1815 review in *British Critic* condemned Wordsworth's seclusion as a member of the Lake School, complained that Wordsworth adhered to his "system" too much, and also that he ignored readers' needs. Like so many other reviews of *The Excursion*, this one uses lengthy quotes and a summary of action book by book. On a positive note, this one does defend Wordsworth's use of the Pedlar character, in effect directly answering the criticism of Jeffrey:

[C]ertainly, they who feel no delight in the sublimities of
 this man's song, and the devout and affecting feelings
 which he utters, merely because he is called a pedlar, must
 needs be the slaves of names to an extraordinary degree,
 and that is a kind of service not very manly nor very
 philosophical (Reiman 143).

Wordsworth's use of the Pedlar had polarized the critical opinion along class lines: some readers found him simply incredible because his language and experience did not match his history, while others accepted Wordsworth's experiment of mixing strata of social class and linguistic dialects.

By the time of the August 1815 *Augustan Review*, both *The White Doe of Rylstone* and the 1815 collected *Poems* were also published, so a notice of all three appeared that was merely descriptive of the action of the nine books of *The Excursion* (28-30).

The *British Review* for August 1815 joined the conversation with a strong defense of Wordsworth in very “Wordsworthian” terms, by which I mean written by someone who understood, as Lamb did, Wordsworth’s emphasis on the reader’s active role in the poetic process:

To this poem it is necessary that the reader should bring a portion of the same meditative disposition, innocent tastes, calm affections, reverential feelings, philosophic habits, which characterize the poet himself; for readers of another kind we greatly fear, (and we deeply sympathize in the author’s shame and mortification,) that this poem ‘will never do’ (Reiman 227).

This last reference shows clearly that this review acts as part of a cultural conversation or dialogue as it takes up its defense of Wordsworth against Jeffrey and other critics who are not fit readers: “the fault imputed to the poet might probably be the fault of his readers” (228). This review chooses the “Lucy” poems as examples of fine poetry that had already been misread by many critics. Much like Wordsworth himself, the reviewer in this case asserts his confidence that the poet will find his readership, even if it is in the future: “his page will live, when the breath of criticism shall have perished” (230), because even if

“the present age be not fitted to receive his poem with reverence and gratitude, that age assuredly will come” (234).

Our final example of a contemporary review of *The Excursion* is the incomplete one by William Allen in *The Philanthropist*, 1815. Allen quotes from the poem’s “Preface” and “Prospectus” to *The Recluse*, suggesting the reader will be anticipating the completion of this project. The review covers some of the incidents and characters of the first four books, saying of Book I (*The Ruined Cottage*) that it “abounds with simplicity and pathos naturally arising from the subjects it embraces” (807). Wordsworth’s writing is compared favourably to Milton’s, as well. This review ends after discussion of Book IV, and was to be continued, but never was completed.

The tide of public opinion was slowly turning. *The Excursion*, while it did not please everyone, at least could not be dismissed as childish or frivolous, as many of the poems in the *Poems, in Two Volumes* had been. Almost all critics recognized that Wordsworth was a “genius,” if only in flashes. The true prejudices were beginning to appear more clearly as prejudices: dismissals of the Wanderer/Pedlar character were clearly based on political leanings and conceptions of class; criticisms of Wordsworth’s “system” were losing their power as his stylistic range clearly extended beyond any such system.

But there were other projects beyond *The Excursion* that contributed to the establishment of Wordsworth’s reputation. His analogy of the Gothic church in the “Preface” to *The Excursion* made it clear that his legacy would rest upon his entire canon, so collections and selections of his work would become even more important. For example, Wordsworth had long thought of publishing his shorter poems according to

some organizing principle. We saw that he arranged the *Poems, in Two Volumes* into seven groups of poems, and as far back as 1809 he had laid out a detailed scheme in a letter to Coleridge that involved seven classifications, loosely arranged in relation to the stages of one's life: 1) poems relating to childhood; 2) poems relating "to the fraternal affections, to friendship and to love and to all those emotions, which follow after childhood, in youth and early manhood"; 3) natural objects and how they influence the mind; 4) poems on the naming of places; 5) poems relating to "social and civic duties"; 6) poems relating to maternal feeling; and 7) poems relating to old age (*Letters* II:1:334-336). In the letter to Coleridge, he also gives suggestions of which poems might fit in which categories, and within at least the first of these divisions, he also planned to arrange the poems on a scale from simple to more imaginative. One grouping of poems that might exemplify this use of different categories is the "Lucy" poems. The first four of these ("A slumber did my spirit seal," "She dwelt among th'untrodden ways," "Strange fits of passion have I known," and "Three years she grew in sun and shower") were composed in Goslar and published in the second edition (1800) of the *Lyrical Ballads* – three ("Strange fits," "She dwelt," and "A slumber") together as a group in the second volume and the fourth ("Three years") later on by itself. After he wrote a fifth "Lucy" poem, "I travelled unknown among men" (published in the *Poems, in Two Volumes*), he published only three of them, and in different categories, in the 1815 *Poems*: "Strange fits" in the class of Poems Founded on the Affections and "Three years" and "A slumber" in Poems of the Imagination. This emerging "theory of collection," which we saw as far back as the arrangement of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, and certainly the 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes*, guided Wordsworth's next publication, the 1815

Poems, and every collection thereafter as the collective works became the vehicle Wordsworth conceived as establishing his poetic identity (Curtis, “Arnold” 55).

One added feature of the 1815 *Poems* further exemplifying Wordsworth’s theory of collection and its importance to presenting the whole “Wordsworthian project” was the category of “Juvenile Pieces,” which allowed him to return to his earliest two publications, *Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk* from 1793. Both were published now as extracts only, and as Averill writes, “[t]hey are meant to be taken as portraits of the young poet’s mind, as emblems of a dead self that is the object at once of condescension and of nostalgia” (Averill 16). Some of the revisions Wordsworth made to the poems included dropping the affected spellings of words like “mov’d” or “clos’d” in favour of the usual spellings, as well as omitting most of the notes he had felt compelled to write for the publications. These were the notes that explained to his assumed audience of 1793 matters like the location of “Chamouny,” the nature of the Swiss Alps, and the specific travelogue-like descriptions of paths, views, and so on. We can conclude that some of these changes were made because Wordsworth realized his audience no longer needed all the glosses he had once provided, but some of them were made because the now-confident and mature poet saw that his earlier conception of himself as Minstrel (a la Beattie) had led him into what were indeed affectations – a derivative style that he had now outgrown.

In addition to the categorizing, the filling out of the canon, and the revisions based on a more mature, less affected style, there were also deletions of poems from this and subsequent editions. As a general observation on Wordsworth’s revising for the 1815 *Poems*, we note that he did respond to the public criticism of the shorter lyric poems from

Poems, in Two Volumes: “In the eight years before [the *P2V* poems] were reprinted, and on the occasion of subsequent editions, he revised many of them to temper their ‘simplicity’ and even banished several of them” (Curtis 34).²³ Wordsworth continued to be actively engaged in the public dialogue over his poetic contribution, and this category of adjustments shows that he was responsive to some of the harsh criticism to which he had been subjected. That he was indeed aware of the criticism, and that he responded to it, makes even clearer the notion that Wordsworth was engaged in a conversation with his larger culture, and that he adapted his style somewhat at the same time that he was attempting to shape public taste.

This conversation or dialogue was playing itself out in broad terms between a group of publishers and professional critics who resisted many of the subtle radical challenges Wordsworth was making on the one hand – challenges to the definition of “poetry,” to the appropriate public body to determine a poet’s worth, and even to the kind of people about whom a poet could write – and on the other, Wordsworth, his coterie, and publishers and professional critics who supported his challenges to the *status quo*. So the reputation of William Wordsworth emerged from this negotiation between *self-fashioning* attempts and attempts by others at *fashioning* the poet and his worth. Yet another significant contribution to the Wordsworthian *self-fashioning* project at this point was the “Preface” that he wrote to accompany the 1815 *Poems*, and especially the further “Essay, Supplemental.” Newlyn suggests that the bad reviews of *Poems, in Two Volumes* led Wordsworth to attempt to control even more tightly the reception of his next publication, such that he adopted this two-pronged attack: “*Poems* (1815) had both a directive Preface, explaining the volume’s internal categorization of poetic faculties, and

an ‘Essay Supplementary to the Preface’ proclaiming the poet’s immunity to hostile reception” (Newlyn 94). The “Preface” looks more like a true preface to a collection of poems, while the “Essay, Supplemental” carries with it more of the defensiveness of Wordsworth’s position in the ongoing cultural conversation. The reviews that seemed most on Wordsworth’s mind were those of Jeffrey in *The Edinburgh Review*. He blamed poor sales and his lack of popularity on Jeffrey’s reviews, especially. We can read the “Preface” to the *Poems* as Wordsworth’s contribution to the current conversation around Imagination and Fancy, and the “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface” as Wordsworth’s latest response in the conversation or argument over his own value in contributing to his culture.

Wordsworth’s “Preface” opens with him describing the qualities of a good poet, and, because he is trying out his classification system in this collection, he suggests ways in which a poet’s productions might be categorized: poems may “with propriety be arranged either with reference to the powers of mind *predominant* in the production of them; or to the mould in which they are cast; or, lastly, to the subjects to which they relate” (*Prose* III:28) – surely not an exhaustive list, but helpful in gaining an understanding of Wordsworth’s categorization. These criteria reflect the categories Wordsworth is himself using for this volume, as “Poems Proceeding from Sentiment and Reflection” might be taken as an example of “the powers of mind during production” of the poems; “Epitaphs” could be a representative genre of the second category; and “Poems Referring to the Period of Old Age” a category that presents poems arranged according to their subject. The first one also refers to the distinction of Imagination from Fancy, a critical distinction of the time and one that Wordsworth uses for two of his

categories (“Poems of the Fancy” and “Poems of the Imagination”). Wordsworth’s definitions draw on Coleridge’s, and he gives several examples of “the imaginative” in order to persuade the reader that his work ought to reside alongside, say, Milton’s and Shakespeare’s.

As he articulates the writer-reader relationship in this essay, he moves even further away from his attempts to renovate his readership, as seen first in the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*. The requisite terms of that relationship are established in this “Preface,” in Bakhtinian terms, as Wordsworth discusses the line from Milton, “So seemed the flying Fiend”: “‘So seemed,’ and to whom seemed? To the heavenly Muse who dictates the poem, to the eye of the Poet’s mind, and to that of the Reader, present at one moment” (*Prose* III:34): the poet of Imagination creates the aesthetic moment that, in turn, creates an emotional response in the reader, and the whole is like a conversation at which writer, ideal reader, and actual reader are all present. Near the end of the “Preface,” we sense the attacks from which Wordsworth is particularly smarting, as he declares his value as it is derived from the quality of Imagination:

justified by recollection of the insults which the ignorant,
the incapable, and the presumptuous, have heaped upon
these and my other writings, I may be permitted to
anticipate the judgment of posterity upon myself . . . I have
given in these unfavourable times, evidence of exertions of
this faculty (*Prose* III:35).

In the 1815 “Preface,” Wordsworth has not only defined “imagination,” but he has also identified it as a necessary, even sufficient, condition of genius, *and* has claimed that he possesses imagination. His training in syllogistic reasoning has stood him in good stead:

Premise 1: All great poets possess imagination.

Premise 2: Wordsworth possesses imagination.

Conclusion: Wordsworth is a great poet.

The “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface,” written about the same time as the “Preface,” takes a more direct aim at Jeffrey and *The Edinburgh Review*, and, therefore, constitutes a key part of the ongoing cultural conversation. When it first came out in 1815, it opened with a very defensive first paragraph, quoted here in full:

By this time, I trust that the judicious Reader, who has now first become acquainted with these poems, is persuaded that a very senseless outcry has been raised against them and their Author. – Casually, and very rarely only, do I see any periodical publication, except a daily newspaper; but I am not wholly unacquainted with the spirit in which my most active and persevering Adversaries have maintained their hostility; nor with the impudent falsehoods and base artifices to which they have had recourse. These, as implying a consciousness on their parts that attacks honestly and fairly conducted would be unavailing, could not but have been regarded by me with triumph; had they been accompanied with such display of talents and

information as might give weight to the opinions of the Writers, whether favourable or unfavourable. But the ignorance of those who have chosen to stand forth as my enemies, as far as I am acquainted with their enmity, has unfortunately been still more gross than their disingenuousness, and their incompetence more flagrant than their malice. The effect in the eyes of the discerning is indeed ludicrous; yet, contemptible as such men are, in return for the forced compliment paid me by their long-continued notice (which, as I have appeared so rarely before the public, no one can say has been solicited) I entreat them to spare themselves. The lash, which they are aiming at my productions, does, in fact, only fall on phantoms of their own brain; which, I grant, I am innocently instrumental in raising. – By what fatality the orb of my genius (for genius none of them seem to deny me) acts upon these men like the moon upon a certain description of patients, it would be irksome to inquire; nor would it consist with the respect which I owe myself to take further notice of opponents whom I internally despise (*Prose* III:64).

Even though it was excised from all further published versions of the “Essay,” this paragraph records an historical moment in the cultural dialogue. He appeals

to the judicious, but perhaps naïve readership with which he wants to connect. He also very clearly identifies his main grievances with the “Adversaries” (critics) who have been attacking his works ever since *Poems, in Two Volumes*. Fed up with the existing model in which the critics mediate his public reception, Wordsworth posits a model “which puts each reader in direct, almost private relationship with the author” (Hess 479). As well, his assertion that “none of [the critics] seem to deny me [genius]” is a revealing piece of his self-justification. On a final note, it seems clear that the one feature of the cultural debate by which the participants are described as “diseased” is picked up by Wordsworth here when he suggests his genius inflicts a kind of *lunacy* on some critics. Not present in the enduring version of the “Essay, Supplemental,” this opening paragraph illustrates the conversational dimension of its cultural moment.

Key to Wordsworth’s project is the defining (or creating) of a good readership, the constituents of which must have “a mind at once poetical and philosophical,” but also those who best combine a youthful quality of appreciation for poetry with more mature reflection:

[T]hose and those only, who, never having suffered their youthful love of poetry to remit much of its force, have applied to the consideration of the laws of this art the best power of their understandings (*Prose* III:66).

In other words, birth and standing no longer matter – in Wordsworth’s conception, the ideal Reader is justified by education and imaginative engagement alone. But we get the impression that Wordsworth is also writing of his own work with this trope of the

passionate young “reader” tempered by the maturer, reflective “reader” of later years. In other words, the volume at hand is part of the maturer Wordsworth’s attempts to reflect, revise, categorize, and incorporate the younger poet’s work/identity into the poetical self that he hopes will carry forward into the future. That is, of course, his ultimate desire, as Wordsworth continues the “Essay” with his own version of literary history, concentrating on public neglect of authors like Milton, but also Shakespeare, as if Shakespeare was not appreciated in his own lifetime, or was “writing down” to his audience in order to make a living: “[The] essay is essentially a polemical history of English literature as a spiritual progression toward the works of William Wordsworth” (Johnston 739). In his version of the continuing dialogism of “English literary history,” Wordsworth is clearly aligning himself with the canonical authors, but also casting their biographies in the light of his own experience. Like any poet, he began his career by attempting to find a poetic “voice” in dialogue with the tradition; now, having achieved his own voice or style, he openly, publicly, places himself in that tradition.

Another of Wordsworth’s strategies is to admit the poor reviews he has received, but to reiterate his faith in his own power of imagination and to console himself that his imaginative labour has not been entirely in vain – indeed, that it has created cultural value:

The love, the admiration, the indifference, the slight, the aversion, and even the contempt, with which these Poems have been received, knowing, as I do, the source within my own mind, from which they have proceeded, and the labour and pains, which, when labour and pains appeared needful,

have been bestowed upon them, must all, if I think consistently, be received as pledges and tokens, bearing the same general impression, though widely different in value;- they are all proofs that for the present time I have not laboured in vain (*Prose* III:80).

The last part of Wordsworth's debate with Jeffrey and the critics introduces the distinction between a conceived ideal of a democratic and informed "people" versus a select, elite, high-profile "public" represented by the critics who manage to get their views published:

Still more lamentable is his error who can believe that there is any thing of divine infallibility in the clamour of that small though loud portion of the community, ever governed by factitious influence, which, under the name of the PUBLIC, passes itself, upon the unthinking, for the PEOPLE (*Prose* III:84).

While a statement such as this takes direct aim at Francis Jeffrey and his ilk, it also allows Wordsworth to do away with "popularity" as a criterion for stature, thereby neutralizing or at least problematizing the claims of Scott and Byron, the two contemporaries most often compared to Wordsworth in the contemporary cultural conversation. Of course, the criticism here is that Wordsworth re-situates his work and its reception into a future that may never come, by an audience that may never materialize:

When he calls for a Reader who will answer the Writer's 'power' with a matching power of response, in the 1815

“Essay”, he envisions a purely symbolic exchange that must stand in place of degraded commodity exchanges the middle-class public has become all too accustomed to accept Wordsworth must ultimately produce the most paradoxical sense of ‘literature’ – a discourse which can be ‘received’ only in the absence of a real social audience. Wordsworth’s effort to remake the existing audience of 1800 ends, in 1815, by inventing an audience in imagination he was unable to form in the world (Klancher 142-3).

While this may have been the case in 1815, it did not remain so for all of Wordsworth’s life – he did gain a “real social audience.” However, Klancher is right that the Reader as posited in the 1815 “Essay” helped inscribe the Romantic ideology as something transcendent and ahistorical; he points out that M. H. Abrams, for one, “canonizes” Wordsworth:

Strikingly, it is the 1815 Essay through which Abrams reads Wordsworth, the text that projects both a humble-sublime mingling of styles and also sanctions a ‘Reader’ apart from any historical audience in which he must be otherwise inscribed (Klancher 148).

Eventually, though, Wordsworth did gain a following during his lifetime – partly because he outlived the criticism. But even more important, the poet created an imaginative “space” in his writings for his readers and, by maintaining his demands for engagement

by his readers, at the same time that he was educating them to accept his poems, he was able to create a reading experience where readers felt themselves part of the Wordsworth coterie.

There were very few reviews of the *Collected Poems* 1815. The reviews that did appear often mentioned the “Preface” and the “Essay, Supplemental” – surely an index of their importance in the cultural dialogue. The *Augustan Review* of August 1815, for example, mostly just described the categories into which Wordsworth had placed the poems, but also attempted to summarize the arguments of the “Preface” and the “Essay.” Similarly, the *Monthly Review* of 1815 quoted some of the poems, but also a fair number of passages from the “Preface” and the “Essay.” This review, though, was clearly negative about the older, more rustic poems, complaining of their childishness and asking why Wordsworth would even re-publish them. Notable in the continuing emergence of Wordsworth’s public persona and assertion of his own authoritative style, however, was the continuing recognition that he speaks in more than one “register”: the sonnets in this collection, for example, are praised even if the lyric poetry is condemned: “Why will Mr. Wordsworth ever be so untrue to himself, as to desert the manly and vigorous style of this burst of poetry? [quotes ‘A Prophecy – February 1807’]” (738). Even at this date, Wordsworth is seen as a poet of talent and genius, but unfortunately one who wastes his time by insisting on writing about low, trivial, or just plain “unfit,” subjects. Wordsworth, in response, will modify and change some of his poems, but, because he has a use for them, he will not throw away those early compositions and publications.

Even more interesting to the student of literary history than the conversational interchange between Wordsworth and his various readers and reviewers is the influence

of *The Excursion* and the 1815 *Poems* on the younger Romantic poets Byron, Percy Shelley, and Keats. While it is certain that all had read at least some of the elder poet's earlier works (*Lyrical Ballads* and *Poems, in Two Volumes*, especially), *The Excursion* and the collected *Poems* with their prefaces signaled contemporary works, utterances by a revered poet spoken to them at that time. Certainly, as younger poets just entering adulthood as these two publications were released, it was easier for Byron, Shelley, and Keats to see *themselves* as engaged dialogically with the older poet. Byron, as the oldest, had already reviewed Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), and had mocked Wordsworth's simple subject matter and egotism in his 1809 *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*:

Next comes the dull disciple of thy school,
 That mild apostate from poetic rule,
 The simple WORDSWORTH, framer of a lay
 As soft as evening in his favourite May
 . . . And each adventure so sublimely tells,
 That all who view the 'idiot in his glory',
 Conceive the Bard the hero of the story (175-78; 192-94).

Any regard Wordsworth may have felt for Byron as a poet seems to have disappeared after the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* had appeared in 1812; as he wrote to John Scott in April of 1816: "Let me only say one word upon Lord B. The man is insane; and will probably end his career in a mad-house. I never thought him anything else since his first appearance in public" (304).

Byron's most famous contribution to the cultural dialogue is the most public, appearing, as it did, in the "Dedication" to the immensely popular *Don Juan*. The response was not immediate – *Don Juan* was first published in 1819. However, given some of Byron's criticisms of Wordsworth's poetry as far back as 1807, *Don Juan* truly extends a cultural dialogue, and is itself structured rather like a conversation, for years directly addressing and engaging an audience that is demanding his continuing publication of the Spanish lover's adventures. What Byron has to say is, naturally, very witty, and also perceptive, although he does repeatedly fall into *ad hominem* attacks. He shows a good knowledge of some of the key criticisms of Wordsworth and the Lake Poets as enunciated in the continuing cultural conversation: verses IV to IX, for example, manage to cover the "system," the seclusion of the "Lakers," the egotism, the job collecting taxes, and even the idea of gaining popularity at some uncertain point in the future, all in just over 40 lines. Of course, there is some influence on Byron by Wordsworth, most notably in the third canto of *Childe Harold*, composed while he was being "dose[d] . . . with Wordsworth physic" by Shelley in 1816, and the records of the two poets' meetings suggest that Wordsworth was charmed by Byron personally in 1812 (Reed 498), and that an 1815 meeting left Byron feeling "reverence" (McGann). But writing in 1819, and *publicly*, Byron sides with the more conservative critics who claim that the Wordsworthian "system" is a muddle, and that Wordsworth's egotism prevents his admitting of a public taste different from his own. Byron, though, even lists his own candidates for posterity, and we note the particular irony that, when it comes to poetry, Wordsworth is undoubtedly read more than Scott, Rogers, Campbell, Moore, or Crabbe, and probably even Byron, although the very placement of such a judgment within *Don*

Juan makes it many times more visible than a similar judgment by, say, Francis Jeffrey. Byron's comments contributed to what persisted as the nineteenth-century "split" between the two schools of "Byronists" and "Wordsworthians."

The contributions of the other two younger canonical poets, Percy Shelley and John Keats, would not fully contribute to the cultural conversation for some time, given that, unlike Byron, neither enjoyed a wide readership during his lifetime. However, since *The Excursion* seems a key text in the two younger poets' own poetic identity formation, this is the appropriate point to sketch some of their reactions. Further, in opposition to Byron's very public pronouncements, which aligned him clearly with some of the major "anti-Wordsworth" critics of the time, Shelley's and Keats's poetical responses to Wordsworth's work created small-scale "nodes" of cultural transmission parallel to Wordsworth's own coterie, although they did not engage directly with the older poet, nor influence the larger conversation until later in the nineteenth century.

Percy Shelley certainly admired Wordsworth, and was hoping to meet the older poet when he went to the Lake District around January 1812. He had plans to meet all of the Lake Poets (Southey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth), but, in the end, only met Southey. As Blank points out in his study *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley*, Shelley's disappointment at missing Wordsworth left the younger writer to work out his relationship, and disappointment, with the precursor poet through his own writings, both poetry and prose. *The Excursion* was crucial to this working out. The famous entry from Mary Shelley's journal for 14 September 1814 reads, "Shelley . . . brings home Wordsworth's *Excursion*, of which we read a part; much disappointed. He is a slave" (*MWS Letters* I:80-81). Shelley's public utterances of his disappointment are in the 1816

volume *Alastor, or, The Spirit of Solitude: and Other Poems*. The title poem itself is a sort of parable of the dangers of the poet becoming too absorbed in his own solitude and creative power, to the point of forsaking the world, and ultimately of death. It is prefaced by the sonnet “To Wordsworth”:

Poet of Nature, thou hast wept to know
 That things depart which never may return:
 Childhood and youth, friendship and love's first glow,
 Have fled like sweet dreams, leaving thee to mourn.
 These common woes I feel. One loss is mine
 Which thou too feel'st, yet I alone deplore.
 Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine
 On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar:
 Thou hast like to a rock-built refuge stood
 Above the blind and battling multitude:
 In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
 Songs consecrate to truth and liberty,--
 Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve,
 Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be.

Entering into the cultural conversation in this poem, Shelley establishes the “two Wordsworths” theory: a powerful early voice, speaking with integrity, is lost (basically dead, in Shelley's terms) and, if it continues at all, it is now replaced with a different voice now. Shelley's rejection of Wordsworth is ultimately vital to his establishing his own poetic identity: “virtually all of Shelley's major poetry comes after his apparent

disappointment with Wordsworth, and specifically with *The Excursion*” (*Wordsworth’s Influence on Shelley* 45-6). Shelley’s experience of Wordsworth’s poetry shows that he is perceptive to the double-voicedness; unfortunately, Shelley’s disappointment with Wordsworth’s politics, and with the sense of a declining, aging poet, leads him to view Wordsworth as two separate *personae*: the former he recognizes as a poet of power, while the latter he rejects. Shelley, in other words, does not perceive the “multi-voicedness” of Wordsworth’s work from 1807 but rather suggests a qualitative breach between the early poetry and the later, and he attributes it to a decline in poetic power and a shift in political attitudes. I, on the other hand, want to insist that Wordsworth kept a “multi-vocal” effect in play throughout his career by a variety of strategies.

The young John Keats also was influenced by Wordsworth. Keats, too, had an ambivalent relationship with the older poet, perceptively picking out Wordsworth’s egotism, but also lionizing him. This extract from a letter to brothers George and Tom dated 21 February 1818, gives a flavour of this ambivalence: “I am sorry that Wordsworth has left a bad impression where-ever he visited in Town – by his egotism, Vanity and bigotry – yet he is a great Poet if not a Philosopher” (*Keats Letters* I:237). In fact, Keats was one of the few readers who responded favourably to *The Excursion*, stating, again to his brothers, “if there [are] three things superior in the modern world, they [are] ‘The Excursion.’ ‘Haydon’s pictures’ & ‘Hazlitt’s depth of Taste’” (*Keats Letters* I:204-5). Wordsworth and Keats even met a couple of times through Haydon in December 1817, and the younger poet clearly looked up to the “sage of the Lakes”: “When he sent Wordsworth his own first volume, *Poems* (1817), the inscription, ‘To W. Wordsworth with the Author’s sincere Reverence’, was not a formality but a genuine

acknowledgement of indebtedness by one who was so steeped in Wordsworth's poetry that his own high conception of the poetic life was largely shaped by it" (Gill 326). Beth Lau's study of Keats's reading of the Romantic poets details specific references and allusions in Keats's work that show the influence of Wordsworth's writing on the younger poet. Jack Stillinger summarizes the connection more succinctly when he describes *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil* as basically a "lyrical ballad":

[C]omplete with deranged heroine, excited narrator, direct address to the reader, balladic refrain, and, for a main interest, depiction of 'the primary laws of our nature' (as Wordsworth described his own 'principal object' in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*) 'chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement' (69).

We can see that the younger poets all had to engage with the older Wordsworth, and how they related to him was very complex. Some of this complexity surely arose because they were reacting to different registers of the personal heteroglossic language that Wordsworth had created.

The next publication in Wordsworth's sustained run of public presentation was *The White Doe of Rylstone*, the composition of which had begun in late Fall of 1807 (Reed *Middle Years* 45). Wordsworth had completed a draft by mid-January of 1808 (*Middle Years* 45), but then publication came to be delayed by a series of bad decisions and miscommunications. Coleridge was also worried that the metre of the poem might be mistaken for an imitation of Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (published 1805), when,

as far as he was concerned, the poem was more derivative of the as-yet-unpublished *Christabel*. To broadcast that fact, however, would undermine Scott's claim to originality – so Samuel didn't know what to tell William. Wordsworth disagreed on all counts: by 18 May 1808, he had written to Longman to prevent altogether the publication of *The White Doe* (Reed *Middle Years* 377-387). About a year later, Dorothy's letters record that William returned to the poem, largely from a household context of needing money. A letter of 1 May 1809 to DeQuincey announced the impending publication of *The White Doe*, to be followed by the publication of *Peter Bell* and *Benjamin the Waggoner* (both of which were not published until 1819), as well as a plan to write for a newspaper (*Letters* II:1 325). We should not presume that Wordsworth was only concerned about writing for “the market,” but he must have been a bit envious of the successes of Scott. *The White Doe* sat unpublished for another six years – until it became another part of Wordsworth's public positioning in the cultural dialogue in 1814-1815 with its publication on 2 June 1815. Thus, its publication history provides an interesting insight into a group of poems that Wordsworth wrote, or of which he wrote substantial parts/versions earlier in his career, but to which he now began to turn to provide “new” exposure to the public. In making what had been *coterie poems* into *public poems*, he seems not merely desperate for something to publish, but clearly, we might even say stubbornly, insistent on his principles as outlined in the 1800 “Preface” and exemplified by the poetry of the 1807 *Poems, in Two Volumes* – insistent on his status as Lake Poet, and on his definition of poetry and poet, on his poetic authority and his commitment to the inclusion of rustic characters and language in his work – all the while providing challenges to his “system” as well.

The highly imaginative *White Doe* was not of the same simple subject matter or diction as earlier lyric poems, and seemed destined to appeal to only a small audience, as Wordsworth himself hinted in a letter to Francis Wrangham of 18 January 1816: “Of the White Doe I have little to say, but that I hope it will be acceptable to the intelligent, for whom alone it is written” (*Letters* II:2 276). It appeared with four paratextual elements that tried, once again, to educate the Reader in how best to approach and appreciate this work. There was first an “Advertizement” indicating the real experience that had spurred the poet’s imagination, drawing certain parallels to earlier lyrical ballads that featured legends surrounding a particular “spot” (“The Thorn,” “Hart-leap Well,” e.g.):

During the Summer of 1807 I visited, for the first time, the beautiful country that surrounds Bolton Priory in Yorkshire; and the Poem of the WHITE DOE, founded upon a Tradition connected with that place, was composed at the close of the same year.

Then there was a sonnet entitled “Weak is the will of Man, his judgement blind,” used as a motto to the poem. This sonnet insists on the power of “imagination” to provide for a full and accurate depiction of life’s events, and is therefore the most helpful guide to the reader as to how best to approach the poem. Then follows a quote from Sir Francis Bacon on the necessity of the “Divine” in a human life, and finally a dedicatory poem to Wordsworth’s wife Mary that draws a parallel between this poem and Spenser. Still, as the editor of the Cornell Wordsworth *White Doe*, Kristine Dugas, points out, neither the prefatory sonnet nor the quote from Bacon is that helpful in directing a certain reader-response; that task falls more clearly to the dedicatory poem which “tells [the] readers

how to read *The White Doe* – to read it as they would read Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, as an allegory of human life, but also as a self-conscious fiction of a particularly Romantic sort” (57). The poem dedicated to Mary, then, has to function as the “key” to the poem’s intended reception, suggesting readers keep in mind *The Faerie Queene* and read the poem both as allegory and as imaginative exercise (like *The Ancient Mariner*). Apparently, however, few readers made the connection.

Some dozen reviews appeared from June of 1815 to January of 1816, and although there are some negative ones along the lines we have seen before (Wordsworth’s style is “affected”; his poetical “system” is at odds with his poetry), it appears that the tide of public opinion was continuing slowly to turn to acclamation at about this point in Wordsworth’s career. That the sustained presentation of his works was affecting the cultural dialogue is evident in the fact that some reviewers quote from, say, the “Preface” to the *Poems*, while others still actually review all three of the recent publications (*Excursion*, *Poems*, and *White Doe*).

The negative reviews, as ever, admit of his “genius,” but take issue with his “taste,” as in this quote from the *Theatrical Inquisitor*:

Mr. Wordsworth is a man of undoubted talent, there is enough scattered throughout his works to prove it; and yet, as the matter now stands, out of all his productions, there is not one which any writer of common taste and understanding would wish to own (875).

The *Quarterly Review* for October includes a long essay by William Rowe Lyall, which does value popularity as a measure of public “success,” and concludes that “if he is not

now or should not be hereafter, a favourite with the public, he can have nobody to blame but himself” (844). Jeffrey, of course, weighs in with his assessment in October as well, opening with another flourish: “This, we think, has the merit of being the very worst poem we ever saw imprinted in a quarto volume” (454). Such a comment gets to the point of the poet’s possible pretension at publishing such an impressive, but expensive, book. But even more stinging for Wordsworth would have been lines like this: “The story . . . in the hands of Mr. Scott, or Lord Byron, would probably have supplied many images to be loved, and descriptions to be remembered” (455). Jeffrey recognizes the Romance elements of *The White Doe*, but conclusively – and meanly – diminishes Wordsworth’s contribution by invoking the two most popular poets of the age.

On the more positive side, a couple of reviewers singled out the dedicatory lines to Mary as the best part of the volume, and several made statements that were supportive of the conversation surrounding the Wordsworthian project of re-defining the public taste. The *British Review* suggested that Wordsworth was making poetry more enticing to “common” readers (234-238). The *Gentleman’s Magazine* of December 1815 had a short but sympathetic review identifying a possible shift in Wordsworth’s subject matter, if not in public taste:

Heretofore he has been censured, and even ridiculed, for debasing [his] powers, for the homeliness of his diction, and the want of dignity in his characters; but in the present case such censure would be misplaced, and the ingenious severity of criticism will not easily find matter for ridicule (556).

So, at least Wordsworth had rectified the problem of his lowly subject-matter! Similarly, the *Augustan Review* concludes, “[t]he poem will be read not without pleasure; and we trust that the author will never choose a loftier subject for the exercise of his muse” (32). And finally, in the same vein, *Belle Assemblée* for July 1815 has very little in the way of an original review to contribute, relying mostly on quotation from the poem, but does conclude that “[f]ew are the lines penned by Mr. Wordsworth that are not distinguished by excellence; many say that such a poet might have chosen a better subject than the *White Doe*; we do not entirely agree . . .” (52). It seems clear that Wordsworth, by pitching this poem more in the popular style of Scott and choosing a subject more “elevated” than the simple lyric poems, has found a middle “voice” that was appealing to a wider audience. Some of the criticism even suggests that the critics see him as having “adjusted” his style in response to their continued calls for him to adopt a more “healthy” tone. In fact, the two reviews of *White Doe* that were probably the most positive make exactly this kind of connection. *The Champion* of 25 June 1815, for example, inserts itself directly into the ongoing cultural conversation by referring to the 1815 “Preface” and to Jeffrey’s attacks, and defends Wordsworth thus:

We doubt not that many of our readers will be startled to find that eight lines so simply beautiful, so chastely sublime, can be taken from the works of an author whose writings they have never read, but have seen quoted in broken lines to be ridiculed for their quaintness and vulgarity He is now before the public in a variety of

works . . . in their collective testimony proclaiming him the greatest poetical genius of the age (267).

The sustained cultural dialogue created by *The Excursion*, the 1815 *Poems*, and now *The White Doe*, coupled with the emerging strategy of keeping many strata of poetic style in play, was effective. Similarly, the July 1815 *British Lady's Magazine* defends Wordsworth against earlier attacks, ending as follows:

[t]hus concludes 'the White Doe of Rylstone,' of which we can scarcely pretend to have given even an imperfect sketch, partly from want of room, and partly (with unfeigned diffidence we say it) from incapacity to estimate worthily a man of Mr. Wordsworth's mind. This feeling is, we are happy to say, becoming more general (212).

This kind of public support from critics and reviewers was crucial, because Wordsworth's own strategy continued for some years to be defensive and self-centred. A further arrow in Wordsworth's quiver of dialogical defense was the 1816 *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*. Written ostensibly in defense of Burns from attacks on his "character" or morality, and therefore a Wordsworthian contribution to the emerging dialogue on Burns and his enduring value, the essay does seem to get a bit more personally defensive near its end. For example, Wordsworth singles out *The Edinburgh Review* for particular condemnation, and continues his attack on critics when he defines one of them as "a man, self-elected into the office of a public judge of the literature and life of his contemporaries" (*Prose* III:127). Even so, Wordsworth's motivation for this essay, he says, is to provide a voice for one who is silenced by death, and therefore,

presumably, unable to speak in his own defense. The concluding lines sum up Wordsworth's faith in this kind of ongoing cultural conversation:

if the many be hasty to condemn, there is a reaction of
generosity which stimulates them – when forcibly
summoned – to redress the wrong; and, for the sensible part
of mankind, *they* are neither dull to understand, nor slow to
make allowance for, the aberrations of man, whose
intellectual powers do honour to their species (*Prose*
III:129).

Wordsworth's egotism, and part of his motivation for writing the *Letter*, is revealed in a letter to Southey around this time: "The service I have lately rendered to Burns's genius will one day be performed to mine" (*Letters* II:2 325). We sense a "brotherhood" of these Lake and Borders poets, second selves of each other, defending each other in the cultural dialogue.

We can see that the period 1814 to 1816 or so was pivotal to Wordsworth's projection of himself *and* the critics' construction of him, and to his commitment to his poetical project. The exchange of published documents (*Excursion*, *Poems* with its "Preface" and "Essay, Supplementary," *White Doe*, and reviews of each), not all of which Wordsworth would have seen, still constitutes an interesting public dialogue or cultural conversation, and one in which Wordsworth was so heavily invested that he viewed it as a battle. And yet he could not "win" the public cultural debate against biased but clever and politically-sanctioned reviewers like Jeffrey. It was the slow shift in support from

other, less influential, reviewers that eventually led to the establishment of Wordsworth's legacy.

Next, I would like to turn to another publication that was related to the cultural conversation, as I am calling it, around Wordsworth's literary accomplishments. As far back as 1802, Coleridge had laid out the basis for some of his disagreement with Wordsworth's poetics. In a letter to William Sotheby dated 13 July of that year, Coleridge wrote:

[I must] set you right with regard to my perfect coinc[idence with] his poetic Creed. It is most certain, that that P[reface arose from] the heads of our mutual Conversations &c. – & the f[irst pass]ages were indeed partly taken from notes of mine / for it was at first intended, that the Preface should be written by me – and it is likewise true, that I warmly accord with W. in his abhorrence of the poetic Licences, as they are called, which are indeed mere tricks of Convenience & Laziness But *metre itself* implies a *passion*, i.e. a state of excitement, both in the Poet's mind, & is expected in that of the Reader – and tho' I stated this to Wordsworth, & he has in some sort stated it in his preface, yet he has [not] done justice to it, nor has he in my opinion sufficiently answered it (*STC Letters* II:811-812).

And, of course, there had been similar disagreements of the same sort over the years. Coleridge was planning to take these up in a systematic way in his *Biographia Literaria*. Its publication in 1817 prompted polarized reviews much as Wordsworth's did, but it sold well and kept Wordsworth and his works, both poetical and prose, before the literary public after the big push of Wordsworthian publication of 1814-1815. And it did so in the same way as Wordsworth's emerging strategy: by reminding the public of an earlier point in the poet's history, thereby forcing a comparison to the recent works and creating the heteroglossic effect. Wordsworth himself may have claimed, as he did to R. P. Gillies on 19 September 1817, "I have not read Mr. Coleridge's 'Biographia'. . . . Indeed I am heartily sick of even the best criticism" (*Letters* II:2:399). Still, the *Biographia* functioned as part of the larger cultural dialogue, and would have reminded a reading public of the earlier works of the Coleridge-Wordsworth collaboration, in effect placing before the public the early successes that Wordsworth himself kept reissuing with his newer works, and that the reviewers seemed to ignore simply *because* they were not new. But Coleridge's defensiveness about his old friend's reputation suffering bad reviews also was an impulse and began to shape his volume (Holmes 382). In other words, the *Biographia* could not be seen as anything but another volley in the ongoing cultural battle over the value of Wordsworth's poetic contribution; what is more, Coleridge, the "Friend" to whom *The Prelude* was addressed, one of the intimates of the Wordsworth coterie and a member of the "family business," returns to the cultural dialogue as a very public and influential version of Wordsworth's ideal Reader and champions the poetic project, at the same time retaining credibility because he criticizes some elements of the "system."

Holmes explains that, up until the end of May 1815, Coleridge's "Literary Life" was to be a single essay, a "Preface," with no planned chapter divisions and running to fewer than sixty pages;

[b]ut now he was grappling directly once more with Wordsworth: the disappointment of *The Excursion*, the memories of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the challenge of Wordsworth's new *Poems* of 1815. So he launched into the materials that became Chapters 4 (and eventually 14 onwards), and began one of the most intensive periods of composition of his life (383).

A type of collaboration is once again apparent, as Coleridge commits to presenting the context out of which the *Lyrical Ballads* arose, and to enshrining that volume in the terms of the myth of the division of labour between the two poets – another of the enduring myths of the Romantic ideology. In fact, the collaboration is conceived by Holmes as a dialogue between the two at this later date:

What is so striking about this new version of the *Biographia* is that it had changed from an autobiography to a book that is essentially a long dialogue with Wordsworth himself (385).

Coleridge identifies part of the problem and a particular point upon which he disagrees with his old friend: Wordsworth's comments on poetic diction, for example, in relation to the poems themselves:

What in and for themselves would have been either forgotten or forgiven as imperfections, or at least comparative failures, provoked direct hostility when announced as intentional, as the result of choice after full deliberation (*BL:I 71*).

This was indeed a main point of criticism for so many of the critics who were looking to deflate Wordsworth. Coleridge also recognizes the inconsistency of the critical assessments of poems from the *Lyrical Ballads* collection:

In the ‘Lyrical Ballads’ (for my experience does not enable me to extend the remark equally unqualified to the two subsequent volumes) I have heard at different times, and from different individuals every single poem *extolled* and *reprobated*, with the exception of those of loftier kind, which as was before observed, seem to have won universal praise (*BL:I 74*).

In other words, different readers reacted in different ways to the same poem, thereby illustrating the heteroglossia, a stratification of diction and subject, at work. Coleridge also perceptively suggests that if Wordsworth’s poetry was not valuable, there would not have been so much critical energy expended on it:

Had Mr. Wordsworth’s poems been the silly, the childish things, which they were for a long time described as being; had they been really distinguished from the compositions of other poets merely by meanness of language and inanity of

thought; had they indeed contained nothing more than what is found in the parodies and pretended imitations of them; they must have sunk at once, a dead weight, into the slough of oblivion, and have dragged the preface along with them. But year after year increased the number of Mr. Wordsworth's admirers (*BL:II* 9).

These and other passages from the *Biographia Literaria* make clear that Coleridge was engaged in the cultural debate, and that he was defending Wordsworth. He also took Wordsworth to task, sometimes in the same ways as other critics; for example, he claimed he did not agree with Wordsworth's goal of the "real language of men" when it came to poetic diction (*BL:II* ch. 17), nor did he find the figure of the Pedlar in *The Excursion* to be believable (*BL:II* 134). But he was able to praise the poetry at the same time that he was criticizing the theory:

In short, were there excluded from Mr. Wordsworth's poetic compositions all, that a literal adherence to the theory of his preface *would* exclude, two-thirds at least of the marked beauties of his poetry must be erased (*BL:II* 106).

Wordsworth's reputation could use this kind of clarification right at this point in his career. "Forget the system," Coleridge seems to be saying, "there is some great poetry in here, and that is what requires our attention." Wordsworth never received better or more sustained criticism of his work during his lifetime. Coleridge even took on the task of "explaining" the "Intimations Ode," that poem of which Wordsworth thought so highly

that he published it as a one-poem “section” in his collections, but which some readers thought unintelligible:

the ode was intended for such readers only as had been accustomed to watch the flux and reflux of their inmost nature, to venture at times into the twilight realms of consciousness, and to feel a deep interest in modes of inmost being, to which they know that the attributes of time and space are inapplicable and alien, but which yet can not be conveyed, save in symbols of time and space (*BL:II* 147).

Perhaps Jeffrey would still not appreciate the poem, but Coleridge’s words might go far to persuade readers “that is what I thought it meant – I could be that Reader.”

In arguing the central importance of Coleridge at this point in Wordsworth’s career, Hess (490) employs Coleridge’s own term “the clerisy,” coined some years later in his *On the Constitution of Church and State*:

The Clerisy of the nation, or national church, in its primary acceptation and original intention comprehended the learned of all denominations; - the sages and professors of the law and jurisprudence; of medicine and physiology; of music; of military and civil architecture; of the physical sciences; with the mathematical as the common *organ* of the preceding; in short, all the so called liberal arts and sciences, the possession and application of which constitute

the civilization of a country, as well as the Theological
(36).

The “clerisy,” then, constitute another node along the cultural transmission line, performing as interpreters and mediators between Wordsworth and his Readers: these are the interpreters who will replace the factionalized critics and reviewers and ensure the writer’s reputation before the Public. The clerisy will provide an institutional structure for understanding the cultural products of English society. Similar to the Reader, however, the clerisy may not yet exist – they may be a theoretical construct, a future audience or element in the chain of transmission between poet and Readers. In fact, in the terms of Wordsworth’s literary reputation, we could say that the clerisy was the series of reader/interpreters, beginning with deQuincey and Arnold but continuing right into the twentieth century with Abrams, Hartman, and others, who solidified the Romantic ideology as they filled the imaginative space for a Reader whom Wordsworth created.

Also at this time (July 1818), *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* carried a long review of *The White Doe*, a late contribution to the conversation on that poem, but one that opens with an essay that utters a pronouncement on the top three poets of the time: “we believe that *we speak the general voice*, when we place on a triple throne, Scott, Wordsworth, and Byron” (78, emphasis added). This statement attempts to resolve the disparate and competing strata of the public dialogue over these three poets’ worth by suggesting, in effect, a three-way tie! In the comparison of the three poets, Wordsworth comes across as the one with the power of a philosopher – a sign that the impression he had made on Coleridge some years before, the power that had been behind the conception of *The Recluse* project, recently reiterated in the passages from the *Biographia*, was

finally being realized among the critics and the public. And specific to *The White Doe*, this reviewer “gets it”: “Mr. Wordsworth has aimed at awakening the feelings and affections through the medium of the imagination” (89).

Wordsworth’s next publication was, in some ways, even more of a success. He had first conceived the poem *Peter Bell* back in 1798 and considered it for a *Lyrical Ballads* contribution, then worked on it in 1801 and 1802, and he picked it up from time to time thereafter, working most recently on it in 1812 (Reed *Middle Years* 21). This very composition history points up one of the challenges of the category of poems begun early and published late: where to place them in an anthology? *Peter Bell* appears early in many editions (like Gill’s *Oxford Authors* selection), right around the *Lyrical Ballads*, while the *White Doe*, even if placed roughly by date of composition, comes much later than *Peter Bell*. And yet, if we are surveying the contemporary readers’ experience of Wordsworth’s emerging reputation, date of publication must be the organizing principle.

Wordsworth got some feedback on the poem from his coterie audience in 1812, as evident in this excerpt from a letter of Henry Crabb Robinson’s dated 4 June:

Wordsw. at this time lent me *Peter Bell* wh. I read in M.S. with great delight, but not without some disapprobation. It contained one passage so very exceptionable that I ventured to beg him to expunge it. He said: ‘Lady Beaumont has advised me to leave it out too [‘]It is now expunged & therefore may not be known to the next generation of Wordsworth’s readers” (*Reminiscences* 55).²⁴

By the time it was published, Wordsworth recognized that this passage would be strongly identified with an earlier phase of his career, that it projected his older, simpler poetic voice, and that that voice was one to which some people objected. This was another of his strategies to deal with the tension between the voices and dialects with which he was working, and his own tendency toward monologism. In this publication, he further attempted to counter negative reactions by publishing *Peter Bell* with four sonnets: we remember that he was consistently praised for his sonnets ever since 1807; it appears, therefore, that he presented sonnets almost as a kind of “antidote” or counter-balance to some of his more experimental works, or those he anticipated might irritate certain critical factions.

But what may have contributed most to the volume’s success was some coincidental publicity. The publication of *Peter Bell* was preceded by John Hamilton Reynolds’ parody *Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad*. Reynolds caught some of the pre-publication advertising and, drawing on his knowledge of Wordsworth’s earlier poetry, created a parody of the simple Wordsworthian style that was published on 15 April 1819. By the time Wordsworth’s *Peter Bell* came out about a week later, there was so much “buzz” around both versions that a second edition of Wordsworth’s poem was demanded only two weeks after publication. The Reynolds parody had proved to be an effective, if accidental, sales ploy.

The first reviews of *Peter Bell* focused mostly on the simplicity of the poem as being ridiculous or too childish: “a toy for children,” said the *Literary Gazette* (597); “its simplicity is truly ridiculous, and calculated only for the nursery,” wrote the *Literary Chronicle* (584). Leigh Hunt’s review in the *Examiner* first of all got the title wrong,

calling it *Peter Bell: A Lyrical Ballad* (which is of course what the parody was called) and then continued on to a condemnation of the poem as “another didactic little horror”: “We are really and most unaffectedly sorry to see an excellent poet like Mr. Wordsworth returning, in vulgar despair, to such half-witted prejudices” (538). So once again, we see that some of the early reviewers reacted negatively and categorically to Wordsworth’s use of different strata of society, rejecting it out of hand as inappropriate.

After the first three negative reviews, the conversation shifted to a slightly more generous tone. *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* for May 1819 ran a much more positive, very long review with lots of quotations, and rightly described the poem as pure invention with the focus on how things operate on Peter’s mind. Surprisingly, given the present-day reputation of the poem in the overall Wordsworth canon, the review concludes “[i]t will probably be considered as one of the best which have been produced by this author, and has every chance of circulating more extensively than some of his other writings” (96). Similarly, the May 1819 *European Magazine* was positive, placing Wordsworth “[i]n the first rank of the bards of our own day” (511), and further elaborates that criticism or failure to appreciate such a poem is actually a sign of something lacking in the reader: “Let the frivolous scoff at and the hard-hearted despise such poems as this; but we do not envy that man his strength of mind who reads *Peter Bell* without being beguiled of tears, or who rises from the perusal without the finer and more amiable feelings of his nature being strongly excited” (513). At least some of the critics understand what Wordsworth is up to with his use of simple diction, rustic characters, and multiple voices.

Of course, some of them referred to the parodic version, too. The May 1819 *Gentleman's Magazine* reviews the “real thing” first, and then the parody right after: “Scarcely had we wiped away the tears which the last-mentioned Poem involuntarily produced, when this Parody of a wicked wag provoked both our laughter and our indignation” (559). This critic experienced the poem as part of a compressed dialogue: one between the parodic version and the “real” one. The *Scots Magazine* for May 1819 defends Wordsworth against the spirit of the parody, but recognizes how easy it is to satirize his style, when projected in the “simple” voice: “It requires no mighty effort of wit, in truth, to turn this singular poet into ridicule, and there are times in which it is scarcely possible, even for his best friends, to avoid doing so; but still when he is in the vein, who can write like William Wordsworth?” (863). We might dismiss such a comment as trivial, but this comparison of a “Wordsworth style” to *parody* profoundly illustrates the relationship between the poet’s “system” and his actual accomplishments in his poetry, and also how difficult it is for Wordsworth to find “the vein” and not slide into self-parody.

Of the remaining four reviews to appear before Wordsworth’s own *Benjamin the Waggoner* came out (and some reviewers dealt with both poems at once), the statements were predictably along the lines Wordsworth had encountered over the years: he ought to exert his powers on more suitable subjects; his work is childish or puerile. Even a positive review in the *British Lady's Magazine* couches its praise in a realization of Wordsworth’s public reputation: “the public will not, we think, fully agree that it is worthy of the high literary rank which its author assigns it” (218). The *British Critic* review of June 1819, however, while it may express some disappointment (i.e., Peter’s

language is too elevated for him, or Wordsworth's "system" is silly), has some excellent observations expressed in a very direct, subjective kind of way that highlights the actual "reading dialogue" in which this reader was engaged:

when we first read *Peter Bell*, it was in the midst of business, and with impatient haste . . . we laid it down, we confess, much disappointed We . . . again read it, with a good deal of attention, and with a total change of opinion Wordsworth demands from his readers, not only the sacrifice of many prejudices, and the conquest of some reasonable dispositions to laughter, or mortification, but also an open heart, and a patient exercise of the intellect (175).

First, reading Wordsworth takes active engagement – reading his poems while trying to do something else is not fair. Second, readers truly must suspend their preconceptions of what "counts" as good or serious poetry – Wordsworth had shifted the definition. The more perceptive critics are starting to understand and to publicly assert Wordsworth's poetic project as it relates to a change in the attitudes and assumptions of his readership.

Almost immediately after *Peter Bell*, Wordsworth published *The Waggoner*. The poem was dedicated to Charles Lamb in the following note:

TO CHARLES LAMB, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

When I sent you, a few weeks, ago, the Tale of Peter Bell, you asked 'why THE WAGGONER was not added?' – To

say the truth, – from the higher tone of imagination, and the deeper touches of passion aimed at in the former, I apprehended this little Piece could not accompany it without disadvantage. In the year 1806, if I am not mistaken, THE WAGGONER was read to you in manuscript, and, as you have remembered it for so long a time, I am the more encouraged to hope that, since the localities on which the Poem partly depends did not prevent its being interesting to you, it may prove acceptable to others. Being therefore in some measure the cause of its present appearance, you must allow me the gratification of inscribing it to you; in acknowledgement of the pleasure I have derived from your Writings, and of the high esteem with which

I am very truly yours,

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

RYDAL MOUNT, May 20, 1819.

Here, then, Wordsworth forces the cultural dialogue to consider him as “Lake Poet,” as poet of the simple and the rustic, by suggesting that one “city-bred” member of his coterie had found pleasure in the poem, and that fact convinced the poet that it might find a wider positive reception. The effect here is to move a poem from early composition to later publication, keeping the early Wordsworth present in the public dialogue, and at the same time justifying that presentation of material by appealing to the taste of the coterie.

He rationalizes publishing *The Waggoner* separate from *Peter Bell* by asserting his own recognition that the two poems are quite different, even opposite, in intended tone and effect. At the same time, though, in terms of the whole volume, he tried to modulate the reception somewhat by the inclusion of twelve sonnets along with *The Waggoner*. I believe Wordsworth was becoming more and more convinced that his legacy would rest on this recognition of his writing in two registers – of his own heteroglossic publications speaking to many strata of readers, or mediating negative reaction to one piece by inviting positive feedback on another. The early works, in general, established the “revolutionary” side of Wordsworth, and spoke to an interpellated reading subject on an intimate level that made the reader feel part of the Wordsworth coterie; the sonnets, the more patriotic verse, and pieces like *The Excursion* were crafted to speak to a different stratum of readers. Taken together, as in the collective works that Wordsworth continued to put out periodically until his death, these provided a comprehensive set of effects that would speak to a large audience.

Unfortunately, *The Waggoner* did not enjoy even the limited success of *Peter Bell*, and was mostly rejected out of hand. The first four reviews to appear dealt with both *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner*, simply because of the timing of publication, and none had anything good to say about *The Waggoner*; in fact, reading both poems close together in order to prepare a review caused many to view *Peter Bell* even more negatively than they might have if they had read it by itself. In a sense, then, the close publication of the two created a potential effect among readers and reviewers, the likes of which Wordsworth had written in his dedication to Lamb that he was trying to avoid. The *Eclectic Review* (391) is representative: “in spite of the imbecilities of style which run through the

narrative, and in spite of our determination not to allow Peter Bell, the potter, to gain upon our feelings, the Poet got the better of us” – then *The Waggoner* changed the reviewer’s mind! Even Wordsworth’s strategy of offering some sonnets with the longer poems could not work across publications.

Of the eleven reviews from June to November of 1819 that dealt solely with *The Waggoner*, most are negative. A few make mention of some of the sonnets as impressive. The *British Critic* did carry a long, favourable review in November that, first of all, *apologized to Wordsworth* for the delay between the review of *Peter Bell* and this one – a clear indication of an ongoing “cultural conversation.” The review continues with a recognition that Wordsworth’s poetry and poetics are, indeed, different from the standard popular fare: “[S]uch a poem cannot stand much chance of pleasing those whose taste has been exclusively formed by food of a more stimulating kind” (176).

These last two publications placed again before the public the earlier, rustic voice of William Wordsworth. But given his re-imagining of his career, as well as his continuing composition in the sonnet form, a form that seemed to elicit almost universal praise, *Peter Bell* and *Benjamin the Waggoner* come across as the re-release of *Lyrical Ballads*: not to diminish the pains Wordsworth may have taken in composing and revising them, they may already represent curious parts of an earlier phase of his entire body of work. But to the contemporary audience, they did serve to present a complex variety of poetic voices from Wordsworth, and they did help in the creation of a series of “counterpoints” in his style from old to new, experimental to traditional, lyric to epic, simple to sophisticated, and emotional to philosophical.

His next production was clearly in a mode that Wordsworth might reasonably expect would be well received by the reading public, given the positive feedback his work in the sonnet form had been given over the years. For some time, he had been working on a sonnet sequence organized around an imagined walk along the river Duddon. In 1820, *The River Duddon* was published, and was made up of several parts, as indicated by the full title: *The River Duddon, A Series of Sonnets: Vaudracour & Julia: and Other Poems. To which is annexed, A Topographical Description Of the Country of the Lakes, In the North of England*. The series of thirty-three sonnets is supplemented by an excerpt from *The Prelude* (the *Vaudracour and Julia*) and “a few other” poems; it also includes a dedicatory poem to Wordsworth’s brother Christopher, a twenty-page “Memoir of the Rev. Robert Walker,” as well as a revised version of the anonymous introduction (the *Topographical Description*) Wordsworth had written for the 1810 *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire* by Joseph Wilkinson, which quickly gained in popularity and was reissued several more times.²⁵ Several elements of this publication were very popular, and led to very good reviews and sales.

A brief review of these constituent parts shows the increasing variety of language and voices in a Wordsworth work. The dedication “To the Rev. Dr Wordsworth” was printed separately from the sonnets in the first edition, but Wordsworth quickly recognized its proper place and positioned it before the sonnet series in the 1820 collection *Miscellaneous Poems* (Jackson 34). Here is a poem addressed to a family member, obviously an “intimate,” but not a member of that true coterie that was so close to William from those early days: “Bear with me, Brother! Quench the thought / That slights this passion, or condemns” (61-2) – these lines would not need to be uttered to a

member of the “true intimate group.” Still, Christopher’s position in the Church was more and more attractive to William’s emerging Anglicanism. And the poem’s invocation of a few simple scenes from the Christmas season, like caroling, and its demonstration of how well the rituals of the season bind all strata of society, further illustrates William’s beliefs:

And who but listened? – till was paid
 Respect to every Inmate’s claim:
 The greeting given, the music played,
 In honour of each household name,
 Duly pronounced with lusty call,
 And “Merry Christmas” wished to all!

(13-18).

Wordsworth here presents a scene exemplifying the power of certain linguistic rituals – like song, or poetry – to embrace all members of a community, and the scene compares favourably with such scenes in Tennyson’s later *In Memoriam* (Jackson 34).

Wordsworth’s Anglicanism and the Christmas season in Anglican England could contain his democratic spirit and include all strata and linguistic dialects of society.

Vaudracour and Julia was, of course, excerpted from *The Prelude*, still unpublished. The episode of the high-born young man and his lowlier love is introduced by a short headnote insisting on the veracity of the events laid out in the piece, but the poem also evokes multiple layers of such “star-crossed” lovers: the direct reference (line 91) to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is obvious, but echoes of several plot lines of desperate abandoned parents from Wordsworth’s own *Lyrical Ballads* resonate with the

story, as well. And, of course, the poem also operates as a sublimated confession of sorts about Wordsworth's own affair with Annette Vallon back in the early 1790s. Structurally, it also offers some Romance elements and even some Gothic elements, making for a rich tapestry of experiences and stories from the real to the imagined.

The sonnets themselves, thirty-three in all, some titled, others numbered, are organized as the speculations of a hiker following the river along its course. These speculations range from thoughts on prehistoric dwellers, to epitaphic stories associated with places, to speculations on America, to reflections on similar hikes as a child, and more. The poems are also rich with literary and historical allusions: Chaucer, Herbert, and Goldsmith in one sonnet; Druids, Romans, and Danish kings in England in another. Sonnet XVIII "Seathwaite Chapel" contains the reference to the "Gospel Teacher," identified as Rev. Robert Walker in Wordsworth's lengthy note to the poem entitled "Memoir."

The final piece of the entire volume had appeared as the anonymous "Introduction" to the 1810 *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire* by Joseph Wilkinson. Wordsworth had long felt that his descriptions were ill-matched with Wilkinson's sketches and paintings, and he had been looking for an opportunity to publish again. Here he did just that, and the *Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes, In the North of England* was the next stage of what would quickly become a popular tourist guide, revised and augmented by Wordsworth many times over the years. Altogether the 1820 *River Duddon* collection presented a mixed volume that would have something appealing to many different audiences.

In fact, the *River Duddon* cultural conversation is answered first by a preview of the volume in *The Literary Gazette* for 25 March 1820: “We consider these poems to be by much the least mannered and most beautiful of any that this distinguished individual has ever written[; this is] a volume conferring immortality, and ranking their author, even with those hitherto most skeptical of his powers, among the foremost bards of the age” (604-6). Many of the reviewers took this kind of approach, suggesting that while Wordsworth’s productions might have been received as “uneven” in the past, this current publication showed him at his best. The tone, however, is one of self-importance, as if the critics are praising Wordsworth for finally “correcting” his faults in response to the criticism of the reviewers: “In the poems before us, there is less of the idiomatic peculiarities, and more of the modest philosophical beauties, than in any preceding works of the author,” wrote *Gold’s London Magazine* (622). Similarly, the *Eclectic Review* writes of this “adjustment” the poet has finally made: “We take it, however, as a good sign, that Mr. Wordsworth has been made sensible of the fact, that the public do not wish for any more Peter Bells” (395). As far as the critics were concerned, the cultural conversation or dialogue was working out to Wordsworth’s benefit because they had been able to make him see the error of his ways over the past twenty or so years; on the other hand, perhaps it was Wordsworth who had been influencing the terms of the dialogue and had subtly shifted the criteria by which his entire work was to be judged. Such is the shifting, negotiated dimension of dialogue.

Generally, the pattern emerging from Wordsworth’s publication record of 1814-1820 is a very conscious campaign that is finally showing the results he envisioned. The *British Critic* for February 1821, while it again praises its own role in criticizing

Wordsworth's past productions, and therefore helping to "cure" him of his excesses, does seem finally to grasp the profundity of the Wordsworthian project:

It has often struck us with surprise that Wordsworth's style should have been considered low, and too simple: undoubtedly phrases of the most colloquial plainness and turn do occasionally, perhaps too often, occur in his poetry, but the general character of his diction has always seemed to us, to be rather raised above, than depressed below his subject (186).

The *European Magazine*, too, attempts a realistic assessment of the poet's current achievement:

to us, we confess, he appears beyond all comparison the most truly sublime, the most touchingly pathetic, the most delightfully simple, the most profoundly philosophical, of the poetical spirits of the age. . . . His poetry may not be the most popular in the present day . . . but we believe he is again regaining his ground in the public estimation (517-19).

This last clause is noteworthy: the use of the word "regaining" indicates a contemporary assessment of Wordsworth's reputation as having once been in the ascendant, only to be lost, presumably by the reactions to *Poems, in Two Volumes* through the *Poems* of 1815.

The review in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* for May 1820, though, has the most sustained positive contribution to the ongoing cultural conversation, and

complicates things by suggesting Wordsworth has enjoyed a greater reputation among *serious* lovers of poetry than any of his contemporaries. It bears quoting at some length:

Nothing is more common than to talk about the unpopularity of Wordsworth; – but, after all, we are inclined to doubt very much, whether at any moment for many years past, he can, with any propriety, be said to have lain under the reproach of unpopularity. The true Acceptation of a Poet does not surely consist in the wideness to which his name is blown on the four winds of heaven. Ever since Wordsworth began to write, he has fixed the attention of every genuine lover and student of English Poetry; and all along he has received from these the tribute of honour due to the felt and received power of his genius Besides, if we be not greatly mistaken, Wordsworth has been read by just as many on account of his Poetry, as ever read the most popular of his contemporaries for the sake of Poetry. Nay, more, we doubt, whether the writings of Spencer [*sic*], or of Dryden, or even of Milton himself, be at this instant truly familiar to a larger portion of the Reading Public of England than those of Wordsworth (100-101).

By shifting the terms that define “success,” this statement makes it seem like Wordsworth had “arrived” long before 1820. But is “success” or even “popularity” based on how

widespread one's name is? The review offers "acceptation" as the new standard. And Wordsworth has long enjoyed a modest appreciation among the public, but he has been accepted by those who are best able to appreciate his work, and there is no shame in that. Finally, this writer considers that for reading "Poetry" itself (as opposed to being merely fashionable?), Wordsworth's work has attracted as much attention as anyone's – in fact, that people would currently be familiar with *more Wordsworth poems than those of any other poet*, including Spenser, Dryden, or Milton – a significant observation, if at all accurate.

This volume placed Wordsworth before the public clearly as a poet of the Lake District, writing from and about a particular place. He had been criticized in the past for being a "Laker," but he fiercely maintained that part of his identity, while moderating it with, for example, the sonnet stratum. Here, however, the sonnet form and the "voice" in that register, as well as the prose *Guide to the Lakes*, seem to be the basis for what is, in a sense, Wordsworth's crowning achievement to a difficult period of his life (the thirteen or so years since 1807). This particular volume, later separated into parts and subsumed into the various re-workings of the *Miscellaneous Poems* and other volumes, was hugely important to the establishment of Wordsworth's laureate-like status as poet.

The *River Duddon* volume provided a high point to this phase of Wordsworth's publication career, but he was still active in 1820. Most immediately, he was working on a new four-volume *Miscellaneous Poems of William Wordsworth*. This was all the poetry and prose Wordsworth wished to preserve, with an eye to reordering and re-categorizing poems, as well as revising them. All of this was carried out with the benefit of feedback and criticism over the years intervening between first composition or publication of a

piece and now. Gill (336-7) points out some of the revisions Wordsworth made based on the ongoing cultural dialogue – “Alice Fell” and some lines of the “Intimations” ode had been criticized by Coleridge and were now excised; some reviewers and even the trusted Crabb Robinson had complained about the “party in a parlour” passage in *Peter Bell*, and it was taken out, even though the poem had only been published a year earlier.

Two substantial additions, for example, were the 1793 poems *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* in their entirety (remember that excerpts had been published in 1815 as “Juvenile Pieces”). But he did not simply reprint the 1793 versions; rather he incorporated changes he had made over the years since then: “[i]n *An Evening Walk* (1820), he merged and revised the 1793 and 1794 versions” (Averill 16). There were other changes to *Descriptive Sketches* that may seem minor, but clearly illustrate Wordsworth’s mature conception of himself at fifty, compared to what, at twenty-three, he thought a poet ought to be. An example might be the dedication to Robert Jones, amended from “I am Dear Sir, Your most obedient very humble Servant, W. Wordsworth” in 1793 to “I am, dear Sir, Most sincerely your’s, W. Wordsworth” in 1820. This shift suggests, in Bakhtinian terms, the consolidation of Wordsworth’s style into an assured monologic voice; however, the very presence of these early productions, now in complete form, continues the Wordsworthian project of adding to his work by reaching back to early works, at the same time as he revises those to make sure they more adequately represent his mature style and his epitaphic urge. But in terms of presenting his work with a clear eye to his future place in the literary tradition, one of the most telling features of the 4-volume *Miscellaneous Poems* has to be the positioning of the “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” apart, with its own title-page, as the last poem in

volume IV, insisting on some special status to this poem. Even if the critics did not yet know how to read it, Wordsworth was investing a lot in this poem by positioning it as the final, punctuating statement on his career and poetic identity.

Wordsworth's final project of 1820 was a second edition of *The Excursion*. Neither the *Miscellaneous Poems*, nor *The Excursion*, garnered much attention from the reviewers, presumably because they were not seen as "new" material. But a short notice of *The Excursion* in the *Literary Gazette* of 30 December 1820 nicely concludes both the year 1820, and an entire phase of Wordsworth's career, by perfectly expressing the multi-vocal nature of his project by identifying no fewer than four audiences:

It is a volume to which *the lover of nature* may turn with delight, for its enchanting pictures of scenery, and its patriarchal views of character; *the admirer of poetry*, for almost every better charm which his favorite science can exemplify; *the philosopher*, for the profoundness and majestic simplicity of many of its speculations; and *the Christian*, for the unaffected piety and devotional sublimity it so abundantly displays (608, emphasis added).

This quotation makes clear the fact of Wordsworth's later poetry and the cultural dialogue as he was engaged in it, from *The Excursion* through *The White Doe*, *Peter Bell*, *The Waggoner*, *The River Duddon*, and the various collections of Poems: he was presenting multiple voices, in a range of poetic forms, and therefore appealing to multiple audiences. His continuing collection and publication of his poetry would exploit this fully by presenting early and late poems; poems of lyric intensity and those of sprawling

length; poems that would appeal to Lake District tourists, aspiring novelists, university radicals, members of government, and so on; and eventually poems and other works that had never been published before but had existed for the coterie only.

Chapter 7: The Poet Confirmed: 1820-1850

William Wordsworth stuck to his principles of presenting simpler characters and sometimes their diction throughout his career. He also moderated this, though, by presenting poems of a more dignified subject matter or tone, especially through his mastery of and attraction to the sonnet. Having achieved a certain level of critical success by 1820, therefore, through these and other factors including a sustained run of publications from 1814-1820, as well as a firm re-identification with the Lakes, Wordsworth now entered a long final phase characterized by less new production, but a continuing public presence through periodic re-issuing and re-packaging of his works.²⁶ One effect of this re-packaging was that, even as Wordsworth's style became more unitary, his publications retained a wide-ranging heteroglossia by combining early works with old, and dialogic with the more monologic. Further, he firmly took his place in the early Victorian culture as a "sage" of the Lake District, allowing him to live his life as poet the way he had envisioned it many years earlier when he read Beattie's *The Minstrel*.

We should remind ourselves that, in 1820, Wordsworth, at 50 years of age, is not yet an *old* man. In July of 1820, the Wordsworths went on a European tour. That William wanted, in effect, to re-create his experience of 1790 and share it with those closest to him seems apparent in the fact that he hoped his old friend Robert Jones would make the trip as well. In the event, Jones could not make the trip, but Wordsworth was joined by his wife Mary, his sister Dorothy, Thomas Monkhouse and his wife, and Jane Horrocks and her sister, meeting up with Henry Crabb Robinson in Lucerne in mid-August. They

visited the Alps and the Italian Lakes, some of the sights that had so impressed Wordsworth and Jones back in 1790.

One result of the trip was the publication, in 1822, of *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820*, a “versified travelogue” (Johnston 837). This publication, which includes a number of sonnets and some other poetic forms, resonates with the Wordsworthian *oeuvre* in many ways. From the title, we conclude that these poems operate within a genre closely related to the epitaph, one of Wordsworth’s fascinations. We might expect, therefore, that these poems will either operate as “inscriptions” marking various spots along the tour at which a story already exists, or that the poems themselves will memorialize the imaginative interaction a particular scene precipitated with the writer. Also, the very occasion of the poems, a tour of Europe, invokes the occasion of Wordsworth’s 1790 tour with Jones, some of which is captured in both geography and speculation in the early poem *Descriptive Sketches*. Wordsworth has organized the volume very much along the lines of a real tour, opening with the landing at Calais, moving through Belgium towards France, Germany, to Switzerland, and then the Italian Lakes, Milan, and back through the Alps towards France and concluding at Dover.²⁷ And the volume opens with a “Dedication” that echoes the ending of “Tintern Abbey” as it appeals directly to its coterie audience:

Dear Fellow-travellers! think not that the Muse,
To You presenting these memorial Lays,
Can hope the general eye would gaze,
As on a mirror that gives back the hues
Of living Nature

For You she wrought: Ye only can supply
 The life, the truth, the beauty: she confides
 In that enjoyment which with You abides” (1-5, 9-11).

This is not merely a travelogue, but rather a true “memorial” of the trip, the places the party stopped, and their imaginative interchange with those sights and experiences – as mediated by Wordsworth, of course.²⁸ Further, Wordsworth reasserts the place of his coterie by suggesting that those who accompanied him on the tour are the readers best suited to read and understand these pieces.

Another work that arose out of the 1820 trip was the sequence of 102 sonnets that also came out in 1822, the *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (later *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*). Gill surmises that the English parts of the 1820 trip, with the journey to see his old friend Jones, a clergyman dedicated to his flock in Souldern in north Oxfordshire, on the way to the continent, and the stay with brother Christopher, now Master of Trinity College in Cambridge, on the return, had made Wordsworth reflect on the place of the Church of England in history and politics. The position of this Wordsworth was very different from that of the young Wordsworth who had “arraigned” the Bishop of Llandaff, but Gill tries to reconcile these two parts of the man:

He detested religious cant, mistrusted sectarians who pursued ideological purity, and declined to satisfy those who wanted assurance that the religion of *The Excursion* was four-square with the thirty-nine articles. But by 1822 he had become committed to the Church of England, and the necessity of defending it as *the* safeguard against

anarchy and social retrogression was a constant in all of his future thinking about politics and national culture (342-344).

Again, the Bakhtinian notion that a maturing poetic style becomes more and more monologic, and increasingly conservative, seems to fit the broad movement of Wordsworth's work. Also, though, we see repeatedly in the work the insistence on charity and humanitarianism, a strain he never tired of singing.

Because the two volumes appeared very close together, some of the journals reviewed them individually, and some reviewed them together. Altogether, there were only two reviews dealing solely with *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, and both were negative: the *Literary Gazette* used the old familiar strong language that Wordsworth was "diseased," while *General Weekly Register* trotted out the old adage that Wordsworth had talent but chose not to use it. Of the four dealing strictly with the *Memorials*, they were split, with Jeffrey's on the negative side, declaring "[t]he Lake School of Poetry, we think, is now pretty nearly extinct" (496), while the *Literary Museum* more positively asserted that "such thoughts as Mr. W. deemed worth recording, must be worth our perusal" (615). Even more detailed was the *British Review* in December of 1822, which had good things to say about the volume but seemed to be also waiting for something more substantial – perhaps *The Recluse*? Still, some of the praise includes, "[w]e have plenty of writers of poetry, but very few makers of poetry. Mr. Wordsworth creates" (256). One reviewer's comment singles out Wordsworth's ability to affect a reader *as if he was in conversation*: "In leaving Mr. Wordsworth, we turn away from objects at once captivating, improving, and pure. We leave him, however, with the hope of speedily renewing our intercourse

with him; we had almost called it intimacy . . .” (259). This critic, at least, seems to be affected at the level at which I believe Wordsworth was hoping his readers would be affected: the reader has responded to the intimate conversation inscribed in the poetry and has joined the coterie.

There were a further half-dozen reviews that took the two publications together. What is curious here is that, in comparing the two, most reviewers found the *Memorials* more interesting than the *Sketches*, and two of them (the *Monthly Repository* and the *British Critic*) did not particularly appreciate the sonnets. Here again, my explanation would be that their ears are attuned to Wordsworth’s “simple voice” rather than the emerging “conservative voice” he adopts, especially in works like the *Ecclesiastical Sketches*. This is somewhat borne out by the further statement in the *Monthly Repository* that “[i]n truth, since Wordsworth changed his politics, his writings have lost much of their charm” (694). It goes on to say, “Wordsworth is indeed a great poet. If his admirers be few, they are chosen from among the best of our species” (698). This reviewer responds to Wordsworth’s own assertion that he is appreciated only by a small but particularly “fit” audience.

Two other reviews pick up two common themes that have been part of the running cultural conversation around Wordsworth and his reputation. *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* trumpets very loudly, “Wordsworth is indisputably the most ORIGINAL POET OF THE AGE” (108). And the *Monthly Censor* review opens with a long disquisition on Wordsworth’s theories and jumps right in to the conversation with some of the specific terms under dispute: these two new volumes are not “puerile” or over-simple, but have other of Wordsworth’s “peculiarities.” Similarly, on the issue of

popularity, “Mr. Wordsworth must content himself with foregoing present popularity, and wait calmly for the award of posterity He can afford to wait; for his poetry contains the seeds of immortality” (660). The critics are starting to see Wordsworth’s talents and chances of success exactly how he has cast them in his recent public prose utterances: “In review after review during the 1820’s and onwards, Milton’s name was coupled with [Wordsworth’s] own, as though in obedience to his prophecy” (Newlyn 98).

Wordsworth’s only other publication of 1822 was the first separate edition of *A Description of the Scenery of the Lakes in the North of England*, the third time a version of this guide had appeared before the public, but the first exclusively devoted to tourism and the picturesque. The *Description* came out again a year later, after which Wordsworth did not put out a volume of new poetry for thirteen years. However, “Wordsworth’s reputation . . . continued to grow despite the dearth of new poems By the end of the decade every Ambleside innkeeper knew that when tourists asked the way to Rydal they were hoping for at least a glimpse of the ‘father of the Lake School of Poetry’” (Gill 347). Wordsworth was more and more identified with the Lakes, both by himself and by others, and this contributed to the aura of the district. To the casual tourist or the common reader, the dispute over poetics of 25 years earlier was secondary. Was the “Lake School” extinct? Did it still exist? Did it ever exist? No matter – Wordsworth was a living relic of an earlier literary-cultural “scene.” The *Description of the Scenery of the Lakes* spoke to audiences authoritatively as a tour guide – as someone who had been there – not unlike some of those early notes Wordsworth appended to the *Descriptive Sketches*. And based on the sales success of this volume, it is clear that many tourists of

this period and on into the Victorian era were happy to have William Wordsworth, the poet who had spoken to them so movingly about this region, as their guide.

In addition to the *Description of the Scenery of the Lakes*, Wordsworth continued to work periodically on his collective works, another version of which appeared in 1827. This move toward a collection of his work was very clearly now viewed by the poet as building his legacy, since *The Recluse* project would not be that legacy, so he would not only add to these collections as new material was published, but he also revised what was already there, as we have seen. A crucial part of this self-representation was the classification system he had used for his poems, and with which he tinkered and revised as well. As he went at the order of the poems again in 1827, Crabb Robinson reported that Lamb “thought that there was only one good order for the poems, ‘the order in which they were written – That is a history of the poet’s mind’,” but Wordsworth continued to conceive of the poems as classified based on “the great objects of human concern.” In this edition, he even removed the information on the title page that had previously given some idea as to the chronology of the poems, further de-historicizing the *Works* and presenting them as statements organized on a grand thematic scale of human interest.

The 1830s was a period during which Wordsworth’s reputation finally seemed solidified, and he became more and more a part of the English cultural landscape, but the decade also marked a time of deep personal loss for the Sage of the Lakes. The name and reputation of “Wordsworth” had become so much a part of the cultural conversation, and readers created their own sense of who the poet was. In my view, this marks the consummate achievement of Wordsworth’s personal poetic project: he had stuck to his humanitarian, democratic principles in some form or another; he had also maintained that

simple “register” in his work, even as he matured and added other registers; his principles of a sympathetic readership had finally been realized; his faith that his work would find praise and its place in the English literary pantheon somewhere in the future was finally appearing to be a faith well placed and, in fact, because of his long life, Wordsworth was able to observe some of this as it happened. He had accomplished this by establishing his own poetic authority – his *style* – that maintained that complex, stratified range of voices in his work. If the early Victorian audience was constructing a “Wordsworth” that it not only accepted but revered, the real Wordsworth’s work was well done. Let us review some of the evidence of his taking his place in the larger culture.

A new, young publisher named Edward Moxon got Wordsworth to work on a selection of his work for use in schools. *Selections from the Poems of William Wordsworth, Esq., Chiefly for the Use of Schools and Young Persons* was published in 1831, and “[a]t this point Wordsworth entered the history not only of poetry but of educational theory and practice in nineteenth-century Britain” (Gill 350); in other words, Moxon was instrumental in moving Wordsworth’s work beyond a literary-cultural conversation and towards an educational-political one. Wordsworth also began contributing to the annuals – for example, to *The Keepsake* for 100 guineas. He also was becoming the subject of more portraits, as in 1831 when he was asked by James Wood, his former tutor at St. John’s College, Cambridge, to sit for a portrait from an “eminent artist” of his choice, the portrait to be a memorial to hang in the college (Gill 38). And, of course, throughout the decade of the 1830s, more and more visitors came to Rydal Mount in hopes of catching a glimpse of the poet. This cultural phenomenon became a powerful

component of the Wordsworthian cultural conversation, as many visitors' voices continued the lionizing process:

All . . . visitors played some part in establishing Wordsworth's reputation, either privately through their letters and conversation or publicly through their memoirs, lectures, and essays. The one who was to have the greatest influence, however, as poet, critic, editor, and future President of the Wordsworth Society, was only a schoolboy when Wordsworth first met him – Matthew Arnold (Gill 386).

Those who did not visit sent letters expressing their views and their thanks for the poetry that meant so much to them: “For the first time in English history a writer's home had become a place of general pilgrimage while its saintly incumbent was still alive” (*Victorians* 11). There was even a “relic” the pilgrims could take away: a postcard-sized image of the poet and his wife in the living room at Rydal Mount.

But Wordsworth was not always a solitary in the Lake District. In any given year, he was often in London and took part in an active social life there: “In popular image Wordsworth was still what he had announced himself to be in the Preface to *The Excursion*, namely, ‘a Poet living in retirement’, but in fact he dined when he chose with an impressive number of the most accomplished, powerful, and well-connected people of his time” (*Victorians* 13). This, too, contributed to his overall reputation, as his *persona* as Lakes solitary was augmented and strangely enhanced by the personal, public dimension – a sort of doubling of his *personae*, as he had exercised a multiple-voicedness

in his works. His time in London was vital to him, though. It was here and in this time that he made a whole new circle of younger friends – like John Stuart Mill in 1831 – and these friends stimulated his social and political imaginations, and kept him present and active in discussions of the arts and literature.

It was around this same time of the early 1830s that Wordsworth suffered another series of personal losses. His 1831 visit to Sir Walter Scott, a poignant leave-taking as Sir Walter was about to leave for Italy in pursuit of better health, was his last visit: Scott died in 1832. Even more affecting must have been the losses of members of the “intimate group.” Sister Dorothy outlived William, but was declining from about 1833 until her eventual death in 1855 from what may have been Alzheimer’s disease. In 1834, Coleridge died, as did Charles Lamb, and the following year saw the deaths of his sister-in-law and household member Sara Hutchinson, as well as his old college friend Robert Jones, and his fellow poet James Hogg. The losses of Coleridge and Sara, along with the shutting down of Dorothy, meant that the “intimate group” was now pretty well reduced to husband and wife William and Mary. However, at this point in his career, symbolic “sons” (like de Quincey and Arnold) were eager to pick up the “family business” of supporting and promoting William Wordsworth.

Although the poet did feel poetically barren during his last decades, still he composed a few new things, like the series of 45 sonnets *Composed or Suggested during a Tour in Scotland . . . 1833*. Hogg’s death prompted the *Extempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg* (composed in November 1835), Wordsworth’s last great poem and “his finest elegy” (Gill 376). And he did put out, in 1835, the collection *Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems*, which does not show much of the best of Wordsworth, but did present

to his public some interesting facets of the poet. The title triptych, “Yarrow Unvisited,” “Yarrow Visited,” and “Yarrow Revisited,” provides a wonderful example of the Wordsworthian imagination: 1) a place purely imagined, followed by 2) a visit to the real place – a visit that pales in comparison to what was imagined, completed by 3) a reflection on both previous poems, augmented by touching personal allusions (i.e., to Scott and Hogg). But a poem like “The Warning” further illustrates Wordsworth’s attempts at re-writing his past – a further attempt at revising his biography. Through the device of speaking to a newborn, Wordsworth expresses anxiety over the present (1833 – the date of composition) state of England, reflecting on his own past:

He, who from her [England’s] mellowed practice drew
 His social sense of just, and fair, and true;
 And saw, thereafter, on the soil of France
 Rash Polity begin her maniac dance,
 Foundations broken up, the deeps run wild,
 Nor grieved to see (himself not unbeguiled) –
 Woke from the dream, the dreamer to upbraid,
 And learn how sanguine expectations fade
 When novel trusts by folly are betrayed, –
 To see Presumption, turning pale, refrain
 From further havoc, but repent in vain, -
 Good aims lie down, and perish in the road
 Where guilt had urged them on with ceaseless goad,
 Proofs thickening round her that on public ends

Domestic virtue vitally depends,
 That civic strife can turn the happiest hearth
 Into a grievous sore of self-tormenting earth (61-77).

Mother England had instilled the basic values in the young Wordsworth, and the French Revolution was a “beguiling,” a dream. The self-sufficiency and harmony of the family depends on the stability of the entire political, historical, cultural “system.” This is one representative facet of the public “Wordsworth” of the last fifteen years of his life.

The volume was very popular, with the first edition of 1500 copies sold out within nine months, proving to be Wordsworth’s most popular success yet (Gill 382). One review of the volume, in the *Monthly Repository* for 1835, expresses a view that was becoming more and more universal: “The common consent which once denied him a place amongst the bards of his age and country, now seems to concede to him the highest rank” (699). After some minor criticisms that Wordsworth waxes a bit too philosophical in his poems at the expense of the poetry, the review concludes that “[t]here is scarcely a trace in it of what used to be regarded as characteristics of Wordsworth. Nobody could ever imagine from it, why he was ever laughed at” (701). The cultural conversation or dialogism between Wordsworth and the broad readership (critics and “common readers” alike) has negotiated a taste for the poet’s style, the result of both Wordsworth’s adjustments in style and subject in response to criticisms, as well as the critics’ acceptance of certain features of Wordsworth’s style as a result of his long campaign.

A reader of the *Yarrow Revisited* volume in 1835 would, at the end of the book, come to some paratextual material (a “Postscript” and an “Appendix” to the “Postscript”) that included an essay on the Poor Law and on Church Reform, Wordsworth’s

contributions to the cultural conversation sparked by the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834), as well as the Government Commission on Church reform. Wordsworth's views on the negative social consequences of the Poor Law are precursors to the later examinations in the novel form by Dickens, Gaskell, and others, and all Wordsworth was doing was remaining true to the convictions he had held as far back as *Lyrical Ballads*: "that a theory stood or fell by its bearing on the individual case" (Gill 382).

Wordsworth's opening is interesting, as he specifically addresses the fact that he has not engaged in the debate through an anonymous contribution to the popular press, thinking "they may derive some advantage . . . from my name," but also that a reader having just read the *poetry* may be more predisposed to sharing the ideas Wordsworth now covers in "plain prose": "the state of mind which some of the foregoing poems may have produced in the reader, will dispose him to receive more readily the impression which I desire to make" (*Prose* III:240). As with the tumultuous years during which he was defending his "system," Wordsworth's *poetry contains* his philosophy, and even *conditions* his audience to be receptive to it. The increasingly more conservative Wordsworth goes on to reveal his persistent humanitarian side in statements like this: "*all* persons who cannot find employment, or procure wages sufficient to support the body in health and strength, are entitled to a maintenance by law" (*Prose* III:240). Or this one later in the essay that condemns the new Poor Law because it "proceeds too much upon the presumption that it is a labouring man's own fault if he be not, as the phrase is, beforehand with the world" (*Prose* III:246).

Subsequent to the *Yarrow Revisited*, Wordsworth made revisions to the poetry that made up his collective works for another re-issue in 1836. As always, he reexamined

his canon exhaustively and made revisions carefully. A few of the significant alterations for this 1836 edition included a substantial modification to the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, including shortening it and reducing the use of the first person (*Prose* I:111). He made revisions to the early published pieces *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, shortening the former overall from 446 lines to 387, and dropping some of the notes he had provided as glosses to particular lines or descriptions in the earlier versions of both poems. It was as if those explanations, and the insistence on his status as eye-witness, were no longer necessary to “sell” the poems to the audience. And his revisions to the poem itself reveal his maturer assertion of himself as poet of a particular place – the Lake District and the Borders region, as in this example:

<i>Descriptive Sketches</i> (1793)	<i>Descriptive Sketches</i> (1836)
O'er Anet's hopeless seas of marsh to stray, Her shrill winds roaring round my lonely way; To scent the sweets of Piedmont's breathing rose, And orange gale that o'er Lugano blows (ll. 715-718)	Hail Freedom! Whether it was mine to stray, With shrill winds whistling round my lonely way, On the bleak sides of Cumbria's heath-clad moors, Or where the dank sea-weed lashes Scotland's shores; To scent the sweets..." (ll. 606-610).
Table 2. Example of 1836 revisions to <i>Descriptive Sketches</i> (ed. Birdsall, 1984)	

The relative exoticism of the original, with its setting in the Alps and northern Italy, is no longer necessary to establish the authority of the writer or the poem. It also loses its specificity of time and place, as the “sage of the Lakes” reworks the poem into a more generalized work with a geography much closer to home.

Another example from *Descriptive Sketches* is this note from the 1793 and other versions – “It is only from the higher part of the valley of Chamouny that Mont blanc is visible” (Birdsall 106) – that was excised from 1836 on. Another cut, this time from *An*

Evening Walk, was this note (“Down the rough slope the pondrous waggon rings.’ BEATTIE”) glossing Wordsworth’s line “Downward the pond’rous timber-wain resounds” at line 116.

I believe there are two final significant elements of the 1836 *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* as it was placed before the public as part of the cultural conversation. First of all, it was the first authorized edition of Wordsworth’s work to carry a portrait of the poet,²⁹ further evidence of his place in the larger English culture. And finally, it was in the 1836 *Poetical Works* that Wordsworth removed from the title page of *The Excursion* the sub-title “a Portion of the Recluse,” finally admitting both to himself and publicly that *The Recluse* would remain unfinished, and the rest of his canon would have to suffice to ensure his place in the poetic tradition. Both of these features speak to a stability of poetic identity, a monologism related to his epitaphic impulse, that guided Wordsworth’s publication strategy in his later years.

Meanwhile, Wordsworth’s presence in the contemporary culture and cultural conversation continued to be felt. One of the things that was happening was the publication at this historical moment of memoirs and biographies of those earlier days. In the same way that Coleridge’s *Biographia* had “reminded” the culture-at-large in 1817 of the first impressions made by *Lyrical Ballads*, people like Joseph Cottle, for example, began publishing reminiscences that “reminded” the culture of the 1830s of the early influence of Wordsworth. So, in the same way that Wordsworth’s repeated releases of updated collective works kept his earlier *persona* in front of the public, the remembrances of Coleridge, Cottle, and others to come kept his multiple voices and uses of voices present. It was Cottle, too, who alerted the world to the existence of *The Borderers*. We

have seen with works like *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner* how early works, received by the coterie audience or “intimate group,” were later released by Wordsworth; now, members of the coterie audience were making the culture at large aware of the existence of some of these earlier unpublished works.

The new generation responded positively to Wordsworth’s early work, and the chronological distance from its origins somehow aided in this phenomenon. Shelley and Keats lived to be disappointed in the author of *Lyrical Ballads* and *Poems, in Two Volumes* – lived to see him become a friend of Lord Lonsdale, for example – and, of course, Byron dismissed the Lake poet. But the early Victorian audience did not seem as concerned with Wordsworth’s personal shift in politics. To them, he must have seemed a relic from bygone times. As Gill puts it in his later study of Wordsworth and the Victorians, “[t]o Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Hazlitt, Wordsworth had been the lost leader, who had betrayed his early radicalism. By the 1840s the circumstances against which his apostasy had been measured had so changed that to the new generation political apostasy mattered less” than the consistent strain of humanitarianism that ran through his work (*Victorians* 27-8). The vagueness of Wordsworth’s religious doctrine actually became a strength, as did the simplicity of the poetry and the solitary themes of a “Lake Poet,” things for which he had once been ridiculed. By the 1830s, he had, in fact, become an adjective: something could be described as “Wordsworthian” (*Victorians* 22). Two other pieces of evidence pertaining to Wordsworth’s final success and complete incorporation into the larger culture come in the form of specific publishing occasions: in 1837, 20,000 copies of an authorized³⁰ one-volume *Complete Poetical Works* were published in Philadelphia, showing that Wordsworth was not only affecting a new generation but a

new world as well; and in the following year Wordsworth published *The Sonnets of William Wordsworth: Collected in One Volume*, which presented the public with the popular sonnets, a total of 415 of them, and each printed on a separate page.

Examinations of the social conditions of the working poor, which had become one of the defining features and elements of success for the early novel in England, had informed Wordsworth's consciousness and poetical works since the very beginning. The very successes of writers like Dickens resulted in part from a sensibility identified by Wordsworth and other Romantic poets. Even as poetry may have declined as a published form in relation to the emerging popularity of the novel, Wordsworth's work was woven into the cultural, ethical, and political fabric of the early Victorian era. His poetry appealed to a wide range of readers, and the records at Dove Cottage show that his work did continue to comfort and encourage readers from all walks of life. Part of this appeal was that Wordsworth's poetry was difficult to square entirely with one creed or another; as Gill points out (*Victorians* 69), he was enlisted in *both* the Anglican and Catholic causes, and even shown to be a Quaker!

One of the projects he kept coming back to was, of course, *The Prelude*. Begun in 1799, and greatly expanded by 1805, the poem was returned to many times over the years. By 1839, the thirteen-book structure of 1805 had been modified into a fourteen-book version. Reiman posits an interesting theory that illustrates the pervasive influence of the sonnet on Wordsworth's later career. He notes that Wordsworth cut the 1805 version by 589 lines, or more than the average length of one of the Books of the poem in its fourteen-book form. At the same time, he added a Book to the thirteen-book structure. If the classical model of epic was at all a concern, Reiman argues, Wordsworth could

easily have reduced the poem from thirteen to twelve books – but instead, he *added* a Book. Reiman’s idea here is that the sonnet has now informed the epic, and Wordsworth is with *The Prelude* achieving a kind of “super-sonnet”:

The macrosonnet begins with an octave in which he describes his intellectual and moral development before his watershed encounter with the French Revolution. The first tercet of the sestet consists of three books (IX-XI), all entitled “Residence in France,” that recount his revolutionary enthusiasm for, and subsequent disillusionment with, the course of events in France. The final three books discuss his revulsion against the calculating, rational philosophies both in France and England and his return to reliance upon more fundamental human emotions arising from the influences of his early, formative years (Reiman “The Beauty of Buttermere” 148).

It is tempting to speculate that the sonnet form had taken such a hold on Wordsworth that he would subtly invoke it in his final revisions to the early autobiographical poem he would leave for publication upon his death: in other words, the epitaph of his early years was in sonnet form. However, given that no one even noted this parallel for over 130 years after the publication of *The Prelude* argues the extreme obscurity of such an “encryption.” Overall, the movement of Wordsworth’s career is to engage naïve readers at an intimate level in order to widen his audience; Reiman’s suggestion, even though it

offers this neat connection of the sonnet form to *The Prelude*, indicates an extremely small “*closed coterie*” as the intended audience of such a pattern.

The year 1842 also marked further publication. Wordsworth turned his attention to the manuscripts of the *Salisbury Plain* poems and *The Borderers*, both known among the coterie, and even mentioned in print, and now he worked them into form for publication while they were still under his control (Gill 404). The *Salisbury Plain* poems underwent thorough revisions, and a version entitled *Guilt and Sorrow; or Incidents upon Salisbury Plain* opens the publication *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years (Salisbury Plain 11)*. It also included a revised version of *The Borderers* and one of the poems he had written in memory of brother John back in 1805, “Elegiac Verses, in Memory of my Brother, John Wordsworth.”³¹ New compositions in the volume included a series of sonnets on capital punishment, some new lyric poems, as well as a series of memorial poems on the 1837 trip to Europe with Crabb Robinson: *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*. Then, in a somewhat characteristic move to control the reception of the volume, Wordsworth instructed Moxon:

I will send you in a post or two the names of the Persons in and about London, to whom I wish Copies to be sent from myself. But I have particularly to request that no Copies be sent to any Reviewer or Editor of Magazines or Periodicals whatever (*Letters VII:308*).

Wordsworth’s choice of channels of transmission in the cultural dialogue meant it was barely noticed, much less reviewed (*Salisbury Plain 14*). Only the *Eclectic Review* of November 1842 contributed to the public cultural conversation with a mixed response.

While admitting, on the one hand, that Wordsworth's "rank and place are already assigned him by the general voice" (401), there is a great deal of criticism of the early poetry and of the Wordsworthian "system." *Lyrical Ballads* was basically a failure, in the opinion of this reviewer: "Productions, in which figure such characters as Betty Foy, Peter Bell, and Harry Gill, in spite of occasional flashes of genius, will never be regarded as otherwise than egregious failures" (403). And the "early" poems as presented here for the first time, dating as they do from the same time period as *Lyrical Ballads*, seem to be dismissed with the same attitude (404). When the volume did not sell very well, Wordsworth did not question his decision not to send copies out to the opinion leaders; rather, he typically blamed the taste of his audience, identifying their apparent appetite for the novel now over poetry: "Dr. Arnold told me that his lads seemed to care for nothing but Bozzy's [Dickens's] next number" (*Letters* VII:314). Ultimately, however, what is significant about the *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* is that it is Wordsworth's last discrete volume.

Wordsworth as Poet Laureate is an interesting thread in the cultural conversation in itself. In 1813, his reputation was so clearly contested, and Scott and Byron were clearly so much more popular poets, that Wordsworth did not really have a chance. The laurels had gone to Southey then, but now, upon Southey's death in 1843, Wordsworth seemed to have finally established himself as indisputably the leading poet of his time. However, when the laureateship was first offered to him, he declined because he thought himself too old to fulfill the duties – here he was, 73 years old, a remnant of an earlier time (from our vantage point, we could say a relic of the "Romantic era" surviving into

the “Victorian age”³²). Upon further request from government, including from Queen Victoria herself, Wordsworth accepted:

[H]e had established that it was he who was conferring luster on the Laureateship, not the other way around, and that he had accepted only because it was his sovereign’s conviction that as long as he lived no one else could claim the title of pre-eminent national poet (*Victorians* 28).

In dialogue, then, with his time and culture, Wordsworth and his reputation had increased the “value” of the laureateship.

While he continued to revise and re-issue his work, the 1845 incorporation of the *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* into his canon was an important final project. The single-volume, double-columned collection *Poems of William Wordsworth* of 1845 he saw as both comprehensive and as more convenient for the common reader. He controlled its production as tightly as ever, including the choice of engravings (the volume had an engraving of the poet and one of Rydal Mount); the decision to drop the prose pieces that had been published for years now at the end of his collected works; the placement of the poem ‘If thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven’, with which he wanted the volume to open; and the layout of the title-page. His original impulse of 4 November was to present himself in all his glory:

“THE POEMS

OF

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH D. C. L.

POET LAUREAT ETC – ”

However, by the next day, he was writing back to Moxon, “I have considered and reconsidered the title, and I cannot make up my mind to adhere to any but simply

THE POEMS
OF
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH’

In the event, however, Moxon went with the former: a publisher’s marketing decision trumped the author’s attempt at simple, epitaphic self-presentation (*Letters VII 717*).

And, of course, he revised, including a revision to the end of the first Book of *The Excursion* – what had begun as *The Ruined Cottage* – making it more explicitly Christian:

<i>Excursion I, ll. 932- 950(1814)</i>	<i>Excursion I, ll. 932-956 (1845)</i>
<p>My Friend! Enough to sorrow you have given, The purposes of wisdom ask no more; Be wise and cheerful;</p> <p style="text-align: center;">and no longer read</p> <p>The forms of things with an unworthy eye. She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here. I well remember that those very plumes, Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall, By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o’er, As once I passed, into my heart conveyed So still an image of tranquility, So calm and still, and looked so beautiful Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind, That what we feel of sorrow and despair</p>	<p>My Friend! Enough to sorrow you have given, The purposes of wisdom ask no more: Nor more would she have craved as due to One Who, in her worst distress, had oftentimes felt The unbounded might of prayer; and learned, with soul</p> <p>Fixed on the Cross, that consolation springs, From sources deeper than the deepest pain For the meek Sufferer. Why then should we read The forms of things with an unworthy eye? She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here. I well remember that those very plumes, Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o’er, As once I passed, into my heart conveyed So still an image of tranquility, So calm and still, and looked so beautiful Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind, That what we feel of sorrow and despair</p>

was his theory of Poetic Diction. The diction itself, without the theory, was of less consequence; for the mass of readers would have been too blind or too careless to notice it. But the preface to the second edition of his Poems (2vols. 1799-1800) [i.e., the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*] compelled all readers to notice it. Nothing more injudicious was ever done by man (296).

De Quincey said a lot of silly things in this essay, but his general enthusiasm was hard to deny. And we must remember, too, that, like Coleridge, he was one of the coterie members who had heard *The Prelude* recited in its earliest version. In fact, far from hiding the fact of Wordsworth's connection to the French Revolution, de Quincey seemed eager to proclaim it, as he seemed to sense the "revolution" was coming round again. His comments on the "sceptic" in *The Excursion* – the figure we would call the Solitary – exhibit this faith in the political revolution coming round and the Wordsworth of the French Revolution becoming more publicly proclaimed:

If [the sceptic], at the first, hoped too much . . . [the Wanderer, the Vicar and the poet] afterwards recant too rashly. And this error they will not themselves fail to acknowledge, as soon as they awaken to the truth that the French Revolution did not close on the 18th Brumaire 1799, – at which time it suffered eclipse but not final eclipse, at which time it entered a cloud but not the cloud of death, at

which time its vital movement was arrested by a military traitor, – but that this Revolution is still moving under ground, like the ghost in Hamlet, through every quarter of the globe (312).

As Roberts puts it, de Quincey wants to *re-politicize* Wordsworth at the same time that others, including Coleridge and the poet himself, are trying to *de-politicize* him (254). From this point until late in twentieth-century criticism, it would appear that Wordsworth “won” and the romantic ideology predominated until the 1980s.

The last five years of Wordsworth’s life were marked by personal losses, reissues of the various forms of his collected works, and further attempts at ensuring his lasting reputation. Dora was gravely ill in 1844, and had gone to Portugal in 1845 in search of better health. In 1846 William and Dorothy’s brother Christopher died. Dora, back in England, fell ill over the winter of 1846-7, and eventually succumbed to tuberculosis on 9 July 1847. The loss was devastating, and for some time it was thought Wordsworth himself might die. He did not, but once again he took steps to ensure his works were received in a certain way. He continued to revise and alter his canon and present the works to the public, with a series of projects intended to arrange and confirm the shape of his *oeuvre* after his death: an 1846 reissue of the 1836-7 *Poetical Works* in 7 volumes, incorporating *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*; an 1847 reissue of the one-volume *Poems* of 1845; an 1849 reissue of the 1846 *Poetical Works* in 7 volumes; an 1849 reissue of the 1845 *Poems* in one volume; and the 1849-50 *Poetical Works* in 6 volumes. Wordsworth’s works were selling, and he was working right up until his own death to find the ideal final form of his canon. It was during this year, as well, that he dictated a

series of memoranda to his nephew Christopher to be used after his death – this did, indeed, lead to the two-volume *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* that was published in 1851. These memoranda complement *The Fenwick Notes*, as well, those notes dictated to Isabella Fenwick in 1843. These two biographical “projects” of Wordsworth’s simply serve to emphasize the ongoing commitment of the “family business” to the proclamation of William Wordsworth’s greatness in an organized, coherent, and controlled way.

He lived out the rest of his life as the Sage of the Lakes, active to the very end. A letter of 1844 illustrates his cultural place and popularity: “You will perhaps be surprised when I say that nearly every day, the year through . . . I have either Books sent to me, or MSS, or applications for Autographs” (*Letters* VII:538). Visitors included the young Algernon Swinburne who, in 1849 at age eleven, visited the great sage: “Wordsworth was rather stiff with the adults, but he was so very kind to Algernon, who was ‘greatly interested at the thought of seeing the great poet’, that when they parted and the poet said ‘he did not think Algernon would forget him’, the sensitive little boy left in tears” (*Sewell* 106-10). By the time of his death at noon on 13 April 1850, William Wordsworth, D.C.L., Poet Laureate, Etc., had done all that he could to educate the public’s taste in relation to his poetry, and to ensure his place in the pantheon of great English poets.

Chapter 8: Epilogue

A strict adherence to my method ought to dictate that the conversation end with Wordsworth's death. However, the poet was right in his assessment of epitaphs and memorials: the conversation continued even though his living voice could no longer participate in it. Although many critics had nominated Wordsworth as one of the leading poets of his age, his reputation was still contested right through the rest of the nineteenth century. To use the language of Arnold and Swinburne, the cultural dialogue was largely continued by the "Wordsworthians" and the "Byronists" who were still struggling to decide which poet had supremacy. Here, too, members of the Wordsworth coterie – his "second selves" – contributed to the final establishment of his enduring place, much as we saw Coleridge come back as a critic in 1817, and de Quincey in 1845, to defend Wordsworth. Thus we see the further workings of the "family business" in attempting to promote Wordsworth's reception even after his death.

After his death, the mythologizing of William Wordsworth was immediately fostered by three things, two of them arising directly from the "family business." The first, of course, was the release of *The Prelude* in the year of his death, 1850 (it just happened to be the year Tennyson released *In Memoriam*, as well, which outsold Wordsworth's work). *The Prelude* is the story of the growth of poet's mind – growth that took place during his childhood and youth, including parts of his past he most tried to hide or re-present during his lifetime. As Johnston points out (835), there was a paradox at work in the fact that the last publication Wordsworth oversaw was the one that dealt with the first things about him and his career: "*The Prelude* was the story he could not tell his nation, only his family and friends [during his lifetime]": the last addition to his

public portrait covered the earliest part of his life. Further, it was the ultimate example of the coterie poem becoming a public poem.

The following year, the second piece of the machinery of reputation-building appeared in the form of the “authorized” biography by nephew Christopher Wordsworth, based on the brief, sketchy notes taken from what his uncle had dictated to him, and on the *Fenwick Notes* and letters Christopher only saw after his uncle’s death. Gill criticizes Christopher as a biographer, suggesting that he had no literary sensibility, and ended up re-casting his uncle in his own religious image. Further attempts at controlling the image of William Wordsworth are clear from the fact that only 2 of 64 chapters are devoted to the crucial period of personal development 1791-5, with no mention of Annette at all (*Victorians* 32-35). Between *The Prelude* and this authorized biography, we can see that the “family business” worked hard to give the reading public versions of Wordsworth’s life that would serve to explain but also promote his work – that would serve as paratexts to his whole life and career.

The third force at work, which began to gain momentum, was the drive to erect public monuments in honour of the Lake Poet (*Victorians* 28-9). Eventually, this led to the establishment of Dove Cottage as a focal point for Wordsworth’s life and work, and to the creation of literary societies devoted to maintaining the profile of William Wordsworth. The Wordsworth Society was formed some years later, in 1880, lasted seven years, and included eminent members like Matthew Arnold, Robert Browning, Lord Coleridge, Leslie Stephen, and John Ruskin, but also Miss MacFarren of The Ladies’ College in Cheltenham, Professor G. H. Palmer of Harvard, Revd. R. Brown

Borthwick of All Saints' Vicarage in Scarborough – and several Wordsworths (Liu 261-7).

Wordsworth's family and his publisher Moxon released several editions of his work before copyrights began expiring in 1859. De Quincey re-released his essay "On Wordsworth's Poetry" in 1857, mostly unaltered but with a short "Postscript." But one of the biggest boosts to Wordsworth's enduring popularity was Arnold's rearrangement of the poems in 1879, and the preface that accompanied the selection. Arnold writes at that time that Wordsworth's popularity had peaked in the 1830s, partly because of the influence of Coleridge and revolving around Cambridge (36-37). Since then, Arnold asserts, Tennyson has wrested away some of the readers from Wordsworth, to the point that, "I cannot think, then, that Wordsworth has, up to this time, at all obtained his deserts" (38). Writing from the perspective of a member of this late coterie, Arnold uses the word "Wordsworthian" to describe readers such as himself, at the same time arguing that Wordsworth deserves a larger readership:

I have spoken lightly of Wordsworthians; and if we are to get Wordsworth recognized by the public and by the world, we must recommend him not in the spirit of a clique, but in the spirit of disinterested lovers of poetry (Arnold 55).

Arnold's solution is twofold: first of all, he argues that since the longer poetry is the weaker, we must, to really appreciate Wordsworth, concentrate on the shorter pieces; further, the poems need to be selected, but selected according to a new set of principles. Wordsworth's classification system was "not according to any commonly received plan of arrangement, but according to a scheme of mental

psychology” (42-43), and Arnold quite obviously disagrees with the arrangement. Arnold’s approach has been a powerful force in shaping Wordsworth’s reputation and place in the English literary canon ever since. Wordsworth’s own intentions, clearly, were to build up his body of work in a comprehensive way, even though the parts of that corpus were assembled non-chronologically. In other words, although Wordsworth brought in and kept revising earlier works for re-publication – I am thinking of *The Borderers*, the *Salisbury Plains* poems, and the re-releases of *Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk*, for example – his primary impulse was to leave an entire *Works* behind. Arnold was the first powerful influence on a more “anthologized” version of Wordsworth, and the one that most undergraduates and the “common reader” encounter in selections of Wordsworth’s poetry to this day. Jared Curtis writes in his “Matthew Arnold’s Wordsworth” about how Arnold essentially remade Wordsworth in his own image, not only selecting poems from many sources and rearranging them according to his own principles, but also selecting the texts he wanted to use and even re-titling some of the poems.³⁴ Curiously, like many reviewers ever since its appearance in 1807, Arnold did not seem to think highly of the “Intimations Ode”:

Even the ‘intimations’ of the famous Ode, those cornerstones of the supposed philosophic system of Wordsworth . . . this idea, of undeniable beauty as a play of fancy, has itself not the character of poetic truth of the best kind; it has no real solidity (Arnold 49).

The edition Arnold worked on was published in two formats by Macmillan, and has proved enduringly popular, with “steady demand” on an initial run of 3500 copies dictating a continuous life in print up until at least the time of Curtis’s article (1992): “In its first 110 years the book has been reprinted more than forty times and is still in print with its original publishers” (Curtis “Matthew Arnold’s Wordsworth” 45).

While one of my primary assertions is that much of Wordsworth’s reputation was established during his lifetime, and to a large part because of his own persistent “campaigning,” it is also important to recognize that the establishing of a “Romantic period,” and Wordsworth’s place in it, largely took place in the twentieth century. There were influential critics and shapers of English culture during the latter half of the nineteenth century as well – Arnold and Swinburne come to mind – but the privileging of the Romantics was intimately linked with the rise of the New Criticism (see Mahoney). In a way, Wordsworth’s most influential idealized audience, the readership he defined in the 1815 “Essay, Supplemental,” came to be the critics and the English literature “clerisy.” And the “Romantic ideology” became ascendant, with a generalizing and essentializing that elided the actual historical conditions of the French Revolution and the early nineteenth century. During this part of the critical history, the “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” became an apt statement of that Romantic ideology and the “solidity” Arnold noted as lacking actually was seen as part of its appeal. By the time of the New Historicists, the enduring power of the “Intimations Ode” is largely unquestioned, even though the poem was so challenging to the contemporary audience when it first appeared:

[I]t is a rare, original, and comprehensive record of the birth and character of a particular ideology – in this case, one that has been incorporated into our academic programs. The idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture is the grand illusion of every Romantic poet (McGann *Romantic Ideology* 91).

However, a full study of Wordsworth's reputation from 1850 to the present would be a substantial undertaking in its own right, and here we are concentrating mostly on those features and figures directly related to the person William Wordsworth, especially the coterie audience and their contribution to the "family enterprise."

Conclusion

Using Mikhail Bakhtin's theories and vocabulary of *dialogism*, *heteroglossia* and *style*, and attempting to maintain as much as possible a chronological examination of Wordsworth's career, we have traced a portrait of the author slightly different from that provided in most biographies. By showing how Wordsworth and Bakhtin were so similar in their awareness of social dialects and differences, we might even be tempted to view Wordsworth as an early Marxist! I do not mean this as mere idle speculation: the striking similarities between Wordsworth and Bakhtin dramatically illustrate how Marx and his followers inherited the Wordsworthian or Romantic ideology, with its sensitivity to the intersection of class, politics, and language. In other words, Wordsworth sounds like an early Marxist precisely because Marx's mid-nineteenth-century work has picked up the concerns of Wordsworth and his contemporaries.

Rather than accept a notion of declining authorial power, or of a young radical Wordsworth vs. an older conservative Wordsworth, I have shown an ongoing cultural dialogue in which the poet's style, approach, poetics, and reputation have been negotiated through that long conversation. I have, of necessity, had to begin with a more "traditional" methodology, that is, a retrospective construction of what the young Wordsworth must have been like and how he viewed a poet in the first place. Wordsworth took solace, throughout his long career, in the comfort and support of a true coterie – the intimate group of family and friends around him. I suggest, in fact, that some of his early poems were parts of his working through of his relationship to his potential audience (or the absence or neglect of that audience), with representative members of the coterie (Dorothy, John, Coleridge) providing the real-life models for what would become rhetorical structures inviting "ideal readers" to engage with the poems. But he was striving for a larger audience at the same time that he sought to retain a coterie-like relationship to that audience, so he widened that circle, pushing the conversation outward to a more faceless public. Simultaneously, he published theoretical pronouncements about his poetry, the kind of audience he deserved, and how readers should approach his work. One of the exciting results of this was that audiences who did engage imaginatively with Wordsworth's poetry essentially did become members of his coterie. He also brought poems that had been composed early and shared only amongst the intimate group into the public conversation many years later. This practice became professionally risky: from 1807 to 1820 or so, Wordsworth was typically seen as a poet of great talent, but also as someone who insistently pursued his own path. I suggest he was worried enough about his reputation to perhaps accentuate forms and subject matter

that appealed to a more “conservative” audience later in his life, in particular the sonnet form. However, he did not altogether give up on his early ideals of democracy and humanitarian spirit, nor did he ever remove the “rustic” from his body of work, instead insisting on re-publishing those early or ridiculed pieces in the entire corpus of his work. The appearance of *Peter Bell* and *Benjamin the Waggoner* are perfectly illustrative of this insistence: given the attacks by the critics from 1807 on, these two publications were bound to be open to ridicule, and yet Wordsworth put them on view, placed them in their context, and assimilated them into his full public legacy. The public statements of coterie members like Coleridge, and later de Quincey and Arnold, assisted in establishing his reputation and overcoming some of the condemnation. But William Wordsworth took a great deal of pride and faith in his own abilities, always shored up by members of his family. The triumph of his poetic vision was Wordsworth’s greatest struggle, but ultimately his greatest accomplishment. William Wordsworth lived to see his place in the pantheon of English poets guaranteed; since his death in 1850, that place has become, if anything, only more assured.

¹ Some of the theories and writings attributed to others, like V. N. Volosinov, are assumed by some to be by Bakhtin.

² In the *Fenwick Note* (1843) on this poem, Wordsworth recalls “*An Evening Walk*. The young lady to whom this was addressed was my Sister. It was composed at school, & during my first two College vacations. There is not an image in it which I have not observed; and now, in my seventy third year, I recollect the time & place where most of them were noticed. [quotes ll. 181-184, 1836] I was an eye-witness of this for the first time while crossing the pass of Dunmail Raise. Upon second thought, I will mention another image: [quotes ll. 213-214, 1836]” (*Fenwick Notes* 6).

³ Note, for example, the opening paragraph of the “Preface” to Beattie’s *The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius*: “The design was to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude age, from the first dawning of fancy and reason, till that period at which he may be supposed capable of appearing in the world as a Minstrel, that is, as an itinerant Poet and Musician; – a character which, according to the notions of our forefathers, was not only respectable, but sacred.”

⁴ As Hartman recognizes in *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814*, “An incredible visual appetite is at play: the poet relies mainly on sight (the importance of sound will, however, become apparent) or on a strong reduction of the visual to alternations of high and low, stasis and motion, and, above all, light and shade” (92).

⁵ All citations for contemporary reviews are from Reiman’s *The Romantics Reviewed* and employ Reiman’s pagination.

⁶ When Wordsworth and Jones landed in France at the very beginning of their trip in 1790, they landed right in the middle of the first “Bastille Day” celebrations.

⁷ Kenneth Johnston makes a great deal out of the erotic element in the poem, speculating on actual experiences Wordsworth may have had on his trip to Europe. More to my purpose is the recognition that Wordsworth revised these lines later in his life as he re-published the poem: “Wordsworth dropped nearly half of the lines from the 1793 version describing these girls, and drastically toned down those that remained when he first reprinted excerpts from the poem in his collected Poems of 1815. He further truncated these passages when he republished the entire poem in 1836 as a specimen of his juvenile work” (215).

⁸ Wordsworth’s note to line 475, omitted when an excerpt was re-published in 1815: “This tradition of the golden age of the Alps, as M. Raymond observes, is highly interesting, interesting not less to the philosopher than to the poet. Here I cannot help remarking, that the superstitions of the Alps appear to be far from possessing the poetical character which so eminently distinguishes those of Scotland and the other mountainous northern countries. The Devil with his horns, &c. seems in their idea, the principal agent that brings about the sublime natural revolutions that take place daily before their eyes” (Birdsall 84).

⁹ Hartman suggests, “William’s reunion with Dorothy in 1794 coincides with his first real change of style, shown by these revisions: the poetry begins to be more relaxed, that is to say, less aggressively mimetic, less under the oppression of sight and rich externals” (n93).

¹⁰ France had declared war on England February 1, and England followed suit by declaring war on France February 11.

¹¹ The sermon had appeared on January 30, 1793, and was noticed in *The Critical Review* of February 1793.

¹² In this vein, Alan Liu writes, “We can pick up the story of Wordsworth’s vocational imagination in 1794, when he first thought seriously of writing as a profession” (332).

¹³ Kenneth Johnston suggests that the Calvert inheritance was enough for Wordsworth to live independently (401).

¹⁴ “In the poems of spring 1797 the Racedown crisis comes to an end. Most are experimental in form and style, but in none is Wordsworth's art disordered by compelling personal feeling” (Sheats 136).

¹⁵ Robert Mayo’s 1954 article “The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads” makes this point: the poetic “scene” of the 1790s made repeated reference to women in similar circumstances.

¹⁶ As in this letter to Joseph Cottle June 8, 1797: “Wordsworth admires my Tragedy – which gives me great hopes. Wordsworth has written a Tragedy himself. I speak with heart-felt sincerity & (I think) unblended judgement, when I tell you, that I feel myself a *little man by his side*; & yet do not think myself the less man, than I formerly thought myself. . . . T Poole’s opinion of Wordsworth is – that he is the greatest Man, he ever knew – I coincide.---” (STC Letters I:321).

¹⁷ And, of course, there was the further “Note to The Thorn” published in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* which describes the sailor as a retired Captain, etc.

¹⁸ Levinson (1986) comments on this feature of the poem: “Because he defines himself as an individual spirit, dependent only on Nature and on his own responsiveness for his sense of meaning and attachment . . . he cannot conceive himself as anything other than a role (the recluse) – or, what amounts to the same thing, a past and a future projection. The turn to Dorothy, then, is a move toward otherness, or toward a social reality, albeit a greatly complaisant (cathected) instance of that order. Dorothy functions in the poem as a final surface, the condition for the poet’s ongoing reflective life” (45).

¹⁹ Sheats also recognizes this “double-voicedness,” contrasting the lyric to the broader category of the poems written in “blank verse”: “He consistently approaches the most painful and threatening truths in his life through the lyric, and speaks in blank verse only from positions of relative safety, of subjects that can be mastered without the aid of extrinsic guarantees. At any given time in the great decade, therefore, he commands two voices, and in the lyric may confront fears that in contemporary blank verse he represses, rationalizes, or denies” (187).

²⁰ The Solitary’s loss of his children evokes Wordsworth’s recent loss of his own children. And years later in the *Fenwick Note to The Excursion*, Wordsworth went to great lengths describing the real, historical bases for the characters, as well as identifying himself very naturally with the poetical “I” who narrates the poem, as in this passage explaining the geography of the poem and the movement of the characters: “In the poem, I suppose that the Pedlar *and I* ascended from a plain country up the vale of Langdale, and struck off a good way above the chapel to the western side of the vale. *We* ascended the hill and thence looked down upon the circular recess in which lies Blea-Tarn, chosen by the Solitary for his retreat. After *we* quit his cottage, passing over a low ridge *we*

descend into another vale, that of Little Langdale, towards the head of which stands, embowered or partly shaded by yews and other trees, something between a cottage and a mansion or gentleman's house such as they once were in this country. This I convert into the Parsonage, and at the same time, and as by the waving of a magic wand, I turn the comparatively confined vale of Langdale, its Tarn, and the rude chapel which once adorned the valley, into the stately and comparatively spacious vale of Grasmere, its Lake, and its ancient Parish Church; and upon the side of Loughrigg Fell, at the foot of the Lake, and looking down upon it and the whole vale and its encompassing mountains, *the Pastor is supposed by me to stand*, when at sunset he addresses his companions in words which I hope my readers will remember, or I should not have taken the trouble of giving so much in detail the materials on which my mind actually worked” (*Fenwick Notes* 81, italics added).

²¹ In his first “Essay on Epitaphs,” Wordsworth alludes to the role of the *Works* of one such as himself in relation to an epitaph: “The mighty benefactors of mankind, as they are not only known by the immediate survivors, but will continue to be known familiarly to latest posterity, do not stand in need of biographic sketches, in such a place; nor of delineations of character to individualise them. This is already done by their Works, in the memories of men” (*Prose* II: 61).

²² For example, Dorothy wrote to Sara Hutchinson on 18 February 1815, “Longman informs us that exclusive of those Copies of the Excursion sent by William’s order, ‘they appear to have sold 269 copies’. This is not so bad” (202).

²³ The short poem numbered “2” following “To a Butterfly” was removed until 1835.

²⁴ The offending passage is when Peter Bell looks into a pool of water: “A startling sight / Meets him beneath the shadowy trees. / Is it a fiend that to a stake / Of fire his desperate self is tethering? / etc. . . . Is it a party in a parlour / Crammed just as they on earth were crammed, / etc.”

²⁵ Wordsworth supplied the prose text to Joseph Wilkinson’s *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire* in 1810. Next came this *Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes in the North of England*, published as part of the *River Duddon* volume in 1820. The success of that volume encouraged Wordsworth to publish the *Topographical Description* separately, under the same title, although with revisions each time, in 1822 and 1823. Finally, in 1835 another revised version came out, this time entitled *A Guide through the District of the Lakes in the North of England*. Wordsworth himself never used the title *Guide to the Lakes*.

²⁶ For example, the first section in the 1815 *Poems* is “Poems Referring to Childhood and Early Youth,” followed by “Juvenile Pieces” – a structure that held for several subsequent publications. By 1845, however, with the addition of the *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*, and after the decision to publish *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* in their entirety, the opening section was “Poems Written in Youth,” followed by “Poems Referring to the Period of Childhood.”

²⁷ This organization is so strong that it trumps the reality of the tour: the poem “Incident at Bruges” makes its way into the *Memorials* volume in 1843, even though it was based on a separate trip Wordsworth took in 1828 with a different party.

²⁸ Geoffrey Jackson, editor of the Cornell edition *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845*, draws this contrast: “Whereas Dorothy and Mary may be viewed as

enthusiastic cultural tourists enlarging their own minds by exposure to fresh experiences, he is more of a cultural colonist intent on engraving foreign (and Scottish) landmarks on his own Anglocentric cultural map, a map on which many of the main features derive from a classical education” (16).

²⁹ While this was the first authorized edition to carry a portrait of the author, the pirated 1828 Galignani edition does have an engraving (Bruce Graver, posting to NASSR-L Aug. 8, 2003).

³⁰ A pirated version of the 1820 Longman *Miscellaneous Poems* (four volumes) came out in Boston in 1824 with the title *Poetical Works*. This 1837 edition was edited by American academic Henry Reed, who became a promoter of Wordsworth’s work in the U. S., and with whom Wordsworth established a friendship.

³¹ Jared Curtis points out that, in the period May-July 1805, Wordsworth wrote the elegiac poems “To the Daisy” (first published 1815 among “Epitaphs and Elegiac Pieces,” where it was put in all subsequent editions), “Elegiac Verses, in Memory of my Brother, John Wordsworth” (first published 1842; placed among “Epitaphs and Elegiac Verses” in 1845), and “Distressful Gift! This book receives” (first published 1947), all composed after John’s death, and intended as a sequence to be read together (Curtis 7).

³² Wordsworth appears in both Hazlitt’s *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) and Richard Hengist Horne’s *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844).

³³ Gill says that Wordsworth was fond of Faber, but that the latter was frank about his dislike of the early Wordsworth’s pantheism (Gill 417).

³⁴ Curtis concludes, for example, “Anxious to influence Wordsworth’s reputation as the fine lyric and narrative poet he saw him to be, Arnold built up his text accretively, if not systematically, to that end” (57).

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Appendix I

Case Study – Cumberland, British Columbia

For today's "common reader," and the culture at large, I suggest that Wordsworth has been incorporated into the cultural fabric as a monologic Nature-poet. Once he had created the ideology through which to view his works, he has been seen as a Nature-poet – perhaps *the* Nature-poet – for several generations. In his own words, Wordsworth was very successful at creating the epitaph that was the body of his work. There is nothing new in this statement, but by way of a conclusion the evidence I'd like to cite is *geographical* rather than textual. For, as a poet of Nature, and in particular of the nature and people of a *place* (the Lake District, in what was called Cumberland), Wordsworth's presence today can be recorded in *places* named with Wordsworthian associations clearly intended. His actual names are both too common ("William") and too odd ("Wordsworth") to be very widely used. But, one need only look at an atlas of North America to get an idea of the dozens of "Cumberlands" and "Lake Windermers" that mark a gesture toward the sage of the Lakes.

In British Columbia, largely explored and settled after 1850, there is both a Lake Windermere and a Cumberland. Our Cumberland is on Vancouver Island, in the Comox Valley. Coal was discovered there in 1869, and over the next dozen or so years coal baron Robert Dunsmuir bought up control of the coal and arranged with the provincial government to build a railway (the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway) from Victoria up to the area where the mines were to go in. By 1888, a new settlement called "Union" went up in the Comox Valley to provide goods and services for the miners at the Union Mines (*Cumberland* 226-7). After waves of immigrant miners – from China, Italy, and, of

course, Scotland and England – a new town site called Cumberland was established in 1893 (*Cumberland* 228).

Now, there is great natural beauty surrounding Cumberland, to be sure, but it is difficult to imagine how a coal-mining town itself would resemble the pastoral beauty invoked by Wordsworth. Some suggest that the town may have been so named because many of the miners were from the Cumberland area in England. Perhaps, but they did not stop at the name of the town. One of the most striking things about walking around Cumberland, even today, is that one is surrounded by place names with Wordsworth and Coleridge associations. In addition to the obligatory “Dunsmuir” Street there are streets named “Penrith,” “Maryport,” “Windermere,” and even “Derwent.” So, presumably, for some, the town and its streets were named for the corresponding places in the Lake District that had become so identified with the Lake Poets, particularly Wordsworth, further illustrating that this poet, his work, and his strong identification with a particular place continued the cultural dialogue. The miners themselves who worked and settled on the Island were probably largely the kind of rustics that Wordsworth wrote about when he used figures of local farmers and shepherds in his poetry. In fact, someone (Dunsmuir?) may have chosen the Lakes’ associations because the mining population of Cumberland, B.C. evoked the Lakes, Dales and Borders inhabitants of Wordsworth’s poetry. However, it also seems fitting somehow that a poet who could leave out particularities and gloss over historical fact as Wordsworth did in his drive to be an enduring figure in literary history would be so closely associated with a coal mining community, riven by racial and labour strife, and perhaps even consciously replacing “Union” with “Cumberland” as part of a sanitizing publicity campaign. In any event, Wordsworth and his associations live on

well beyond the town of Grasmere and the confines of Dove Cottage, and they continue to speak in many registers.