

demonstrates how interpretations *within* Wordsworth's poems can serve as a model and rationale for our contemporary interpretations:

We note one omission from our Wordsworth section, which testifies complexly to the current situation in studies of the poet. We offer no essay on the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," which may be Wordsworth's most extensively discussed major lyric. The reasons for this are varied. In many cases significant work on the great Ode has become so heavily contextualized that it has outgrown the confines of a book like this one. The intertextual, dialogical analyses of the Ode's engagements with Coleridge's and other work found in Lucy Newlyn's *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion* (1986), Paul Magnuson's *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (1988), and Gene W. Ruoff's *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Making of the Major Lyrics, 1802-1804* (1989) are not readily extractable. In *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (1989), Alan Bewell stresses Wordsworth's indebtedness to eighteenth-century anthropological speculations for his depiction of the child as philosopher. Jeffrey C. Robinson's *Radical Literary Education: A Classroom Experiment with Wordsworth's "Ode"* (1987) is a substantial and interesting monograph and encircles the poem from a variety of perspectives. Helen Vendler's "Lionel Trilling and the Immortality Ode" (1978), which takes off from Trilling's celebrated and influential essay of fifty years ago is long and densely argued, and does not represent the redirections we illustrate in this book. Other distinguished commentaries, which any student of the Ode should consult, are by scholars represented elsewhere in this book. See Jerome Christensen's "'Thoughts That Do Often Lie Too Deep for Tears': Toward a Radical Concept of Lyrical Drama" (1981); Geoffrey H. Hartman's "'Timely Utterance' Once More," in *Rhetoric and Form: Deconstruction at Yale* (1985); relevant chapters in Frances Ferguson's *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (1977); Marjorie Levinson's *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (1986); and Peter J. Manning's *Reading Romantics: Text and Context* (1990).

The Politics of "Tintern Abbey"

Although Kenneth R. Johnston's most substantial contributions to Wordsworthian studies are his comprehensive analyses of the various stages in the composition of the poet's unfinished masterwork in *Wordsworth and "The Recluse"* (1984), and although he would not describe himself as a new historicist, his important essay on "Tintern Abbey" dramatizes most of the characteristics of romantic new historicism. He is concerned here, as elsewhere, with how contexts affect texts, both in their presence and (in the case of "Tintern Abbey") by their absence. The concern extends to how texts work within contexts—how a poem appearing in the anonymous *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, for example, differs from the same poem appearing in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, which emphasizes in its preface poetry's social relations.

One new-historicist tendency missing from Johnston's piece is deference to Frankfurt school Marxism, emphasized by Marjorie Levinson in her "New Historicism: Back to the Future" (1989). New historicists begin from the oldest tradition of Wordsworthian criticism, dating back to the poet's own day—the accusation of "anti-climax," denunciation of the change in both poetic skill and political morality in the poet's later years, this falling off attributed to his "betrayal" of his early interlinking of more progressive poetic and political principles.

New historicists, however, give this established tradition two special twists. First, political ideology for them supersedes all else. For new historicists, Wordsworth's principal and almost exclusive concern was the French Revolution, with his agonized apostasy from his original sympathies being the determinative event of his career. When in 1974, for example, Karl Kroeber, credited Wordsworth with being driven by an ecological vision, he observed that such a vision had definite political implications, that from its origins in the seventeenth-century landscape representation had been a politicized mode. But for the new historicists references to the natural world are primarily a screen for more fundamental ideological motivations, which, repressed, shape all other impulses and interests. Hence the importance of "displacement," currently our criticism's most fashionable term. As Johnston argues, "Tintern Abbey" is "already political," and because it is "one of the most powerfully *depoliticized* poems in the language" it is necessarily "a uniquely political one."

The most controversial aspect of this popular approach is its emphasis on the silences of a text. Thus Marjorie Levinson, in her

essay "Tintern Abbey" (1986), which is generally congruent with Johnston's reading, argues with impressive vehemence that it is the absence of any reference to the French Revolution (along with the failure to mention the vagrants who congregated around Tintern Abbey) that should determine our understanding of the poem. A clue to this line of thought is provided by Johnston's observations on the poem's date, which he and Levinson believe Wordsworth associated with the fall of the Bastille nine years before.

This essay is also characteristic of current scholarship in its interest in the Wordsworth of the 1790s. Johnston's current work in progress is a biography of young Wordsworth. Among other recent studies shedding new light on the poet in this decade, see James K. Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (1984); David V. Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790-1793* (1986); and Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (1988).

Wordsworth's "Lines, Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 13, 1798," is not usually considered a political poem, but if we shift from "political" to "social," and thence to the still more general "moral," we find ourselves on familiar grounds of interpretation. The entire poem may be said to turn upon the fulcrum of Wordsworth's assertion that he has "learned / To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes / The still, sad music of humanity" (88-91). Most critical interpretations focus on the beginning or end of this process rather than its turning point: i.e., on Nature's "beauteous forms" or on the transcendently sublime insights they lead to, when "we see into the life of things" (49). But each of the poem's five verse paragraphs contain strong language of social responsibility that lends value to Wordsworth's enjoyment of landscape—otherwise a morally neutral datum—and allows him to build toward quasi-religious assurances. Thus these knots of social language are essential to the reputation "Tintern Abbey" deserves and has long enjoyed, of a secular poem that gives us something to believe in. In its own cultural context, the poem enacts a process whereby a fashionable intellectual pastime—the cultivation of picturesque views—becomes transcendently important, precisely by virtue of *not* being an escapist pleasure, but a socially responsible one.¹

But there are many tensions inherent in this process, directly parallel to the more obvious tensions in the topic sentences of each of the poem's paragraphs, and generally identifiable with the over-arching drama of Wordsworth's work (especially *The Prelude*): how to present the growth of his mind as a continuous, uninterrupted, fundamentally unthreatened sequence, or, to show how love of Nature leads to love of Mankind. In socio-political terms, this problem requires that the connection between landscape-viewing and religious belief be non-violent, certainly non-revolutionary, and possibly even non-political, insofar as politics, the art of the possible, must be practiced in the arena of the improbable and the uncertain. Preliminarily, we can identify some of the strains to which Wordsworth subjects the idea of political maturity even in the poem's central fulcrum, the sonorously impressive lines on "the still, sad music of humanity."

There is the slight oddity of displacement between verbs, *looking* on nature while *hearing* that sad music. Is it a recall to duty or a fading echo? And *how* has he "learned" to do this? Not the process, but its beginnings and endings (Before and After) are represented most in the poem. The adverbs and adjectives multiply qualifications. "Hearing oftentimes—but how often is that? And what kind of music is "still, sad music"? It sounds more like the *andante* of a Brahms symphony than the *allegro* of a Romantic one by Beethoven, where we might hear, rather than "still, sad music," the agitated angry noise of human suffering. Furthermore, why is music so obviously calm as "still, sad music" further qualified as being "nor harsh nor grating," especially when, as John Hodgson has excellently observed, "harsh" and "grating" certainly seem appropriate to the human sounds represented elsewhere in the poem: "the din of cities," "the sneers of selfish men," and "greetings where no kindness is?"² What is being so carefully protected from harsh grating in a nonetheless necessary process of *chastening* and *subduing*? Probably, by way of a preliminary answer, the egoism of the creative artist, fearful of being overborne by other legitimate claims on his genius.

Certainly some of these questions are unfairly loaded, and go too far beyond the text, which after all is what it is, and is not required to supply an exact demonstration of the relation of aesthetic experience—whether landscape viewing or poetry writing (or reading)—to social responsibility and ultimate values. Nonetheless, the poem itself provokes such questions, and if in what follows I seem often to go outside the poem and to imply that Wordsworth is neglecting or sublimating unpleasant associations, it's not to suggest that he like any poet can't write the poem he wants to write, but that he himself has imbedded it with language which simultaneously invites and resists probing, opening up just those areas of concern that it determinedly seeks to elide or contain in more manageable terms. Overall, this dialectical tendency in the social language of "Tintern Abbey" is directly parallel to what is to many readers its most impressive dramatic achievement, its way of making affirmative statements of belief while urging itself along by a constant series of very tentative, not to say negative, qualifications: "If this / Be but a vain belief," "somewhat of a sad perplexity," "Nor perchance, / If I were not thus taught," etc.

The more appropriate question would be to determine how "the still, sad music of humanity" is represented *in the poem*? A partial answer has already been suggested, in Hodgson's gloss on "harsh" and "grating". But I want to consider Wordsworth's representations of humanity in "Tintern Abbey" from a variety of perspectives: the progress of the text itself, Wordsworth's actual and literary experiences during his Wye tours, the poem's place in *Lyrical Ballads* and in relation to Wordsworth's contemporaneous work on *The Recluse*, and in the context of his other learning processes combining nature and humanity between 1793 and 1798.

We hear the "still, sad music of humanity"—i.e., see representations of human beings and human emotions—in two basic variations of a single phenomenon: of elision, mutation, or restriction. In the first, descriptive paragraph, human phenomena constitute fully half the description, but are presented in a consistently specialized way that connects them—blurs them, one might say—as *undisturbingly* as possible into the beautiful surrounding natural landscape. Secondly, in each of the subsequent verse paragraphs, the fulcrum or tonic note of human music is heard within a very narrow yet very intense range of notes, which is

conservative pastime, and an eminently non-political or even escapist one. He facetiously proposes, for example, taking a hammer to certain corners of the Abbey to give it a more appropriately ruined appearance. Nonetheless the simple honesty of his clergyman's intelligence quite breaks through his aestheticizing framework when he come to the beggars, even as he tries to account for them with conventional moral assumptions (this is the same Gilpin whose only complaint against the picturesqueness of Grasmere was that it lacked banditti⁹). "The poverty and wretchedness of the inhabitants were remarkable," he says; they lived in "little huts, raised among the ruin;" they had "no employment, but begging: as if a place, once devoted to indolence, could never again become the seat of industry" [a Protestant slap at Catholic decadence]. "The whole hamlet" of beggars congregated at the gate, some begging outright, others offering "tours" of the ruin's most interesting spots. Gilpin and his party followed one of these: "one poor woman [who] could scarce crawl; shuffling along her palsied limbs, and meagre, contracted body." She leads them to what she says was the "monk's library," but "it was her own mansion," and "all indeed she meant to tell us was the story of her own wretchedness; and all she had to shew us, was her own miserable habitation. We did not expect to be interested; but found we were. I never saw so loathsome a dwelling . . . a cavity between two ruined walls; which streamed with unwholesome dews. . . . not the merest utensil, or furniture of any kind. We were rather surprised, that the wretched creature was still alive; than that she had only lost the use of her limbs."¹⁰

I submit that such a powerfully ambiguous passage, standing out markedly from its bland surrounding contexts in Gilpin, and reinforced by direct experience, must have had an enormous impact on Wordsworth, as landscapeviewer, as author of *Lyrical Ballads*, and as prospective author of *The Recluse*, with its philosophical "views of Nature, Man, and Society . . . of considerable utility" (*LEY*, 212, 214). And I think he went to great lengths—greatly artistic lengths—to prevent such powerful associations and experiences from overbearing his poem, by recasting such beggars as "vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods," and further distancing them into the Hermit at home in his cave, where he belongs, sitting by his fire, alone.

It may be objected that the poem is not set at Tintern Abbey, but a "few miles above" it.¹¹ Insofar as this is poetically true (even if not literally so), I may only be supplying background contexts to the poem. But we must also recall that Tintern Abbey was the focus of all such tours up the Wye, for Gilpin as well as Wordsworth, and that the Wordsworths were at the abbey every single day of their tour, arriving, departing, passing, or visiting.¹² The point of all such tours was to view *ruins in landscape*, not just landscape alone—a point underscored by the fact that in Gilpin's guidebook the ratio of illustrations of ruins to those of landscapes without ruins is three-to-one. Furthermore, though the poem's original title said "written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth later changed this to "composed," to take cognizance of the fact that he finished it as he descended into Bristol at the end of their "four or five" day tour. And, just as we all refer to the poem as "Tintern Abbey," so did Wordsworth and his circle, as evidenced most recently in Beth Darlington's edition of Wordsworth's love letters to his wife, where he speaks of "the Tintern Abbey, . . . of all my Poems the one [in] which I speak of it will be the most beloved by me."¹³ There have been various attempts over the years to connect or detach the abbey from the poem, but these have been

mostly concerned with reinforcing or downplaying the religious associations it would lend.¹⁴ My point stresses, not its religious associations, but the troubling, painful notes its human, social implications would introduce into "the still, sad music of humanity."

To return, in conclusion of this point, to Gilpin's description of the crippled beggar woman, think how many of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* recapitulate Gilpin's stance when confronted by her: "all indeed she meant to tell us was the story of her own wretchedness." Compare the Female Vagrant: "She ceased, and weeping turned away. / As if because her tale was at an end." Compare the forsaken Indian woman: "Too soon, my friends, you went away; / For I had many things to say." And think how much of Wordsworth's own learning "to look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth" derives from following out the implications of Gilpin's unwilling expression of surprise: "we did not expect to be interested; but found we were." Wordsworth composed basically two kinds of poems for *Lyrical Ballads*: "views" or "pictures" of suffering humanity (roughly, his "ballads") and "lyrics" of meditation upon natural beauty (his five sets of "Lines" in the collection, from those left on the yew-tree seat to those composed above Tintern Abbey). The "views" or ballads of suffering are presented quite barren of commentary or explanation, except for a strong, repeated, but unspecified injunction to *thought*, as in, "Now *think*, ye farmers all, I pray, / Of Goody Blake and Harry Gill." The "Lines," by contrast, are full of meditation and explanation about the source and meaning of human appreciation of natural beauty, but quite vague and unspecified about its social significance, except for the sense of sharp and even contradictory contrast, as in, "Have I not reason to lament / What man has made of man" "Tintern Abbey" in a way brings these two discrete modes together, when Wordsworth says he has "learned to look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth." But, though it admits more of "the still, sad music of humanity" into its meditations, it nevertheless radically downplays it, proportionate to "all that we behold / From this green earth: of all the mighty world / Of eye, and ear."

This proportion, or disproportion, within "Tintern Abbey," and between the two kinds of poems Wordsworth contributed to *Lyrical Ballads*, is explicable within the context of the work Wordsworth considered his main task in 1798, writing of *The Recluse*, to which the composition and collection of *Lyrical Ballads* was very much incidental. By the time he composed "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth had written 1300 lines of *The Recluse*, consisting mainly of the poems now known as "The Ruined Cottage," "The Old Cumberland Beggar," the lines on the Discharged Veteran which conclude Book IV of *The Prelude*, and, probably, "A Night-Piece."¹⁵ More important, however, is the fact that he had, by July, *stopped* working on *The Recluse*, and the most powerful reason for his stopping, on the basis of internal interpretation, is precisely his failure to integrate the sufferings of Margaret, the old Cumberland Beggar, and the Discharged Veteran with scenes of natural beauty like those described in "A Night-Piece," or to satisfactorily establish the connection between landscape viewing and social responsibility which is implicit in the frames around "The Ruined Cottage" and the Discharged Veteran—i.e., the connection between their aesthetic, way-wandering young narrator and the bleak human figures or stories he unexpectedly meets of the road. Wordsworth's poems in *Lyrical Ballads* are successful, relative to his failure on *The Recluse*, because they present separate, discrete, freestanding images of human suffering on the one

hand, and meditations upon natural beauty on the other. He had, so far, failed to coordinate such images with such meditations in his masterwork, *The Recluse*, and he had to work very carefully in his most ambitious poem in *Lyrical Ballads* lest their failure to relate, to integrate, overcome and break down that poem as well. Hence the modulated chords of "the still, sad music of humanity." Of course, the integration of aesthetic experience to social responsibility is still the largest legacy—or piece of unfinished business—which the Romantic movement has bequeathed to the modern world, and our modern institutionalized academic structures (including scholarly journals) for instruction and research into the nature and meaning of artistic experience have as their major justification, in mass democratic societies, the claim to be doing just that.

FROM POLITICAL LONDON TO PICTURESQUE TINTERN

The presence or absence of beggars in poems was not necessarily a political fact in 1798, however much it may seem so today. It was more of a religious fact, having to do with parish relief rates and poorhouses, which, though not without political implications in a society with an established church, was mainly a local problem, not a national one, and certainly not yet a matter of international political ideologies. But mention of *The Recluse* does touch upon the widest sort of implications for explaining human suffering, since, with its themes of Man, Nature, and Human Life, it was to have been a means of rescuing the young intellectual radicals of Wordsworth's generation from the selfish cynicism into which they were sinking as a consequence of the failures of the French Revolution.¹⁶ Furthermore, while *The Recluse* was not exactly an ideological poem, it was certainly a philosophical one, and was, in effect, the habitation and the name of the ideal of a philosophically interpretive, and philosophically interpretable, poem which motivated much of the greatest work of both Wordsworth and Coleridge. Although the idea of such a grandly philosophic masterwork undoubtedly came to Wordsworth from Coleridge, Wordsworth had not been innocent of grand plans before he met Coleridge, and the grandest of these was a project whose scope very much resembles that of *The Recluse*: his detailed discussions between 1792–95 with his best friend before Coleridge, William Mathews, for a liberal journal of politics and literature, to be called *The Philanthropist*. Some examination of this project, and some speculation on its possible realizations, will lead us back to the second large aspect I have noted in the representation of "the still, sad music of humanity" in "Tintern Abbey": the intense but narrow range of human ills by which it is characterized.

Wordsworth's description of the various departments he wanted to include in *The Philanthropist* give a good idea both of its ambitious scope and of likely reasons for its failing to appear. It would include 1) general political news and comment, 2) essays on morals and manners and "institutions whether social or political," 3) essays for instruction and amusement, particularly biographical sketches of such libertarian heroes as Milton, Sidney, and Turgot, 4) essays on taste and criticism, and works of imagination and fiction, 5) reviews, 6) "some poetry," selected on a decidedly conservative editorial policy (given Wordsworth's later reputation as an innovator)—no original compositions, to avoid the "trash"

investing other journals, and 7) reports of parliamentary debates and selected state papers (*LEY* 125–26).

Given this enormous load of contents, it is not surprising that Wordsworth's and Mathews' plans for *The Philanthropist* should fail to materialize, nor to hear Wordsworth say, somewhat grandiloquently, in November, 1794, that "The more nearly we approached the time fitted for action, the more strongly was I persuaded that we should decline the field." But did they entirely abandon it? Even in the letter in which he gives it up, Wordsworth says he is so "emboldened" by Mathews' description of the possibility of finding work on an opposition newspaper "that I am determined to throw myself into that mighty gulph [i.e., London literary journalism] which has swallowed up so many, of talents and attainments infinitely superior to my own." By February of 1795, he was back in London in company with Mathews and several other old Cambridge "friends of liberty," congregating around the temporarily famous figure of William Godwin, author of *Political Justice*. And on March 16, 1795, appeared in the first issue of an actual journal called *The Philanthropist; or Philosophical essays on politics, government, morals and manners*, published "by a society of gentlemen." Of this actual *Philanthropist*, Moorman says it was of "extreme radical opinion [and] ran for six months, when Pitt's 'Gagging Acts' must have killed it. It was scurrilous in style and contained nothing which could have issued from the pen of Wordsworth" (M.I., 256n3).

I am very grateful to Moorman for pointing out the existence of the real *Philanthropist*, but I must indicate that even her description of it is not quite accurate. It ran for eleven, not six, months (through January 25, 1796), was not extremely radical in opinion (but rather liberal Whiggish, manifesting the "Spirit of 1688" which had been revived to greet the French Revolution and to push for further parliamentary reform in England), and contained many things which could have come from the mind or pen of Wordsworth—if we imagine him working in the special circumstance of a group effort by young liberal university gentlemen publishing a popular journal for the enlightenment of the masses, a group in which he would have been a decidedly junior, apprentice member. This actual *Philanthropist* was, for the most part, a Godwinian, anti-war, opposition paper. Such sentiments as, "All improvements are slow and progressive," are pure Godwinism: it contained some bumptious propropaganda verse on contemporary abuses ("Bob Shave the King," against Pitt's tax on wig powder), but the imitations of Juvenal's satires which Wordsworth was writing during this same period (which he was later very eager to hush up) would have done just fine in *The Philanthropist*. For the most part it mixed lengthy extracts from standard Whig texts (e.g., Trenchard's *History of Standing Armies in England*) with original essays, the best of which are written in clear, simple, argumentative prose, based on traditional principles of British constitutionalism, and opposing the war with France not on revolutionary "French principles" but on the expeditious grounds of the war's damage to English peace and prosperity because it interfered with free trade and the expansion of the empire—and also because it inflicted hardship on the lower classes. Thus the politics of the actual *Philanthropist* of 1795–96 very much resemble the politics of the proposed *Philanthropist* of 1792–94. Although both might have been considered "radical" in the hysterical political climate in London after the declarations of war (mass meetings, extremist plots, Treason Trials, paid government informers), it was certainly not treasonous, nor activist, and could be characterized as "a

very safe little journal," as E.P. Thompson has described another Wordsworth friend's provincial journal, *The OEconomist*,¹⁷ a description which would also fit yet another of his friend's plans for yet another similar journal, Coleridge's *The Watchman* of 1796. When Wordsworth and Mathews were discussing the political slant of their proposed *Philanthropist*, Wordsworth said, "I recoil from the bare idea of a revolution," and the actual *Philanthropist* is not a revolutionary journal, but one aimed precisely at avoiding revolution by advocating economy in public administration and "gradual and constant reform" of profligate ministerial abuses.

Almost all that is known of Wordsworth's whereabouts in London in 1795 is that he was a frequent visitor at Godwin's. They first met at a large tea party on February 27 (M.I.; *CEY*)—a tea party which, in the hypothesis I am developing, has all the marks of an organizational meeting. There was Godwin, the tutelary genius and celebrity to act as a magnet and inspiration for the large group of ambitious young literary gentlemen three or four years out of college: Wordsworth, Mathews, James Losh (the friend from *The OEconomist*, and also the friend who received on of the first notices of *The Recluse*), and other ex-Cambridge friends of Wordsworth's, Tweddell, Raine, Thomas Edwards (who would work with STC on *Watchman*), Higgins, and French (M.I. 263–64). More important, there were, between Godwin and these young men, three men in particular—William Friend, George Dyer, and Thomas Holcroft—who were all experienced publicists in radical-reformist causes. Friend and Dyer were, moreover, former faculty members or family friends of Wordsworth and others in the younger group, and their presence as managers in a joint enterprise would be very flattering and impressive to their protégés. Friend had been removed from his Cambridge tutorship in 1792 for his conversion to Unitarianism, and from his fellowship in 1793 for writing a political and religious tract of liberal, moderate persuasion: *Peace and Union Recommended to the Association Bodies of Republicans and Anti-Republicans* (1793).¹⁸ Holcroft was a different kettle of fish, irascible and erratic, one of the heroes of the day by virtue of his almost accidental inclusion in the famous Treason Trial of 1794, and, coincidentally, author of a condescendingly cool review of Wordsworth's first two published books, *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* (1793).

In sum, without going into all the many biographical details that variously link these people together, I hypothesize that the mix looks right for a publishing venture by a society of young, ambitious, and unemployed university gentlemen. And the title, *Philanthropist*, was in 1795 virtually a Godwinian code-word, the inevitable abstract personification, common to 18th century journals (cf. *The Spectator*), of Godwin's key noun: Benevolence. I propose that London was too small a town in 1795 for such a group of genteel intellectual philosophic reformers as met at Godwin's house in February not to overlap somehow with the "society of gentlemen" who brought out the first issue of *The Philanthropist* in March; indeed, it is questionable whether any other group could have published so thoroughly Godwinian a journal. I hypothesize not so much Wordsworth's composition of particular passages in the journal, but his place among the legwork errand boys of the enterprise: gathering the extracts from Trenchard's *Standing Armies* or Robinson's *Political Catechism*, writing up drafts—stimulated by meetings at Godwin's—of current topics, and experiencing the unpleasant sensation of having his drafts heavily edited by his former teacher, Friend, his former schoolteacher's friend, Dyer, and his former reviewer, the "extremely candid" Holcroft (as Lamb

later described him). Furthermore, I connect Wordsworth's likely reaction to this experience with his letters to Mathews about their proposed *Philanthropist*, where he expresses the easiest sort of confidence about achieving a simple, lucid prose style with practice (cf. his actual, crabbed prose style in the *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*, 1793), and I contrast this with his hesitations about actual newspaper work as he comes to London, preferring solitary composition of occasional pieces of commentary to covering parliamentary debates, because of "being subject to nervous headaches, which invariably attack me when exposed to a heated atmosphere or to loud noises . . . with such an excess of pain as to deprive me of all recollection" (*LEY*, 138).

The most specific places in *The Philanthropist* where I would argue for the presence of Wordsworth's hand are two essays—one signed "W."—where the topic is the use of genius or talent in the face of widespread human suffering. The implicit argument—or subtext—of these essays is to draw parallels between England's ignoring its talented young men and its insensitivity to the hunger and homelessness of the rural lower classes, as if to assert, 'If only I could achieve greatness, so could all of humanity.' If not exactly a unique topos of argument, it is nonetheless a highly specialized one. Both of these essays concentrate more on poverty's effect on the human mind than on its bodily ills, as do Wordsworth's "views" of human suffering in *Lyrical Ballads*, and both extend such effects to the entire character of a nation. As "W" says, "familiarity with this kind of wretchedness has also an injurious effect upon the minds of the higher orders."¹⁹ To anticipate, I hypothesize that in "Tintern Abbey" we see some of Wordsworth's efforts to modulate such injurious effects.

Not only does this hypothesis allow us to give a more concrete location to Wordsworth's flirtation with Godwinism in the 1790s (otherwise adequately covered by Harper and Legouis²⁰), it also provides an active, real context for his narrow but intense range of expressions for human evils in "Tintern Abbey": "lonely rooms," "the din of towns and cities," "hours of weariness," "the fretful stir / Unprofitable, and the fever of the world," and, especially, "evil tongues, Rash judgments . . . the sneers of selfish men, . . . greetings where no kindness is, . . . [and] all / The dreary intercourse of daily life." For this is the kind of emotional context my hypothesis suggests: heated discussions, intense arguments, differences of editorial opinion pressures of deadlines and securing copy, peer pressure and rivalries, oversight by slightly senior former teachers whose success and achievements could not be denied, even as (in Wordsworth's case) the suspicion dawned that he was a much better writer but *not* a better journalist, the need to find some employment, the eagerness to succeed, all underlined not only by the heady atmosphere of political liberty unleashed by the French Revolution, but, more to the point, the exciting danger of working on an opposition newspaper in wartime, which was underlined by the danger of treason trials—though for such young gentlemen the danger was less of imprisonment or transportation to Botany Bay than the almost equally frightening danger of damaging *their* individual publishing prospects, and messing up the development of their *careers*.

"Tintern Abbey" is not the only poem in which Wordsworth generalizes about human evil from a narrow base of negative emotions. I have already cited the "Lines" left on the yew-tree seat. The portions of Book X of the 1805 *Preludes* dealing with his London experiences of this time ("Dragging all passions . . . Like culprits to the bar"), could as well describe editorial arguments at Godwin's

house as internal arguments with himself. And in the portions of "Home at Grasmere" composed in 1800—as Book First of Part First of *The Recluse*—he defends his removal to Grasmere as not the escapist fantasy of a self-indulgent aesthete but as a realistically responsible decision, since human beings in Grasmere are just as bad as human beings elsewhere (i.e., in cities). But we note again the specificity of the evils by which he conveys this: "selfishness and envy and revenge, / Ill neighbourhood . . . flattery and double-dealing, strife and wrong" (436–38), in contrast to the poem he intends to write, *The Recluse*, which will keep "clear . . . of all ill advised ambition and of pride" (884–885). The range of powerful generalization that Wordsworth sustains from this narrow base is all the more important when we consider that the "W" of *The Philanthropist*, confronting much more directly the mental evils of extreme poverty and deprivation, was inevitably if unwillingly driven into veiled threats of violent revolution: "I forbear the direct application of these sentiments to our own country: if my premises be true, its prospects cannot be very bright. The state of the lower orders, I am persuaded, marks more than any other circumstance, the state of a country; that of the lower orders here is certainly deplorable. Let us hope that their relief is within the reach of ordinary means; for the application of extraordinary means to remedy the evil, the hardiest cannot anticipate without dread. Yours [sincerely], etc., W."

To return to "Tintern Abbey," we may say that insofar as it describes a process of learning "to look on nature not as in the hour of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes the still, sad music of humanity," it is a process very different from the implicit disruption of picturesque context which occurs in Gilpin's guidebook, or the one that is explicit in *The Philanthropist*. Like "still, sad music," this learning is represented as smooth, continuous, and unbroken, not disruptive, violent, uncertain, or threatening. This is why it must be "nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power to chasten and subdue." Harsh, grating music might break the music of the poem, might cause the poem to break down, and open up the gaps in the fabric of thought, or society, such as those that "W" could only anticipate with dread.

Inevitably, this address to the politics of "Tintern Abbey" sounds critical of Wordsworth, and to a certain degree it is. But not to a fundamental degree: I wish him to have been neither a political journalist nor a revolutionary activist, and his shift of enthusiasm away from the French Revolution is a shift that almost all European intellectuals underwent in greater or lesser degree. Nor am I suggesting that "Tintern Abbey" should somehow be "more" political—that Wordsworth should have more forthrightly included some ruins—human or architectural—in his landscape "a few miles above Tintern Abbey." Rather, I am saying that the poem is already political, that its necessary social fulcrum is everywhere present (if narrowly defined), that the beggars are there, as "vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods," and that this necessary political element opens the poem up to further appreciation if we press appropriately on the language Wordsworth himself provides, aided by information outside the poem. Undeniably, Wordsworth engages in some retrenchment in presenting the mediating social terms of his learning process; we may call this his conscious artistic control or his unconscious psychological sublimation, or a little of both. This is part of the cost of his becoming a poet, and the price of "Tintern Abbey's" being the poem it is: moving without fundamental breaks from the beautiful landscape toward seeing into the

life of things, with Nature as "the soul of all my moral being." Indeed, it is part of the triumph of the poem to be able to include as full a representation of this process as it does—in comparison, for example, with Wordsworth's tendency elsewhere in the *Lyrical Ballads* to divide his poems into powerful narratives of human suffering (that only vaguely imply "thought") and equally powerful meditations about the interrelation of Mind and Nature (that only vaguely refer to "what man has made of man"). I am as impressed by Wordsworth's honesty in allowing the socio-political tensions of his poem to show through as by the parallel rhetorical statement of doubt ("If this be but a vain belief") that organize his final affirmations.

CODA: THE DATE OF "TINTERN ABBEY"

The date of "Tintern Abbey" may bear importantly upon its political sublimations. The standard account is that William and Dorothy left Bristol on July 10 and returned on July 13; the poem being inspired, composed, and completed during most of these four days.²¹ However, Wordsworth in later life spoke of a tour "four or five" days (Fenswick Note), and the rate of progress which he and Dorothy would have had to maintain to complete the entire tour (from Bristol past Tintern to Goodrich Castle and back) in four days has been calculated as twenty miles per day, even granting two stretches they covered in the sightseeing boats which plied a lively tourist trade between Ross-on-Wye and the Wye's mouth at Chepstow.²² This may not seem much to such super-human walkers as the Wordsworths now appear to us lazy moderns, though it works out to three miles per hour if we assume eight full hours of steady walking, making allowance for time stopped for refreshment, time spent inspecting ruins (the main business of such popular excursions as the Wye tour), and the fact that Dorothy, however energetic, would necessarily have been a genteel young lady hiking in long skirts and none-too-comfortable shoes. Moreover, Wordsworth's description of another walking tour, his summer jaunt across Europe in 1790 with Robert Jones (which also began, coincidentally on July 13; cf. *Prelude* VI.355–57), consistently emphasizes their lightning speed and astonishing rate of progress. Yet my calculation of stages of this journey (from Mark Reed's *Chronology of the Middle Years*) shows them to have been approximately twenty-five miles per day—essentially the same as the Wye's tour's—covered by two young men aged 20, rather than a brother and a sister, aged 28 and 26. My wife and I tested these hypotheses by some "feet on" research in August, 1982, and though satisfied that the Wordsworths could have accomplished the circuit in four days, we are certain that five days would have been more comfortable. (The day deserving most suspicious scrutiny is the Wordsworth's third day, a 27-mile walk down the whole course of the trip, from Goodrich Castle through Monmouth past Tintern to Chepstow—and thence back up the river to Tintern to spend the night.) Given Wordsworth's literalism, there is not much reason to doubt that he dated the poem of the day he finished writing it. But there is every reason to suppose he looked at it long and hard the next day (it was at the printers with the rest of *Lyrical Ballads* by July 18), and, with that same literalism, thanked his Muse it was already finished. But it is intriguing to suppose that the tour took one day longer than we think, and that Wordsworth, in light of other contemporary socio-political associations we can find lurking beneath the

calm surface of its "still, sad music," turned its clock back twenty-four hours, to avoid setting off the powerful buried charges that would be exploded if this locodescriptive meditative landscape poem concluding his new volume of poems, were to have been entitled, "Lines / Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 14, 1798."²³ Though "Tintern Abbey" may never come to be regarded as a political poem, it may well be, in light of these interpretive possibilities, one of the most powerfully depoliticized poems in the language—and, by that token, a uniquely political one.

ADDENDUM—1993

Since this essay first appeared, several others have been published, to such an extent that one might now refer to "The 'Tintern Abbey' Debate." The issue in the debate is more methodological than interpretative, turning on the kinds of evidence that are admissible when we interpret a historical document in terms of its context. The participants in the debate work from various sets of assumptions—historicist, deconstructionist, intertextual, and formalist—to ask how permeable a text is, or can be made, to phenomena (including other texts) that we know lie just outside its margins. What is or should be the effect, for example, of our knowledge that Wordsworth carried William Gilpin's *Tour of the Wye Valley* with him in 1798? This is a relatively uncontroversial example. The debate has tended to focus more heatedly on socioeconomic and political factors in the Wye Valley and in Wordsworth's career that are not mentioned in "Tintern Abbey," particularly the vagrants living in the ruins and the local iron industry. The most controversial position has been staked out by Marjorie Levinson, "Insight and Oversight: Reading 'Tintern Abbey,'" in her *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, pp. 14–57. Levinson in effect argues for the poem's maximum permeability, not only to contemporary facts about the Wye Valley but also to the history of its institutions: the communitarian ideal of the Cistercian monastery, for example, relative to Wordsworth's personalistic focus. Most subsequent entries in the debate have tried to qualify Levinson's claims to a greater or lesser degree. But her position received an advance endorsement (so to speak) from its summarized appearance in Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology*, pp. 84–88, as an example of the role historicist scholarship can play in exposing the assumptions of a past artistic ideology, especially how that ideology is reproduced in successive generations of critical (McGann would say, "naive") interpretation. Other essays in the debate include, to date: M. H. Abrams, "On Political Readings of *Lyrical Ballads*" (1990); Robert Brinkley, "Vagrant and Hermit: Milton and the Politics of 'Tintern Abbey'" (1985) and "'Our Cheerful Faith': On Wordsworth, Politics, and Milton" (1987); David Bromwich, "The French Revolution and 'Tintern Abbey'" (1991); Mark Edmundson, "Criticism Now: The Example of Wordsworth" (1990); and Thomas McFarland, "The Clamour of Absence: Reading and Misreading in Wordsworthian Criticism" (1992). Taken together, these essays provide an excellent introduction to current theoretical issues in Wordsworthian and Romantic studies, focused around the instance of a well-known text. The present essay, while anticipating Levinson's approach, does not go as far as she does in holding Wordsworth's poem responsible for what it excludes, ignores, or overlooks. But I do assume the interpretive "interest" (to use an ambiguous Wordsworthian word) of much of the same data she cites.

NOTES

1. Carl Woodring has recently traced in "Tintern Abbey" a movement from Picturesque to Sublime, stressing its "sublimity of humble human feelings," and comparing its "still, sad music" to the "still, small voice" of God in Old Testament prophecy ("The New Sublimity in 'Tintern Abbey,'" in *The Evidence of the Imagination*, ed. Reiman, Jaye, & Bennett [1978], pp. 86–100). My conclusions are similar, though in many instances our interpretations of textual details are so different we may be said to have arrived at agreement by opposite routes.
2. *Wordsworth's Philosophical Poetry, 1797–1814* (1980), p. 38.
3. *Romantic Paradox* (1962), pp. 39–53.
4. Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: The Early Years* (1957), p. 402; cited hereafter in text as "M.I."
5. In his general valuation of the inter-penetration of cultivated and uncultivated land, Wordsworth follows Gilpin: the artist "wishes that these [property] limits must be as much concealed as possible . . . that the lands they circumscribe, may approach, as near as may be, to nature—that is, that they may be pasturage" (p. 30). Specifically, Wordsworth's "hedge-rows . . . little lines of sportive wood" follow closely Gilpin's discussion of the border shrubs planted by a Mr. Morris at Persfield (*below* Tintern, incidentally): though causing "the most pleasing riot of imagination," such "paltry" improvements are but "splendid patches, which injure the grandeur, and simplicity of the whole," and their "formal introduction" should be avoided in favor of "wild underwood" (pp. 40–42).
6. Gilpin, p. 45.
7. "A Note on a Guide to Tintern Abbey," *TWC*, 8 (1977), 95–6.
8. "With a sweet inland murmur" (1.4): Wordsworth's note ends with the same phrase as his title: "The river is not affected by tides a few miles above Tintern." There is considerable evidence available to caution us against taking too literally any of Wordsworth's statements in, or about, the poem (see Notes 11 and 21). The Wye ceases to be appreciably affected by tides very close to Tintern, perhaps less than a mile above it; tourist officials cite Tintern as *the* limit, for convenience.
9. I am grateful to Pamela Woolf for this information, offered during an expert tour of "The Discovery of Lakes," an exhibition of picturesque landscape paintings mounted in the Wordsworth Museum, Grasmere.
10. Gilpin, pp. 35–37.
11. See Note 8. Geoffrey Little argues that the Wye landscape described in the poem bears more similarity to the areas Wordsworth visited on his first tour in 1793, much further up the valley (" 'Tintern Abbey' and Llsywen Farm," *TWC*, 8 [1977], 80–82).
12. If the tour took four days (see Note 21), they arrived at Tintern on the first day, departed from it on the second, passed by it on the third (returning to spend the night there), and departed from it on the fourth.
13. *The Love Letters of William and Mary Wordsworth* (1981).
14. Peter Brier, "Reflections on Tintern Abbey," *TWC*, 5 (1974), 5–6.
15. For an interpretive overview of Wordsworth's work on *The Recluse*, see my "Wordsworth and *The Recluse*: The University of Imagination," *PMLA*, 97 (1982), 60–82.
16. "I wish you would write a poem . . . addressed to those who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind. . . . It would do great good, and might form part of *The Recluse*"

(Coleridge to Wordsworth, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. [1956-1971], 1:527).

17. E.P. Thompson, "Disenchantment or Default?," in *Power and Consciousness*, ed. O'Brien and Vanech (1969), p. 169.

18. For a full account of Friend, see Frida Knight, *University Rebel: The Life of William Friend, 1757-1841* (1971). At the university disciplinary hearings on his dismissal, the Cambridge undergraduates strongly supported him, Coleridge prominent among them (Dictionary of National Biography); in 1789, he made a summer walking tour of France and Switzerland, returning with glowing reports of the new republic—such enthusiasm from a widely admired young faculty member may have helped stimulate Wordsworth to make essentially the same tour the following year.

19. *The Philanthropist* (London: Printed and sold by Daniel Isaac Eaton, Printer and Bookseller to the Supreme Majesty of the People, at the Cock and Swine, No. 74, Newgate Street, December 14, 1795), in *Early British Periodicals* (1972), University Microfilms, reel 244.

20. G. M. Harper, *William Wordsworth* (1916), I, 223-73; Émile Legouis, *The Early Life of William Wordsworth* (1897), pp. 221-78.

21. John Bard McNulty, "Wordsworth's Tour of the Wye: 1798," *MLN*, 60 (1945), 291-95; M.I., 400-07; Mark Reed, *Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Early Years* (1967), pp. 243-44.

22. McNulty, p. 293n.3.

23. J. R. Watson, while accepting the July 13 date, subjects it to interpretation that support my suppositions. Besides emphasizing the date's importance for Wordsworth as personal anniversary (because of the landing at Calais in 1790), he points out that on July 13, 1793, exactly five years before, Marat had been murdered in his bath by Charlotte Corday (the event which led most directly to Robespierre's rise to power), adding that Wordsworth, if he did indeed revisit Paris in autumn 1793, would've been aware of the great propaganda value the Jacobins had derived from this assassination, principally by David's famous painting, presented to the Convention on November 14, 1793 ("A Note on the Date in the Title of 'Tintern Abbey,'" *TWC*, 10 (1979), 379-80).

The Economy of Lyric: The Ruined Cottage

The following selection abstracted from Alan Liu's book, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (1989), displays the interaction of new-historicist thinking with interest in the early versions of Wordsworth's poems. If displacement is taken as a dominating feature of Wordsworth's poetry, a conscientious critic must reconstruct specifically (not abstractly) what does not appear in the poem. And that will carry the critic, as it carries Liu, into detailed historical analyses not merely of the poet's psyche but also of the macropolitical and microeconomic life of his society. Such analyses require the critic to consult whatever version of the text is closest to the historical moment in which the poem took shape rather than a later, "final" form.

Our brief and heavily edited excerpt from Liu's very long and heavily annotated book does no justice to his broadest political discussions, which represent Wordsworth's anxieties at his psychic complicity in the tragic violence of the French Revolution and its principal "totalitarian" product, Napoleon. But Liu's treatment of "The Ruined Cottage" not as "a poem of humanity" but as a "capitalization upon inhumanity" illustrates his basic method. This brings together the biographical details of the poet's life at the time of composition with a definition of the social-political-economic forces impinging upon him then. With "The Ruined Cottage" Liu identifies the poet's anxieties about mismanaging the legacy left him by Raisley Calvert as concentrating his awareness of the deleterious effects of industrialization, whose effects on weavers like Robert, whose desertion of his wife is the crux of the tale, is of decisive importance to the poem's shape and tone. Thus for Liu the tragedy of the poem is its demonstration that labor, which had once signified the value of household economy, is being transformed into wage-value, becoming a dehumanizing activity.

Persuasive as Liu's learned presentation is, we must note that its very vigor has recently provoked an impressive counterargument. The charge is that Liu, along with other new historicists such as Levinson and McGann, having lost sight of Wordsworth's primary concern with natural phenomena, distort the fundamental character of the poet's sociopolitical commitments. This case is eloquently presented in Jonathan Bate's

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