

28. Woolf, *Dorothy Wordsworth, Writer*, 27, 28.

29. 20 April 1806, *MY*, 1:25.

30. An interesting variant of cross-borrowing by brother and sister is the sequence of Dorothy's prose-approaching-verse notes on their visit to Glen Almond during the Scottish tour of 1803, followed by William's poem, *Glen-Almain, or the Narrow Glen*, followed in turn by Dorothy's prose account in her *Recollections of a Tour in Scotland*. See *my Poems, in Two Volumes*, 415-16.

31. Add. MS. 27902 in the British Library is Dorothy's transcription of these poems; the manuscript was originally found among Coleridge's manuscripts.

32. Levin, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism*, 6.

33. Pamela Woolf says of Dorothy's prose that it presents the natural world as whole and cyclical, but for human beings "there is no renewal"; her "writing frequently approaches elegy": see *Dorothy Wordsworth, Writer*, 67.

34. Dorothy left a gap in the line.

## Tintern Abbey: Two Assaults

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THE poem commonly known as *Tintern Abbey* has come in for two major assaults lately, one by Marjorie Levinson in *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, and one from John Barrell in *Poetry, Language, and Politics*.<sup>1</sup> Levinson and Barrell would not agree with my describing their chapters on *Tintern Abbey* as assaults on the poem; they would say they were assaulting the received reading of the poem, which they both perceive, in somewhat different ways, as what they would call, in a specialized meaning of the word, an "idealistic" one. By this they mean that critics have taken the poem at its word, have read it by positioning themselves as closely as possible to Wordsworth's authorial self-positioning, and have seen the poem and the world it summons to mind as self-constituting and immune from criticism of its premises. "Idealizing" readers, over the years, have taken a stance rather like that of Wallace Stevens toward the girl singing at Key West: "There never was a world for her / Except the one she sang and, singing, made." Levinson and Barrell (like other new historicist or cultural materialist readers such as David Simpson and Jerome McGann)<sup>2</sup> are concerned to measure the world of the poem against two historically specifiable worlds surrounding it: for Levinson, the actual topography of the valley of the Wye; for Barrell, the world of eighteenth-century philosophic discourse. By their measurements, the poem becomes suspect, and every earlier critic becomes that classic straw man, "the naive reader," taken in by the mystifications practiced by the poem. Wordsworth is exposed as one at pains to conceal or repress, according to Levinson, the real world he affects to be describing; or he is exposed as one at pains to conceal or repress, according to Barrell, the patronizing attitude he is taking up toward his sister. Both of these critics assert that they are coming to a new reading of the poem by situating it in its historical moment.

Now, situating a literary work in its historical moment can range in helpfulness from the indispensable to the marginal. The ob-

viously social genres—epic, fiction, and drama—have proved more attractive to new historicists or cultural materialists than the lyric because the social genres are full of social and historical detail. When these two materialist critics bring aspects of its historical moment to bear on *Tintern Abbey*, they seem to me to end up seriously mistaken; I want to ask here what aspects of the theory of evidence, and the theory of lyric, their mistakes bring into relief.

I will begin with the easier case, that of Levinson. Since Wordsworth and Dorothy visited the Wye with a guidebook, and since their itinerary included the town of Tintern and the Abbey itself (both described in their guide), Levinson decides that Wordsworth's omission, in the course of his poem, of descriptions of the Abbey and the vagrants that were to be found within its precincts, as well as his omission of Tintern and its industrial workers, amounts to a suppression of fact in the service of historical denial and anticollective feeling. "Wordsworth's pastoral project," she writes, "is a fragile affair, artfully assembled by acts of exclusion" (*WGPP*, 32). She defines the poem as a pastoral, and she seems to feel that even in a pastoral "acts of exclusion" (at least certain ones) are impermissible. Wordsworth's supposition that the wreaths of smoke glimpsed above the trees might point to the existence of a Hermit (his earlier supposition being that they might be a sign of "vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods")<sup>3</sup> is sternly judged: the persona of the Hermit, says Levinson, "confesses its divorce from an order of collectivity that might validate poetic achievement" (34). It does not seem to matter that the speaker nowhere in his utterance identifies himself as a poet.<sup>4</sup> Surely, if a speaker is not identified within the poem as a poet, he need not express feelings about how his poetry is to be validated, nor provide a collective reading group as an exhibit in his lyric. It might be argued that the subtitle—COMPOSED A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY, ON REVISITING THE BANKS OF THE WYE DURING A TOUR, JULY 13, 1798—sufficiently distinguishes its speaker as a poet, but I would argue that giving a title to a poem is the author's privilege; uttering the lines is the speaker's function. The speaker dramatically imagined here is not a writer, though he is a talker, a traveler, a social observer, and a brother. Wordsworth often identifies himself as a poet; and very often (even in an "autobiographical" poem) he does not. The needs of a specific genre (here, elegy and topographical description) play a role in how the speaker is imagined, as do the philosophical aims of the speaker.

Levinson's annoyance with what she takes as Wordsworth's self-

portrait in *Tintern Abbey* is that the speaker, in discussing his past, leaves out Wordsworth's earliest political disappointments. "Wordsworth learns," she writes, "to sever his interests from history . . . that had, he felt, betrayed him . . . and to align them instead with poetry, a safer investment" (36). Of course, this is a false disjunction. Wordsworth's interests were aligned with poetry long before they were aligned with politics. His first surviving poem is a celebration of the bicentenary of his school, Hawkshead, written when he was fifteen; no fifteen-year-old can write accomplished heroic couplets, in a pentameter that has rhythmic variety and musical intelligence, who has not been reading many books of verse. It might more truly be said that politics was an interruption of Wordsworth's long-standing alignment with poetry, to which he reaffirmed his commitment when his political enthusiasms had been checked by the Terror. I am not sure that it is correct to say that he felt that "history" had betrayed him. The account in *The Prelude* suggests that he felt human nature (in its turn to violence) had betrayed his former idealized view of human nature, so that he "Yielded up moral questions in despair" (1805 *Prelude*, 10.900). Whether, as Levinson thinks, poetry is (in her vulgar phrase) a "safer investment" than politics depends on what one judges poetry to be. No poet, so far as I can see, has ever considered it "safe." The despair of artists is not only a legend. In any case, Levinson's argument depends on our considering the lyric speaker of *Tintern Abbey* to be coterminous with the historical Wordsworth, a canard that should by now be impossible to anyone writing on lyric. Wordsworth did not conceal (or "repress" or "exclude") in his poetry, taken as a whole, his political investments and his political disillusion; that he should be obliged to mention them in his every poem, or even in *Tintern Abbey* alone, is a manifestly absurd requirement.

Levinson continues with a judgment about the plot of *Tintern Abbey*: "The primary poetic action [of the poem]," she writes, "is the suppression of the social" (37):

The audience consists of one person, the poet's "second self," and even she is admitted into the process a third of the way through, a decidedly feeble gesture toward externality. (38)

Sometimes one wonders whether one has read the same poem as Levinson. The female auditor is first mentioned, in fact, two-thirds of the way through the poem (in line 114, in a total of 159 lines). Levinson's language is strange: we usually don't speak of an

"audience" of one; the speaker does not refer to this female as his "second self"; the speaker is not identified as a poet. The sentence would be truer if it read, "A listener, the speaker's sister, is first addressed two-thirds of the way through the poem." Whether the sister's appearance is meant as "a gesture toward externality" at all, and, if so, whether it is a "decidedly feeble" gesture of that sort, are surely matters to be argued rather than assumed. (I will return to this question.) "Wordsworth cancels the social," Levinson continues, "less by explicit denial and/or misrepresentation than by allowing no scope for its operation" (38).

This is the old story of the dissatisfaction of the social critic with the lyric. Where are the characters? where is the plot? where is the social detail? where is the investigation into social status? where is the history? where is the scenery? where is the quotidian? where is the class war? Lyric poets themselves also feel these discontents, and the history of lyric shows a periodic tendency (from Donne through Browning to Ginsberg) to want to represent the social surround. There is an equally periodic tendency of poets toward the private and absolute lyric, aiming at either semantic concision or musical refinement of a high order, of which Mallarmé has become the modern example but which George Herbert would exemplify as well. If one wants to say, "Wordsworth cancels the social," or to speak of "the spirits [*Tintern Abbey*] must suppress" (39), one can as truly say that a drawing "cancels" the oil painting it might have been, or that a solo partita "suppresses" the symphonic mode it might have been written in.

Levinson's argument brings up the very interesting theoretical question of how one knows when something that is not present has been "suppressed" or "cancelled" (words Levinson uses as pejoratives). We are used to seeing a good deal scratched out in manuscript, but we are also accustomed to ratifying the taste of the composing author whenever we see a reason—musical, semantic, or philosophical—for the deletion, and we do not treat it pejoratively, but rather admire it. Wordsworth certainly did have, as Levinson says, historical interests and political commitments, visible in many poems, even later poems about abbeys. And his poetic project is, at least in many pieces, an autobiographical one (as it seems to be here, given the speaker's mention of his sister). We have become sophisticated enough about prose autobiography to know that the persona of the autobiographer is not necessarily his full quotidian persona—that an autobiography of religious conversion, for instance, may say nothing about the author's do-

mestic life, however full and historically important it may have been. We speak of shaping a work toward its end; are we to deny that privilege to a poet? A shadow-presence, continually suggested by unmistakable signals, can be a powerful part of a lyric; but a context not suggested within the poem by a continuous shadow-play can scarcely be invoked as a real suppressed or cancelled presence in a poem. Levinson invokes Wordsworth's historical and political interests as, in some sense, what *ought* to be in the poem, along with the history of the Protestant Reformation that left the Abbey a ruin, the charcoal-burning industry that might have been the cause of the wreaths of smoke, the enclosure policies that produced the pastoral farms, the unemployed, and so on.

What would count as evidence that these have been "suppressed"? Levinson seems to believe that anything that can be, by a critic, attached to a phrase in the poem must have been subliminally causative of it. The title, for instance, mentions the Abbey as the nearest landmark only to situate the prospect where the poem was mentally composed.<sup>5</sup> It does not seem to me that Wordsworth, who was perfectly conscious, as a tourist, of the historical facts about the ruin of English abbeys during the Reformation, had to work at suppressing those facts in writing the poetry he wanted to write. The wreaths of smoke serve in the poem as a way station for the eye to lead it down from the cliffs to a human focal point in the horizontal plane; as a visual marker, the smoke is its own excuse for being. Its presence does not mean that Wordsworth had to purge thoughts of the charcoal-burning industry from his head before or after inserting the smoke into his landscape.

Levinson's metaphors of suppression and cancellation assert that because Wordsworth knew about history or industry he had to work some sort of violence on them before he could write a poem lacking their presence. This statement would be true perhaps of the work of some minds; it may be true, say, of the lyrics of Joyce or Faulkner, all poor stuff, where one feels no material body in the poem at all, and where one knows that the author's narrative talent eventually led him to seek out social and historical material. But materiality can be other than factual. In lyric poetry, materiality is chiefly a property of words, not of images nor of propositions, and the social dimension can appear in lyric both as the history of any single word preceding its use in the given poem, and the transformation of that history, if any, by the new use of the word in that poem. This is why Barrell's assault on the poem,

which focuses not on historical or social representation but on language, is an apparently more sophisticated approach than Levinson's.

Levinson's Afterword gives away her instinctive response to *Tintern Abbey*, which is that the poem is meaningless and annoying to her:

If a teacher wants his students to feel the force of "Tintern Abbey," which is the force of its negativity [i.e., its "cancellings" and "suppressings"], he cannot approach the poem as a finished product, endeared by its experimental, essayistic rhetoric. Of what use is the record of a victory, and of a victory bound to seem nugatory to the modern reader? What does it mean today to know that Nature never does betray the heart that loves her? Who fears that it would, or did? . . . What do these words mean to us? (56)

I cannot imagine that anyone would find "essayistic rhetoric" "endear[ing]." The falsity of Levinson's tone here suggests she has never found anything to like in the poem. The modern reader is surely to be pitied if she cannot find "the record of a victory" humanly stirring in itself. With some soul-searching, Levinson might even find parallels in her own experience to the phases of experience explored by Wordsworth, and the "victory" might come to seem not so "nugatory" after all. Levinson says that Wordsworth's universalizing remark about "a man speaking to men" is a "platform . . . that denies the historicity and the instrumentality of literature" (56). It is not surprising that she so judges it, since she has not found its "nugatory victory" speaking to her own experience. She does not recognize by what means lyric both participates in history and is effective within history.

The symbolic order, as C. S. Peirce pointed out, accomplishes what can be accomplished by no other means:

Without denying that we cannot escape from language, from Thirdness, Peirce shows us that Thirdness (linguistic, symbolic signs) can symbolically represent Firstness. According to his theory of signs, literary art is language (Rhematic Symbol) used to show, picture, symbolize the quality of immediate consciousness that can never have been immediate to consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

The symbolic order is not the documentary order. Poetry is fiction, and creates existence (as Stevens said) on a fictitious plane. It is true that the resemblance of the fictitious plane to the actual plane can often be so strong as to be deceiving; but the presence

or absence of historical and factual matter does not change the nature and location of the plane we are talking about.

Arrangement is the central function of art; arrangement itself is what speaks history in the lyric. In *Tintern Abbey*, the arrangement is both triadic (the poem breaks into three equal pieces, not four as Levinson says) and hierarchical (as she notices). The three pieces are, roughly, a description of a landscape invested with memory; a narrative autobiography; and an address to a female companion. These preserve, historically speaking, three nineteenth-century specificities—the importance of the new imaginative nexus between scenery and memory; the secularizing of spiritual autobiography; and the nascent equality of women to men. These three nineteenth-century specificities can be further specified: the scenery is rural and the pastoral memory of the speaker has been interrupted by his period of urban residence; the autobiography still requires an active presence to replace the deity (this will be less true in twentieth-century spiritual autobiography as we find it, e.g., in Stevens or Lowell); the equality of woman seen in *Tintern Abbey* is more easily predicable outside marriage rather than within it (this is being argued to our day). Further nineteenth-century specifications of the poem are possible: the scenery is that of the author's own nation and forms a part of nationalist feeling; the autobiography depends on a hierarchical psychology and cosmology left over from Aristotelian scholasticism, but substituting the mind and self for a theologically defined soul; the equality of woman is based on the indistinguishability of female from male psychic life rather than on political or biological grounds. All of these theoretically further specifiable specificities determine the history of nineteenth-century England just as much as charcoal burning and tourism.

To Levinson, the omission of the "collective" means an omission of the historical, but she conceives of the historical solely in factual and materialist terms. It is a poor definition of the historical that does not include changes in epistemology, national sentiment, and so on, exemplified in a particular but representative case. Lyric, unlike the social genres, does not incorporate interaction with a "collective"; it privileges the mind in its solitary and private moments. The poet does not have to make any special effort to place himself in solidarity with "the collective"; the only thing that distinguishes poets from the rest of us is that they have the singular aesthetic and linguistic equipment to trace the nuances of common imagination, thought, and feeling in a way less crude than the norm. The "instrumentality" of their work is both to echo



and to refine the sensibility of the age with respect to psychic monitoring of itself and its own language. Cultural psychic monitoring (that is, writing from within the age itself rather than with the conceptual and linguistic equipment of the age that has just passed) is a very rare talent. Most writers in any given age are reproducing the discursive boilerplate of their parents' or grandparents' generation.

I turn now to Barrell's equally mistaken, and only apparently more sophisticated, essay. We shall in fact find that its veneer is only the preface to an astonishing plunge into vulgarity. Barrell pursues the question of the tension between what he defines as the two languages prominent in the poem—the sublime and timeless language used about the “something far more deeply interfused” (TA, l. 96) and the descriptive physical and sensuous language of Wordsworth's personal history.

There are of course more than two registers of language in the poem—and Barrell makes subdivisions concerning the senses, thoughts, memory, and so on—but for practical purposes we can provisionally accept Barrell's large two-part division. What is not so easy to accept is his idea that Wordsworth believes in a simple personal (and universalized) progress from descriptive language to sublime language. “The doctrine that [the poem] offers to teach,” Barrell writes, is “that lofty cliffs are replaced by lofty thoughts” (PLP, 144). (It is curious how fond materialist critics are of the notion that poems offer to *teach doctrines*.) “We are to believe,” Barrell continues, “that there is a relationship . . . between the abstract and highly-articulated language of the poem and another kind of language which is also present in ‘Tintern Abbey’ . . . —the language of natural description . . . . This language is conceived of as entirely unambiguous, but also as lexically and syntactically impoverished” (148). Barrell's passive constructions—“this language is conceived of” in such and such a way—must, to have any pertinence to his essay, be referred to Wordsworth's own conceptions of language. But of course there is no evidence (so far as I know) that Wordsworth (or any other poet) considered the language of natural description “lexically and syntactically impoverished.” On the contrary.

Next, Barrell partitions out his two languages—the abstract meditative one and the “impoverished” and “unambiguous” descriptive one—to the two sexes, “in the context of late eighteenth-century beliefs about, and attitudes to, language and gender: beliefs and attitudes to which Wordsworth . . . refers explicitly” (147). In fact, Barrell does not offer any such “explicit” reference

on Wordsworth's part to the ideas about concrete and abstract language which he summarizes from Locke and Hartley; and he adduces absolutely nothing from Wordsworth which might connect such ideas to gender. As a general reader, not a Wordsworthian, I might expect to have some proof offered me that Wordsworth thought that the language of natural description was impoverished and that it was only this language that women were able to master. No such proof is cited.

To my mind, Barrell misinterprets the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* when he says that for Wordsworth “the capacity to feel for others is something ‘learned,’ and is a function of the capacity to reflect, to have thoughts” (154). He mentions as proof of this unlikely assertion Wordsworth's remark that “our thoughts are the representatives of all our past feelings”—which, as I understand it, means exactly the opposite of what Barrell asserts. Wordsworth *assumes* that feelings are present from birth in all human beings; he is concerned to distinguish his own idea of what *thoughts* are—the conceptual lodgment of a nexus of memory and feeling—from a more purely depersonalized notion of what a thought is—something platonically elevated above memory and feeling. Feelings, in Wordsworth, are experienced by the infant babe; thought comes later. Thoughts are, to Wordsworth, essentially backward looking, infused with memory and emotion; they are the representatives re-presenting past feeling.

Barrell's aim is to show that Dorothy represents primitive, unambiguous, and impoverished sense language, and that her brother (and other members of the masculine sex) are the only owners of the realm of abstract and highly articulated language. Barrell too easily endorses a progressivist theory of language, by which ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny: he speaks of Dorothy's future development as if it were to be solely from the realm of the wild, the savage, and the undifferentiated, to the realm of the cultivated, the autonomous, the transcendent (161). It is barely conceivable that someone who had read no Wordsworth except *Tintern Abbey* could see this account, as Barrell does, as “unproblematic” (160). In fact, what the poem represents is a passage through social suffering, through which the speaker has come to hear “The still, sad music of humanity” (l. 91). It is this passage which the speaker envisages for his sister—though reluctantly, knowing the cost of such a transition, which is nonetheless, in terms of widening acquaintance with human life, inescapable. Though it is true that, historically speaking, Dorothy was less than two years younger than her brother, she was far younger than he

in social experience; she lacked his knowledge not only of the French scene (including his sexual experience there) but also his knowledge of Cambridge and London. In any case, the poem says only that the sister addressed at the end has not yet passed through the crucible of suffering already endured by the speaker, and the poem thus belongs to the genre "Initiate to Ephebe," regardless of its autobiographical origins.

Barrell's animus against the poem shows up in the vulgarity of his reprise of Dorothy's envisaged future: "Dorothy's wild ecstasies will simply mature, like fruit or cheese, into a sober pleasure. . . . Dorothy will grow up and sober up" (160, 162). The *Intimations Ode* alone would give the lie to such a summary of Wordsworth's convictions about maturity. Fallings from us, vanishings, blank misgivings, obstinate questionings of sense, as well as ecstasies, make up the child's experience, just as sense responses to "The clouds that gather round the setting sun" (*Ode*, l. 200) or, in *Tintern Abbey*, to the farms "green to the very door" (l. 17), are part of the experience of the adult. What Wordsworth narrates as loss and recompense, an ebb and subsequent flow, Barrell redescribes in progressivist terms (which he ascribes to Wordsworth), presenting an experience of maturity from which women are excluded.

"We can say with reasonable confidence," Barrell asserts without a scintilla of evidence, "that it was important for Wordsworth that the ability of women to grasp the principles of abstraction should be conceded only at the level of a potential, not an actual, ability to do so":

Thus in "Tintern Abbey" Dorothy is promised future membership among the company of the intellectual [italics mine]; only for Wordsworth to withhold it for the time being, and perhaps indefinitely. . . . The prayer [Barrell adds] that [Wordsworth] begins to utter . . . "Oh! yet a little while, / May I behold in thee what I was once"—is no more or less than a prayer to nature to arrest Dorothy's development, and for his benefit. (161, 162)

Otherwise, Barrell concludes, Wordsworth could "no longer appeal to Dorothy as the Bank of England, underwriting the value and meaning of the coins and banknotes he issues" (163) in his abstract language. In short, as Barrell vulgarly concludes, "The polite needed the uneducated and impressionable to know and to keep their place, if they themselves were to remain in exclusive possession of the top spot" (166). He does not perceive that what Dorothy is promised is membership among the company of the morally suffering, not among "the company of the intellectual."

Barrell's account of the poem rests, like Levinson's, on several assumptions about lyric and about evidence. It regards lyric as a naively mimetic form, in which historically identifiable characters ("Wordsworth" and "Dorothy") appear as in a play, acting out top spots and bottom spots, carrying into the poem not only biological attributes like their sex but also biological abilities to mature like fruit or cheese. Yet at the same time, and in the same breath, Barrell's theory regards lyric as a woodenly allegorical form, in this case one of sex war (which materialists address along with, or instead of, class war). In Wordsworth's poem the female presence must stand (in Barrell's view) for Woman and her brother must stand for Patriarchy. Finally, Barrell's theory regards lyric as a means for staging allegories of language, by which the critic is authorized to substitute for the story the poem actually tells—of the passage from innocence through social suffering to a sober recognition of the sadness of humanity's choral song—a different story about the poet's appropriation to himself alone of certain kinds of intellectual language.

These mistakes about lyric are not new ones. They are testimony of a tendency in modern readers, whose sensibilities have been trained on the social genres, to turn all lyrics into short stories peopled with novelistic details of sex, class, and social conflict, stories most absurd when they attempt to describe "absolute" lyric. (Emily Dickinson and female influences, Emily Dickinson's putative abortion ["Split the lark and you'll find the music"], and Emily Dickinson and the Civil War are only the most egregious examples of this recent biographical criticism of the lyric, managing to avoid the essential issues of Dickinson's poetry in favor of desperate attempts to historicize her in materialist fashion.) Levinson's reproachful indices of omission (since Tintern is in the guidebook Wordsworth used, since we know he knew about vagrants, why aren't these things in the poem?), and Barrell's insistence that Wordsworth must have endorsed a connection between gender and language because some of his contemporaries did, are both examples of a misplaced historicizing of lyric.

The principal question raised by these reinterpretations of the poem is what is to count as evidence and as method in reading a lyric. Accusing a lyric of "suppressing" what a critic was disappointed not to find within it (as if to say of a novel, "But where is its internal sonnet sequence?") is of course always possible; it is also always otiose. Lyric—to a far greater extent than the social genres—offers itself as an analogous, symbolic, algebraic account of experience, rather than as a mimetic one. This is because lyric

offers itself as a potential speech for its reader to utter, or *lied* for its hearer to sing. T. S. Eliot's formulation, adapted from Mill, that lyric is not heard, but overheard, is false except in the case of dramatic monologue. Aside from the suspect position of the reader in such a formulation—the reader as eavesdropper—the model, borrowed from the soliloquy, is simply inappropriate. A lyric is not a monodrama (though Tennyson decided to write a monodrama in *Maud* and see how it came out; one need only compare *Maud* with *In Memoriam* to see the difference between monodrama, with its public dimension, and lyric). Nor is a lyric a dramatic monologue. A dramatic monologue, of course, is actively spoken to, and heard by, an audience implied *from the beginning of the poem itself*, whether the Bishop's sons or Andrea del Sarto's wife. *Tintern Abbey* is not perceived as a dramatic monologue, since no auditor is represented until the poem approaches its close.

No; a lyric is a *role offered to a reader*; the reader is to be the voice speaking the poem. This intrinsic constraint on what is said in a typical lyric—since the poem is to be spoken in *propria persona* by anyone who reads it, male or female, young or old, European or American—accounts for the generalizing diction of lyric. Lyric reposes on a presumed resemblance between readers (rejected by some modern critics as a false universalizing presumption, but a quite reasonable assumption until rather recently, given the size and social coherence of the historical audience for written lyric). It does not presume absolute resemblance between fictive speaker and reader-as-surrogate-speaker; what it says is that, *mutatis mutandis*, what a man might utter in love or grief can be voiced by a woman reader as her own, or what an Englishman might say about the passage of time might be voiced by a Frenchman as truthfully. In this, as I have said, it resembles the *lied*, where a woman can feel as her own the words of the male singer of a Schubert song cycle because the emotions therein (carried by music as well as words) are generalized and abstracted ones.

It is hard for critics who want to read for social decoding to realize that art, for a lyric poet, is not arrived at by a first-order mimesis. Poets have already, in deciding to write the usual sort of lyric, abstracted themselves from mimetic ambition. If Wordsworth's aim in *Tintern Abbey* is, as I believe, to write in longer form *My heart leaps up*, then he is constructing a geometrical figure for the ego over time, connected by lines between four points: the speaker at ten ("glad animal movements"), at, say, fifteen ("dizzy raptures"), at twenty-three ("five years" ago), and at twenty-eight ("now"). If these are the four different immersions in the land-

scape that generate the poem, nothing could be more irrelevant to them than the industrialization of Tintern and the vagrant-haunted Abbey; these had nothing to do with the poet's remarking of striking gulfs between the child's and the adolescent's and the young man's experience in the same natural scene. Only in the most recent visit of the four has Wordsworth traveled, guidebook in hand, to the town of Tintern and the Abbey; these sites as such, and the description of them in his present guidebook, are irrelevant to his theme of difference-within-continuity in an evolving personality. Wordsworth freely describes the two new aspects of personal growth that his experience has taken note of since the times of animal movements and of dizzy raptures—the awareness of the still, sad music of humanity and the presence of something accompanied by elevated thoughts and a sense of sublimity. Both are felt as disturbing and yet compensatory interruptions to the continuity of the ego (which passed from its first glad animal movements to adolescent raptures without any sense of an ego break). Both the ability to hear the sad music and the visitation of elevated thoughts spring from the speaker's acquisition of social maturity through social suffering, and can be analogized by any reader (whose own passage to social maturity will necessarily contain some sort of social grief and a consequent pressure toward the philosophic mind).

The implicit assumption of cultural materialists—that all art is, and should be, factually mimetic of its own historical moment of social experience, sufficiently particularized so as to distinguish it from comparable moments in other lives—simply fails to recognize the continuing force of various paradigmatic identity roles proffered by lyric to centuries of readers. The first imperative for a lyric poet, after his first imaginative invention (what Stevens called "the poetry of the idea"), is the finding of a way to specify psychological nuance within a generalizing and shared diction. The second is to find a structural figure (usually, in Wordsworth, a complex form of then-and-now) sufficiently abstract to be widely predicable of others besides its speaker. The third is to find a "simple, sensuous, and passionate" material form for its generalized psychology and its generalizable structure: in lyric this material form is supplied by sense images ("pastoral farms, / Green to the very door," etc.). These sense images, and their accompanying verbs, adjectives, etc., give an appearance of the mimetic to something which is far from mimetic in intent. To investigate, and to criticize, the paradigmatic identity roles offered to the readers of lyric (a romantic lover, a religious woman,



a guilty sinner) could be one focus of an adversary position; at least one would be operating on the terrain proper to lyric, and not on that proper to the novel. But such a criticism would have to admit that the genre of lyric itself cannot exist without offering such identity roles. If the present paradigms are unsatisfactory (and they have been much satirized—"Why so pale and wan, fond lover" or "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"), then some notion of alternative paradigms might be offered. But advocating (like Levinson) Dickensian description within the restricted compass and structural concision of the lyric will not do.

As for Barrell's imputation of linguistic oppression to Wordsworth, surely *Tintern Abbey* must be the first post-Christian poem in English in which a man asserts that male and female experience are absolutely identical. That is, the woman is introduced first by the gender-neutral noun, "Friend," and only later as "Sister"; the speaker announces that her present experience as a passionate but socially inexperienced young person corresponds *exactly* to his own past experience when he was a passionate but socially inexperienced young person. He announces further that her future experience, when she has passed through the crucible of social sorrow, will correspond to his own present state. In short, Wordsworth assumes a necessary human ordeal (as Keats saw and said) by which one passes from "the chamber of maiden thought" into "dark passages." The two figures in the poem represent the younger sister of the speaker and the speaker himself, but they also represent Maiden Thought and Dark Passages, respectively, not, as Barrell seems to think, Woman and Patriarchy. Lyric has an interest in dehistoricizing the self, not to obscure its historicity but to make the claim that symbolic or allegorical language is as accurate—or more accurate—as a second-order mimetic means than first-order documentary language can be. The narrow conviction on the part of cultural materialists that allegory, symbol, and analogy represent the "suppression" of the social betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the charismatic means of lyric poetry, which must schematize and reiterate, rather than describe and expatiate, if it is to remain true to its own principle of compact analogical representation.

There *are* ways of historicizing lyric, as I have said above, which should derive from the language in the poem, not from theories of language generally available in the poet's century, not unless there is evidence *in the poem* that the poet was availing himself of them; here, that would mean the speaker's using a language for his sister not already used for himself; or not asserting the identity of her experience and his own; or not foretelling a future for his

sister identical to his own present. The poet did none of these things in characterizing his speaker. He wrote, accurately, of a man who had been through things in the world that his sister was necessarily on her way to encounter.

If I were to look at the language of *Tintern Abbey* as a symptom of its historical moment, I would notice especially two things. One is the difference between the way the word "nature" is used in the second part and the way it is used in the third part (it does not appear in the first part at all). The word "nature" in the second part means "the natural world," and is not personified: "nature then . . . / To me was all in all" (ll. 72, 75); "I have learned / To look on nature . . . hearing oftentimes / The still, sad music of humanity" (ll. 88–91); "well pleased to recognize / In nature and the language of the sense / The anchor of my purest thoughts" (ll. 107–9). In part three, "nature" is personified as female. How did this change take place? I suggest it was enabled by the entrance of the thought of the speaker's sister, who becomes the genius loci. If we did not know that the following remarks were made of personified female nature, about whom would anyone with some knowledge of *The Prelude* think they were written?

'tis her privilege,  
Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
From joy to joy: for she can so inform  
The mind that is within us, so impress  
With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold  
Is full of blessings. . . .

(ll. 123–34)

For me, at least, this passage has the savor of what we know, biographically, of Wordsworth's and Dorothy's association at Dove Cottage; and it reminds me forcibly of the moment in *The Prelude* where his sister's saving tenderness is the cause of the speaker's recovery from breakdown:

then it was  
That the beloved Woman in whose sight  
Those days were passed—now speaking in a voice  
Of sudden admonition like a brook



That does but cross a lonely road; and now  
 Seen, heard and felt, and caught at every turn,  
 Companion never lost through many a league—  
 Maintained for me a saving intercourse  
 With my true self . . . .

She, in the midst of all, preserved me still  
 A Poet, made me seek beneath that name  
 My office upon earth, and nowhere else.  
 And lastly, Nature's self, by human love  
 Assisted, through the weary labyrinth  
 Conducted me again to open day, . . .<sup>7</sup>

The close connection here between Nature's assistance and that of the speaker's sister is unmistakable. Nature could hardly have been so personified in *Tintern Abbey* without the entrance of the female auditor in the poem. "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" (ll. 122–23) because (we might say, speaking for once biographically) Dorothy never did betray Wordsworth. But the poet composing *Tintern Abbey* does not simply place the speaker's sister in the position of a Nature-spirit and leave her there; she is fated to pass out of that role. When she is in the dark passages, it will be her turn to remember that her brother, in his truth telling, never betrayed her:

oh! then,  
 If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief  
 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts  
 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,  
 And these my exhortations!

(ll. 142–46)

Nonbetrayal, even by nature, is grounded in steadfast and lifelong personal affections. Those affections are how we first know the Nature which is personified—which is lower-case "nature" invested with memory, feeling, affection, and continuity. Those life investments create the persistent comparatives that Barrell notes without explaining. The "something far more deeply interfused" (l. 96, italics mine) is linked to the cliffs "That on a wild secluded scene impress / Thoughts of more deep seclusion" (ll. 6–7, italics mine); in both cases, the scene is more than merely visual because it is informed by memory and attachment. The comparative "more" is one of the conventional signs, in poetry, of the celestial (see, e.g., Spenser's *Hymn to Heavenly Beauty*), and it stands here

for lower-case "nature" transformed to upper-case "Nature" not only by the addition of the speaker's long-term visual memory attached at many points in time to the same scene, but to that continuous visual memory being attached to a sustained human affection. Investigations such as these into the change in the conception of nature, and its connection both to philosophical thought (represented by the sadness of the social world) and to human attachment and memory (represented by the speaker's sister) might give some notion of how we could define the "something far more deeply interfused." If our thoughts are the representatives of our past feelings, then the "motion and [the] spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things" (ll. 100–102) can only be called the sum total of visual and temporal consciousness and emotion as they are felt in one adult person and connected to specific loci of feeling and spots of time.

There are many things to say of this poem, whose every line could be praised, not only for its incomparable musical and syntactic management, but for its combination of the distinctively specific ("five years," "O sylvan Wye," etc.) and the widely applicable. It is a poem of habitual history like the nameless and unre-membered acts of love which underlie the history of every long-lived personal relation; it is not a poem of the discrete material public events which we call "history." That some would have it be different from what it is seems perverse; it is like watching *King Lear* and asking (as some have done), "Where is Lear's queen?" To argue with the laurel (Hart Crane's phrase) is an act proper to poets but less rewarding, perhaps, in critics.

## Notes

1. Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); hereafter cited in the text as *WGPP*. John Barrell, *Poetry, Language, and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); hereafter cited in the text as *PLP*.

2. In "On Political Readings of Lyrical Ballads," in *Doing Things with Texts*, ed. Michael Fischer (New York: Norton, 1989), 364–91, Meyer Abrams discussed the readings of Jerome McGann (*The Romantic Ideology*), Heather Glen (*Vision and Disenchantment*), and Kenneth Johnston ("The Politics of 'Tintern Abbey'") together with those of Levinson (*Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*) as examples of the sort of new historicism that "typically 'discredits' or 'dismantles' a poem's 'manifest statement,' or 'contradicts its expressed doctrine.'" (His quotations are from Levinson, *passim*.) Abrams's essay is more theoretical and philosophical than mine here, but we agree in finding Keats a more satisfactory reader

of Wordsworth than the new historicists—in the necessarily generalized and private emphasis of the lyric; in the identity of experience predicated of the speaker and his sister; and in the doubt that all poetic "silences" are in fact "suppressions" or "cancellings." We also agree that the industrialization of Tintern is irrelevant to the speaker's interest in the development of his own self over time. Abrams exposes the predictable outcome of every mode of tendentiously ideological criticism that always knows what it will find.

3. *Tintern Abbey*, l. 20; quotations and line references for *Tintern Abbey* are from *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest de Selincourt (1936; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

4. In fact, he scarcely identifies himself by gender, though I think we infer his gender from his two references to men—the first, when he defines the feelings of unremembered pleasure as ones that have "no slight or trivial influence / On that best portion of a good man's life" (ll. 32–33), the second, in a simile, when he says he bounded, in youth, "Wherever nature led: more like a man / Flying from something that he dreads than one / Who sought the thing he loved" (ll. 70–72). Strictly speaking, both of these generalizations could have been used by a woman, since neither is predicated literally of the speaker. However, conceding the likelihood of the speaker's being male, it is still instructive to read the poem as if it were spoken, say, by George Eliot, judging how little would need to be changed of the feelings expressed.

5. It was actually "composed," i.e., written down, on the way to Bristol, which is below the Abbey, a fact of which Levinson makes heavy weather—though we know that Wordsworth composed in his head, walking, before he wrote passages down. Both processes can be called by the word "compose." The original subtitle had "written."

6. John K. Sherriff, *The Fate of Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 89.

7. *Prelude* (1805), 10.907–23, in *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 408.