

## TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS: THE SPOTS OF TIME IN *THE PRELUDE* OF 1799

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*Our childhood sits,  
Our simple childhood sits, upon a throne  
That has more power than all the elements.*  
(The Prelude v. 531-3)

When Wordsworth spoke about authors of his time 'creating the taste by which they would be enjoyed',<sup>1</sup> he did so, in effect, as a Moses of literature. He would not see this development, or he would benefit from it only in his old age when his gift had deserted him, but what he and his peers had done would help change the moral history of Britain and the English-speaking peoples. Not the least important outcome of this development would be that the Romantic writers came to be valued in their own terms and by ideas of taste and sensibility they themselves had helped bring into being. Every classic author achieves something similar, as Wordsworth was aware: the very act of appreciating Shakespeare involves a submission to (or recognition of) Shakespeare's idea of literature, even his idea of what is normal among human beings. But in the case of the Romantics the individuals concerned do not stand alone and do not even simply form a group; they are part of a movement in the history of ideas to which they contributed and which carried them in turn. We can see that influence like a benign disease in the generations that followed: from John Stuart Mill to Edmund Gosse in autobiography, from Emily Brontë to George Eliot in fiction, from Hazlitt to Arnold in criticism, and from Tennyson to Hardy in poetry.

The leading element in this historical process is the Romantic concept of 'imagination', seen by poets like Wordsworth (in the *Lyrical Ballads* preface), Coleridge (in *Bibliographia Literaria*), Shelley (in 'The Defence of Poetry'), and Keats (in his letters) as a counterpart to Enlightenment rationalism, and as a mark of freedom, human individuality, and the primacy of the subjective self and its apprehension of the world. Mid twentieth-century critics of Romantic literature like M.H. Abrams saw themselves as interpreters of Romantic theories of imagination; it seemed clear then that the most important intellectual contribution of Romanticism to the history of ideas lay in this great shift of emphasis, and the philosophical and psychological beliefs or theories that went with it.<sup>2</sup>

Nowadays, by contrast, we have become used to seeing Romantic writers in different terms: as the possessors and progenitors of an ideology, or a group of artistic and intellectual predispositions that once seemed unarguable (and therefore practically invisible) but which the

passage of time has revealed to be the outcome of a particular set of creative and historical conditions.<sup>3</sup> 'Imagination' itself, like 'inspiration', or 'genius', remains a vague and mystificatory concept partly because, like the latter terms, it seems inevitably to refer to a quality of persons with a special gift of some kind or another. Romantic interest in *psychology*, on the other hand, appears to be less elusive. People are more or less imaginative; but everybody has an unconscious and a psychological history to match.

Romantic writers took a strong and novel interest in the mind: in its modes of operation, creative capacities, and retentive power. First and foremost, there is a good deal of direct psychological notation and report in Romantic poetry and fiction. In 'Anecdote for Fathers', 'We Are Seven', and many other poems besides, Wordsworth describes in documentary terms how psychological patterns of various kinds are initiated and reinforced in children and adults alike. Jane Austen does the same in certain episodes from *Emma* (Harriet's miserable, resigned, yet funny immolation of the group of souvenirs she has from her unrequited love affair with Mr Elton, for example, which gets the heroine's mind racing once more in what turns out to be the wrong direction) and from *Persuasion* (those epiphanic moments of contact and emotional release when Wentworth comes to the heroine's physical aid to remove a clinging child or help her from a carriage, for example, or the 'fragments of low rock among the sands' at 'sweet retired' Charmouth Bay near Lyme, 'the happiest spot for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation': a spot we know to be an objective correlative for the melancholy, self-absorbed, and passive heroine of that novel at that particular time in her life).

Coleridge, on the other hand, often used a set of physical – in fact, topographical – analogues for the mind: Kubla Khan's quiet and well-ordered palace garden, for example, beneath which resound powerful riverine currents and caves of ice; or the sunlit uplands and mysterious dells of 'This Lime Tree Bower, My Prison', in which a file of plants beneath a waterfall responds to the drips from above just as the unconscious mind is imagined to respond to the stimuli of sense. Wordsworth, similarly, in the thirteenth book of the 1805 *Prelude*, saw from the peak of Mount Snowdon at dawn what he called a 'deep dark thoroughfare' amidst the sea of cloud stretching out at his feet:

a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour,  
A deep and gloomy breathing-place through which  
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams  
Innumerable, roaring with one voice!

In this chasm, Wordsworth believed, Nature 'had lodged/The Soul, the Imagination of the whole', and the scene remained for him 'The perfect image of a mighty mind'.

The Snowdon passage almost suggests that for Wordsworth the imagination was indistinguishable from the unconscious; but elsewhere in *The Prelude* we find another way in which Romantic writers typically approached psychological reality: neither by direct notation nor by analogue, but by inductive, generalized observation and analysis. What I have in mind is the passage, 'Blest the infant babe', from the second book of the poem: a passage which discusses the human infant's capacity, under 'the discipline of love' the baby internalizes 'from his mother's eye',

to combine  
In one appearance all the elements  
And parts of the same object, else detached  
And loth to coalesce.

So it is, Wordsworth suggests, that piecing the mother together as a real and separate loved object allows the infant to piece together the rest of the world. In the presence of a loving parent, Wordsworth feels, 'there exists/A virtue which irradiates and exalts/All objects through all intercourse of sense.' The passage as a whole leads directly to Melanie Klein and the Object Relations school of twentieth-century British psychology;<sup>4</sup> and it is a psychological track in the *The Prelude* that I want to follow here, though I don't intend to follow it into the intellectual future, as it were, but rather to discover or recover it in the two-book version of the poem dating from 1799.

*The Prelude* had its origins in the autumn and winter of 1798-9, which Wordsworth passed in the German town of Goslar under conditions of grave poetic and intellectual frustration. In one such mood the poet drafted at some speed the 150 lines now known (from its opening phrase) as 'Was it for this'.<sup>5</sup> Were the uniquely promising surroundings in which I was raised, the poet demands of himself, and the talents I have seen glimmerings of to date, given to me only to be immobilized and wasted as they seem to be now? The question answers itself, since a creative mind that was wholly benumbed would never raise it; but the terms in which it is framed allows the poem to grow (as it were) of its own accord. What *were* the promising surroundings in which this particular poet was raised? What was the *origin* of the talent so far displayed? Was that origin authentic enough, deep enough, to support the feeling of restless ambition which had given rise to the enquiry in which the poem itself has its birth?

Wordsworth's answer to these questions was to go back to his own childhood. The Romantic – essentially Rousseauistic – imperative being what it was, he felt a need to trace to maturity the growth of his mind, always on the assumption that his mind was much like any other and therefore the story of it would be of general interest and value. (So *The Prelude* is an autobiography in a special sense. Personal details are important not in themselves but as they illustrate the overall theme: the description of what F.R. Leavis called 'a type and standard of human normality'.)<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, 'Was it for this' incorporates a set of three discrete memories interspersed with the poet's own commentary on his development: river-bathing, going after birds' eggs, and visiting fowling traps at night. Wordsworth then continued the exercise. In October and November, 1798, he added another trio of scenes involving a boy (evidently Wordsworth himself) naughtily sending mimic-calls over a lake to a community of bewildered owls, borrowing a boat, and thrashing nuts off trees. Some weeks later he wrote another fragment, on ice-skating and indoor games in the Lake District winter; then before leaving Goslar in February 1799 he drafted his recollection of the drowning of a local schoolmaster, and a series of more obscure sections (the subjects of this essay, now known as the 'spots of time') about trips on horseback and family sadness.

In the autumn of the same year Wordsworth returned to these drafts to produce a two-book poem, of which the German material formed Book One.<sup>7</sup> This in turn was put aside until 1801, when Wordsworth extended the story to his student days at Cambridge by writing a third book. Once more the poem rested, until January 1804 when, having read the second book to Coleridge, he greatly expanded and revised the poem as a whole. First he added a long pre-amble about his feelings and poetic ambitions before 'Was it for this'; then he shifted no fewer than four of the childhood recollections from Book One to support material in later books. The boy whistling to the owls and the drowned schoolmaster went into a new Book Four, where recollections sit alongside doctrinal material about the education of children; the 'spots of time', somewhat revised, were added to the hike up Snowdon to form a climactic Book Five about the imagination. No sooner was the five-book *Prelude* finished, however,<sup>8</sup> than Wordsworth began to extend it yet again. Working intermittently throughout 1804 and early 1805 he eventually produced a thirteen-book version of the poem – perhaps the most favoured of its many incarnations.<sup>9</sup> In this, the drowned schoolmaster and the whistling boy found a final home in Book Five, whereas the 'spots of time' ended up in Book Eleven ('Imagination, How Impaired and Restored'), the intervening books being made up of large amounts of new material, particularly the poet's experiences in revolutionary France. (The climb up Snowdon and the vision of 'the mighty mind' started Book Thirteen.)

As if this was not enough, Wordsworth still held back from publication, and carried on working at the poem. Three times in the years that followed – in 1819, 1832, and 1838 – he made major revisions to *The Prelude*. Indeed, he never even gave the poem a name; the title it carries was chosen by his wife when a final fourteen-book version was published (posthumously) in 1850.

The debates among readers about this long and complex history, and the poem which is the final upshot of it, have mostly concerned the issue as to whether the 1805 or the 1850 version is to be preferred. That issue aside,

the development of the poem up to 1805 at least is fairly clear; changes thereafter (with one important exception) tend to be stylistic, to be concerned with matters of expression rather than of basic content.

The initial psychological-cum-autobiographical impulse of 'Was it for this' takes us beyond memory, back to the cradle: to the river Derwent running alongside the garden of his family home at Cockermouth and 'blend[ing] his murmurs with my nurse's song'. Within twenty lines the same river accompanies the physically active four year-old, alternately sunbathing and cooling himself in the stream, and thus making 'one long bathing of a summer's day'. That (clearly generic and non-particular) summer's day comes to an end in a thunder storm: an occasion when, Wordsworth recalls, 'the hill-tops,/The woods, and all the distant mountains,/Were bronzed with a deep radiance' (rather than the fresh light of morning or early afternoon) and he 'stood alone' watching its onset: 'A naked savage in a thunder-shower'. At around this age he had – and, it follows, most other normally developing children would have – the first conscious inkling of moral sense, as opposed to the instinctual or cognitive perceptions described in 'Blest the babe...' (which have their moral implications, too, in certain respects). A child's experience at the breast builds in him or her the knowledge that other, separate objects exist; later, at around age four, a child might begin to perceive for *himself* that 'virtue which irradiates and exalts/All objects through all intercourse of sense': to recognize, in short, that there is a world out there over which he does not have omnipotent control. In 'Was it for this' and in all versions of *The Prelude* yet to come, this moral sense grows alongside and is bound up with an 'aesthetic' response to the forms of nature. The sunny day turns into a stormy afternoon: how and why it does so has at length become a problem for the child – something he notices and ponders, at any rate. Standing alone (but secure) is both the pre-requisite and the outcome of the experience, and the child is seen to be in perfect balance with his surroundings – which is why, no doubt, there is a note of the 'noble savage' in Wordsworth's depiction of him.

'Was it for this' is only 150 lines long. By line 125 the boy is ten and holding, Wordsworth says, 'unconscious intercourse' with the country by which he is surrounded and the sea at its edge. Wordsworth left his home at Cockermouth for Hawkshead Grammar School a month after his ninth birthday, and the bourne of 'Was it for this' is his early childhood there and in the town of his birth.

Up until 1805 each new version of the poem essentially pushes this *terminus ad quem* further forward and in the process assimilates more recollections to the original theme: through childhood to adolescence, Cambridge, student vacations, hiking across the Alps, London, and (finally) the ascent of Mount Snowdon, which took place a little after his twenty-first birthday. The one anomaly in this process is Wordsworth's treatment of the year he spent in revolutionary France between 1791 and 1792. This came after Mount Snowdon, but he places it before. (The 1805 version of *The Prelude* contains in Book Nine a lengthy episode, 'Julia and

Vaudracour', which is a fictionalization of Wordsworth's love-affair with Anette Vallon in France at this time, which resulted in the birth of an illegitimate child; by 1850 the episode had been so abbreviated as to be effectively cut out.) But at heart *The Prelude* remains the story, highly specific but also at all points generalizable, of the development of a human individual from birth to what was the legal age of majority in Wordsworth's time.

We are now in a position to return to the 1799 *Prelude* and the 'spots of time' written after the Christmas of 1798. The river-bathing/thunderstorm recollection gives us the child standing alone in the sense of being free rather than deserted. 'The boy's relationship with Nature', as David Ellis writes, 'is here ideal in that it carries, on the one hand, no hint of envelopment...; but on the other, no hint of separation: the withdrawal of love.'<sup>10</sup> From this privileged situation, however, the child 'graduates to complicated feelings of guilt'; and guilt, as critics have pointed out many times before, is a unifying factor in the recollected scenes which follow. The boy, older than four but not as old as ten, makes exciting and solitary night-time visits to snares he has set for ground-birds (i. 27-49). 'In thought and wish that time', he writes, 'I was a fell destroyer', and the blend of compulsion ('hurrying on,/Still hurrying, hurrying onward') and anxiety ('how my heart panted') is conveyed with remarkable vividness. But as if stealing from Nature was not enough, the child (obeying a 'strong desire/Resistless') also takes birds from others' traps when his are empty:

and when the deed was done  
I heard among the solitary hills  
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds  
Of undistinguishable motion, steps  
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

What lies behind this everyday childhood experience is a simple mechanism. When a child does something wrong he or she expects punishment. The source of punishment is usually a parent, of course, or someone standing *in loco parentis*. (For the child a source of punishment is in that sense always a 'parental' figure.) But if no parental figure is present the child will project human qualities (in this case, punitive anger) onto other objects. If it is too dark to project such qualities onto a visible object an audible one must stand in; and if nothing is strictly available to sense then punitive shapes and sounds are invented, as we see in this passage. In the next episode (i. 50-66) — linked to its predecessor by virtue of involving theft from birds rather than theft of them — it is the wind that blows with admonitory foreboding while the child 'hung alone' above the raven's nest. The forms of solitude in these two scenes are very different from that investing the naked four year-old swimmer .

This is the mainspring behind the famous episode of the borrowed boat (i. 81-129), linked to the two previous episodes by involving guilt induced by theft. This time there is a visible object ('the huge cliff') which

Rose up between me and the stars, and still,  
With measured motion, like a living thing  
Strode after me.

(The opening memories of Book One do often involve mountains and rocks, it must be said: from 'Skiddaw's lofty height' looking down on the four year-old, to the 'crag' which witness his bird-thieving, to the 'slippery rock' and 'naked crag' where the ravens nest, to the 'rocky steep' of this climactic scene.) The state of mind into which the child is thrown by this event (the quality of solitude) is more obscure than the simple feeling of being chased or watched:

In my thoughts  
There was a darkness – call it solitude,  
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes  
Of hourly objects, images of trees,  
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,  
But huge and mighty forms that do not live  
Like living men moved slowly through my mind  
By day, and were the trouble of my dreams.

But again the pattern or condition is discernible. The feeling of darkness comes not just from solitude but from desertion; the child's mind is bereft of familiar shapes and hourly objects that are natural, certainly, but surely are also human. The worst punishment a young child can either imagine or experience is the withdrawal of parental love: 'blank desertion'. In the absence of that protection the primordial shapes of punishment (the 'huge and mighty forms') are let loose. They do not behave like the living and loving individuals by whom the child is normally surrounded, and when they are free the pattern of 'unconscious intercourse' 'which irradiates and exalts/All objects through all intercourse of sense', set in motion even at his mother's breast, is interrupted in a terrifying way.

I am laying stress on psychological patterns here – and will lay further stress on them when we come to the 'spots of time' – because Wordsworth himself did the same. (His doing so, indeed, is part and parcel of his originality as a psychological thinker: an originality he shares with Jane Austen.) 'The mind of man', he wrote immediately before the boat-stealing episode, 'is fashioned and built up/Even as a strain of music.' Like the growth of a musical theme, the process involves a mode of repetition which includes variation and development.

What comes after the theft of the boat is a set of memories (i. 130-258) describing what Wordsworth calls 'home amusements': skating, indoor games (noughts-and-crosses and cards), fishing, and kite-flying. If we ask what makes them a set distinct from the three memories of childish guilt coming before, and the three memories coming after, we would have to say that they all now involve the purposeful seeking out of solitude. The

pursuit of solitude is a normal aspect of childhood; but so is the anxiety it tends to foster in parents and children alike that solitude may in itself be either anti-social or selfish. So the boy of *The Prelude* starts off playing hare and hounds on ice with the local children and stays out late accordingly, as children have always done. ('The cottage-windows through the twilight blazed,/I heeded not the summons.') But then he leaves the others: 'from the uproar I retired/Into a silent bay'. In a race he will stop to stand alone, enjoying private sensations of giddiness. His attention wanders during games of cards when shifting ice outside 'sent/Among the meadows and the hills its long/And frequent yellings, imitative some/Of wolves that howl along the Bothnic main.' His imaginativeness – for what, after all, can he know of wolves on the Baltic? – is tending to cut him off from others, to make him a loner, given to angling and flying kites.

None of this is pathological; on the contrary, the boy's behaviour is 'a type and standard of human normality'. It is a condition of psychological maturation that individuals are capable of being alone while aware also that sources of love (of which, of course, a parent is the 'normal' representative, though the parental role can be carried out by practically anybody, family-member or not) remain open to them. The infant becomes distressed almost immediately she is alone; the toddler can play alone for long periods if she is aware of a nearby loving adult; the seven year-old only comes to such an adult when she is hurt or distressed; and so on. But distance can feel like loss, and the growing impulse for independence (taking the form of solitude) may still feel like 'blank desertion', right up into adulthood. Moreover, the child may feel she has deserted her parents rather than the other way around, and therefore experience guilt and the urge to make reparation.

The boy's appetite for solitude, and his fishing and kite-flying expeditions among the hills, lead us directly to the next (and last) group of memories, also three in number (i. 258-374). To recap:

The crucial episodes of 1799, Part I, fall into two groups of three, separated by the section of 'home amusements'.... The first group, consisting of the woodcock-snaring, bird's-nesting and boat stealing episodes, belongs to October-November 1798; the second (the Drowned Man of Esthwaite, the Woman on the Hill, and the Waiting for the Horses) was written after Christmas.<sup>11</sup>

The first group, as we have seen, is connected by a stress on guilt arising from theft and by the repeated presence of birds and rocks. (The birds in particular seem to function like those associative objects described by Freud, which release a group or series of memories united by the presence of things in themselves irrelevant.)<sup>12</sup> Can the final group be connected by similar means? Indeed, are the events they describe made meaningful only when their connections – both among themselves and between them and the earlier and final groups of incidents – are unravelled?



On one of his solitary wanderings the seven year-old boy (the passage begins 'Ere I had seen/Eight summers') comes to a lakeside where he finds a pile of clothes. Evidently someone is swimming:

Half an hour I watched  
And no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake  
Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast,  
And now and then a leaping fish disturbed  
The breathless stillness.

The owner of the clothes, a local schoolmaster named Joseph Jackson, had indeed drowned, and Wordsworth recalled seeing his face next day as the body was drawn from the water. A seven year-old surely could not have saved Jackson, either by personal intervention or by running for help. The schoolmaster had doubtless been dead for hours. Accordingly, few adults would blame a child who came across a pile of clothes beside a still lake when 'Twilight was coming on' and who simply watched for half an hour instead of raising the alarm. We would say the child was confused. (Wordsworth says nothing about having a role in the discovery of the body.) But to place the incident directly after a group of memories illustrating the child's passion for solitude themselves succeeding a group of memories illustrating his pronounced sensitivity to guilt puts the incident in a particular moral context. A schoolmaster is a person *in loco parentis* by definition, and the child stood by.

Moreover, this was not just 'one of his solitary wanderings': 'twas in the very week/When I was first transplanted to thy vale,/Belovèd Hawkshead, when thy paths, thy shores/And brooks, were like a dream of novelty/To my half-infant mind'.<sup>13</sup> Wordsworth was sent to Hawkshead Grammar on 15 May 1779, and as he was born in April 1770, he had just turned nine (and was approaching his tenth summer). Whether the young Wordsworth ever in fact saw the events he describes is not at issue here;<sup>14</sup> neither is the question whether he made himself younger than he in fact was by oversight or on purpose (in the 1805 and 1850 versions of the incident he says he was 'not nine years old'). For present purposes the issue lies elsewhere. In early March 1778 Wordsworth's mother — 'the heart/ And hinge of all our learnings and our loves' (1805 v. 257-8) — had died of pneumonia aged thirty; in June of that year his only sister, Dorothy, was sent to live with family in Halifax; in May 1779 he was sent to school and to live in lodgings. 'At such a crisis another family might have drawn closer together', Stephen Gill comments: 'This one split apart.'<sup>15</sup> The death of his mother had made a massive alteration to the family, and more than one familiar shape and hourly object was removed as a consequence. Mother gone, father inconsolable, sister removed, and finally removed himself: however beloved Hawkshead later became, at first it must have seemed a place of blank desertion.

If the overall theme of the first group of 1799 memories is guilt, and that of the second is an anti-social desire for solitude, then the theme of the last group is death, and specifically the death of parents. At the very least, 'the

Drowned Man exerts his influence on the whole sequence, setting up an expectation of the sort of memories that are to be talked about, and preparing for the mood of “visionary dreariness” that is to be evoked.’ (Wordsworth, 54.) Being the kind of person he was, Wordsworth instinctively recoiled from Rousseauesque ‘confession’ or private detail. Instead he sought to convert the particular tragedy of his early desolation into some broader meditation on children and the advent of maturity. But the issue was bound up with memories so painful that he could not approach them directly; so powerful that he could not leave them alone. Ultimately, however, they proved too painful even to stay where they were in his poem; he did not discard them but attempted to use them to illustrate something else altogether: the uplifting and redemptive power of the imagination. Whether he was right to do so I will discuss briefly at the end of this essay; first the place of his parents in the spots of time must be examined.

The dead schoolmaster episode is followed by the most complex and ambiguous recollections the poem has to offer: among the most complex and ambiguous passages Wordsworth ever wrote. Jonathan Wordsworth calls them ‘The Woman on the Hill’ and ‘Waiting for Horses’:

I remember well  
 (’Tis of an early season that I speak,  
 The twilight of rememberable life),  
 While I was yet an urchin, one who scarce  
 Could hold a bridle, with ambitious hopes  
 I mounted, and we rode towards the hills.  
 We were a pair of horsemen: honest James  
 Was with me, my encourager and guide.  
 We had not travelled long ere some mischance  
 Disjoined me from my comrade, and, through fear  
 Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor  
 I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length  
 Came to a bottom where in former times  
 A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung  
 In irons. Mouldered was the gibbet-mast;  
 The bones were gone, the iron and the wood;  
 Only a long green ridge of turf remained  
 Whose shape was like a grave. I left the spot,  
 And reascending the bare slope I saw  
 A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,  
 The beacon on the summit, and more near  
 A girl who bore a pitcher on her head  
 And seemed with difficult steps to force her way  
 Against the blowing wind. It was in truth  
 An ordinary sight, but I should need  
 Colours and words that are unknown to man  
 To paint the visionary dreariness  
 Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,

Did at that time invest the naked pool,  
 The beacon on the lonely eminence,  
 The woman and her garments vexed and tossed  
 By the strong wind.

Nor less I recollect  
 (Long after, though my childhood had not ceased)  
 Another scene which left a kindred power  
 Implanted in my mind. One Christmas-time,  
 The day before the holidays began,  
 Feverish, and tired, and restless,  
 I went forth into the fields, impatient for the sight  
 Of those three horses which should bear us home,  
 My brothers and myself. There was a crag,  
 An eminence, which from the meeting-point  
 Of two highways ascending overlooked  
 At least a long half-mile of those two roads,  
 By each of which the expected steeds might come —  
 The choice uncertain. Thither I repaired  
 Up to the highest summit. 'Twas a day  
 Stormy, and rough, and wild, and on the grass  
 I sat half sheltered by a naked wall.  
 Upon my right hand was a single sheep,  
 A whistling hawthorn on my left, and there,  
 Those two companions at my side, I watched  
 With eyes intensely straining, as the mist  
 Gave intermitting prospects of the wood  
 And plain beneath.

Ere I to school returned  
 That dreary time, ere I had been ten days  
 A dweller in my father's house, he died,  
 And I and my two brothers (orphans then)  
 Followed his body to the grave. The event,  
 With all the sorrow which it brought, appeared  
 A chastisement; and when I called to mind  
 That day so lately passed, when from the crag  
 I looked in such anxiety of hope,  
 With trite reflections of morality,  
 Yet with the deepest passion, I bowed low  
 To God who thus corrected my desires.  
 And afterwards the wind and sleety rain  
 And all the business of the elements,  
 The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,  
 And the bleak music of that old stone wall,  
 The noise of wood and water, and the mist  
 Which on the line of each of those two roads  
 Advanced in such indisputable shapes —  
 All these were spectacles and sounds to which  
 I often would repair, and thence would drink  
 As at a fountain. And I do not doubt  
 That in this later time, when storm and rain

Beat on my roof at midnight, or by day  
 When I am in the woods, unknown to me  
 The workings of my spirit thence are brought.

I said that rocks and crags figured repeatedly in the first group of memories; in the third group it is water that recurs most often (though lakes figure in the boat-stealing and the skating episodes, of course). The dead schoolmaster comes out of the lake; here we have a naked pool and a girl (presumably) carrying water from it; in the final memory we find a metaphorical fountain, 'the noise of wood and water', and the sound of rain on a roof. One other thing connects these two final spots of time, much as birds had connected the first two: horses.

The second of these two memories is more explicit than the first, and the psychological pattern behind it is clearer accordingly. The period of Wordsworth's life to which it refers is December 1783, by which time he had turned thirteen. He and his two brothers were at Hawkshead, impatiently awaiting the Christmas holiday. Again, having climbed a nearby hill to get the earliest possible sight of the horses coming to carry them home, he is alone, and again there is a note of guilt attached to his desire to steal a march on the end of term ('Feverish, and tired, and restless, I went forth'). The emphasis (as before) is on exposure: the boy is sitting on grass, he is only 'half sheltered', the wall is 'naked', the sheep which might be expected to be found in a flock (or at least near to others) is 'single', and the hawthorn is blown strongly enough by the wind to make a whistling sound. The desire to return home for Christmas is of course a social desire; the desire to anticipate his return in this way is arguably an anti-social one. His 'two companions' should be his two brothers: instead they are a sheep and a hawthorn, almost as inanimate as the wall by which they are found.

Before Wordsworth was home ten days his father died, of an illness brought about by passing a night shelterless on the moor at Cold Fell, Cumbria. (He had lost his way on a horse.) The thirteen year-old made the fallacious connection that children often make between family tragedy and their own behaviour: that some trivial disobedience on their part is the cause of the disaster. 'The wish for the earlier arrival of the horses', David Simpson comments, 'then comes to seem as if it involved also a wish that the moment of bereavement should come sooner.'<sup>16</sup> 'The event...appeared a chastisement'. No parent is now available to serve as the source of this admonishment; but a thirteen year-old has an object standing *in loco parentis* that is not available to a child of six or eight: 'I bowed low/To God who thus corrected my desires'. Thus the pattern of childish guilt and punitive correction is maintained, reinforced, but also advanced as the child grows, and perhaps the overall theme of Book One (as conceived in 1799) was the development of a religious sense of morality (bowing to God) arising out of a naturalistic one (bowing to crags). Nor, I assume, is it by chance that *Hamlet* — another drama centring around a dead father —

came to Wordsworth's mind in writing this passage. The mist above the two roads, he remarks, 'Advanced in such indisputable shapes', whereas Hamlet speaks of his father's ghost arriving 'in such a questionable shape' (I. iv. 48).<sup>17</sup>

Wordsworth and his siblings were 'orphans then', though the death of his mother has not in fact been mentioned. This brings us to the most puzzling yet most arresting memory of them all: a 'spot of time' with no apparent moral content or implication whatsoever ('The Woman on the Hill'). But if the event was truly meaningless, why had Wordsworth remembered it? How *could* he have remembered it? To say 'because of the feelings it engendered' is only to shift the question, after all: what were those feelings, to what did they relate, and why did that moment engender them?<sup>18</sup>

What the psychological pattern or 'strain of music' traced thus far suggests is this. As the two episodes are connected by the presence of horses and the feelings of a boy exposed on the moors, so they are connected in dealing with the loss of Wordsworth's parents: his father in 'Waiting for Horses', his mother in 'The Woman on the Hill'. (Propinquity in space or time, Freud remarked of dream-work, indicates closeness of subject-matter.) In 'The Woman on the Hill' the child is once more accompanied by an object *in loco parentis*: a family servant, 'honest James'. Some mischance misjoined them; but clearly that is an adult reflection, not the childish feeling close to stunned panic that is described. Lost, the boy comes to nothing more threatening or portentous than 'a long green ridge of turf' at the bottom of a valley, 'whose shape was *like* a grave': there is no visible evidence that it is the scene of an execution or a gibbet. ('Mouldered was the gibbet-mast;/The bones were gone, the iron and the wood'). Yet from this ridge of turf the child extrapolates a tale he has heard, of a man who murdered his wife and whose executed body was displayed in such a spot. In his fear and exposure the child hates the father-figure ('my encourager and guide') who has abandoned him, and ascribes to him the worst crime he can imagine: the murder of a wife – in effect, the recent death of the child's own mother. (The enormity of this unconscious accusation, of course, is one of the reasons it remains implicit; when Wordsworth blames himself for the death of his father, he can be more forthcoming.) In horror he leaves the spot and sees immediately a female figure: not a woman as Jonathan Wordsworth has it, but one more vulnerable, a girl. If she is a child she must have a family, and on her head she is carrying water to it, struggling to balance her load in a high wind. She needs help, but is beyond communication, walking away from the boy. (Wordsworth's mother died of pneumonia, the closing stages of which involve the patient struggling for breath as the lungs consolidate due to the discharge from infected tissue – 'suppurate', as someone of Wordsworth's time would have said. In effect, she drowned. The lake where the Hawkshead schoolmaster drowned possessed an atmosphere of 'breathless stillness', we might recall.) The girl is what Melanie Klein would call an imago of the lost mother, or an 'emanation of the child's mind'

(Wordsworth, 59), just as the 'beacon on the lonely eminence' (built on a hill above the North Yorkshire town of Penrith to give warning of Scottish invasion after the Jacobite rising of 1715) is a crag-like imago of the absent father: no longer punitive but simply lonely. That 'visionary dreariness' was the upshot of this mental experience is no more surprising than 'blank desertion' being the upshot of stealing a boat. It is a similar sense of abandonment and withdrawal of love, only immeasurably more inaccessible.

But this account has problems. Wordsworth's mother died when he was nearly nine, yet at the beginning of the passage Wordsworth describes himself as being at 'The twilight of rememberable life', and as 'an urchin, one who scarce/ Could hold a bridle'. Expressions more vague would be hard to come by, but a country boy living in the age of the horse and clearly familiar with them could probably begin to hold a bridle around the age of five. (In the second book Wordsworth and his young schoolfriends hire 'galloping steeds' for a day-trip from Hawkshead to Furness Abbey.) Moreover, the scene is unambiguously set at Penrith beacon, near which Wordsworth's maternal grandparents lived with their groom, James. As a young boy Wordsworth frequently visited them, and James no doubt took him for short rides, not as far as the beacon, perhaps, but up the hill behind the house. The experience surely comes too early, therefore, to be connected with the death of his mother.

In 1767, three years before Wordsworth's birth, one Thomas Nicholson had been hanged at Cowraik (or Cowdrake) Quarry, one mile east of Penrith, but not for the murder of his wife. He had murdered a local butcher, Thomas Parker, and the letters 'TPM' ('Thomas Parker Murdered') had been carved in the earth at the spot.<sup>19</sup> In the 1805 version of the poem the boy comes to a spot 'where in former times/ A murderer had been hung in iron chains':

The gibbet-mast was mouldered down, the bones  
And iron case were gone; but on the turf  
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought,  
Some unknown hand had carved the murderer's name.  
The monumental writing was engraven  
In times long past, and still from year to year  
By superstition of the neighbourhood  
The grass is cleared away, and to this hour  
The letters are all fresh and visible.  
Faltering, and ignorant where I was, at length  
I chanced to espy those characters inscribed  
On the green sod. (1805 xi. 289-301)

(Wordsworth makes a mistake about the person to whom the letters referred: see *The Prelude*, 647.) So it is Penrith; it is the murder of a butcher; and the child encountered a real gibbet and not an imaginary one. In the 1805 version of the poem Wordsworth used every means at his disposal to

suppress the question of wife-murder, to direct us towards the death of Thomas Parker, and by these means to sever the psychological connection with the murdered woman: the only problem being how a gibbet erected in 1767 could have 'mouldered down' in only eight years or so.

But there was another gibbet. In 1672 Thomas Lancaster was hanged for poisoning his wife, and his gibbet was still visible: 'a rotted and terrifying stump', as Jonathan Wordsworth describes it, 'that stood in the water-meadows at Hawkshead, on the road that young Wordsworth had daily to pass between his lodgings and the school' (Wordsworth, 57). As Jonathan Wordsworth concludes, 'The Woman on the Hill' is a compound memory. Wordsworth had heard of (perhaps not seen) the Penrith gibbet; he recalled short trips by horse as a child in the neighbourhood (and for all we know some incident of neglect on James's part became a family story). The gibbet at Hawkshead, on the other hand, had a gruesome look and story attached to it, thoroughly in keeping with his new sense of desolation at being packed off to school after the death of his mother; but Wordsworth required (at some level or another, creatively) a dramatic incident with which to introduce it. So the Hawkshead gibbet finds itself at the Penrith locale, which is clearly no water-meadow but 'a rough and stony moor'.

Even as a compound memory and not an empirical one, the patterns traced in Book One should lead us, I think, to conclude the incident relates to his mother. 'There is no means of telling', Jonathan Wordsworth writes, 'where or when he heard the detail of the letters engraved on the turf, or why he decided to insert it.' (Wordsworth, 57.) On the basis of what has been said here about the history of *The Prelude* and Wordsworth's own life there seem to me two possible explanations for his decision, which may themselves be linked. Either the memory of his mother's death and his childish, momentary, and unconscious belief that his father had caused it was so painful a combination that he decided (instinctively or otherwise) to suppress it by emphatically shifting attention to the Penrith gibbet, or he wished (again, instinctively or otherwise) to use the 'spots of time' material not for an investigation of depth-psychology but rather to illustrate the redemptive role of memory and the imagination. Certainly the 1805 version goes out of its way to palliate the original episode by converting it into an incident that is morally explicable and part of a positive process. In that version Wordsworth goes so far as to describe revisiting the Penrith beacon with his wife and sister:

And on the melancholy beacon, fell  
 The spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam –  
 And think ye not with radiance more divine  
 From these remembrances, and from the power  
 They left behind? So feeling comes in aid  
 Of feeling, and diversity of strength  
 Attends us if but once we have been strong.  
 Oh, mystery of man, from what a depth  
 Proceed thy honours! (1805 xi. 321-9)

A family romance could hardly be brought to a firmer yet less convincing conclusion.

'The Woman on the Hill' and 'Waiting for the Horses' are framed by two passages. As regards the first, the whole of the 1799 version could be described in the terms Wordsworth uses, but a particular realization came to him at this point in the narrative:

There are in our existence spots of time  
Which with distinct preeminence retain  
A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed  
By trivial occupations and the round  
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds –  
Especially the imaginative power –  
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;  
Such moments chiefly seem to have their date  
In our first childhood.

There is a clinical realization here: that certain experiences from our early childhood have a 'distinct preeminence' or appearance of indestructibility. (Why certain experiences and not others should possess this quality is an issue which Wordsworth does not address in so many words: their doing so is the implicit subject of this essay.) Then there is an idea much more moral than psychological: that such experiences possess a power beyond mere psychological indestructibility: a 'fructifying virtue', lifting us when depressed and feeding 'the imaginative power'. Here is the moment, perhaps, when Wordsworth began to feel that the two incidents remaining to be described (the gibbet and the horses) could be attached to a discussion of the workings of the imagination rather than those of the unconscious. It appears the passage was written after the winter of 1798-99; it looks back to the optimistic conclusion of 'Tintern Abbey' ('tranquil restoration', 'blessed mood', 'Abundant recompence', etc.), written in the summer of 1798; and it looks forward to the passage quoted above from the 1805 version, about feeling coming in aid of feeling, diversity of strength, and the 'honours' of humanity.

The second framing passage we have already seen, at the end of 'Waiting for Horses':

All these were spectacles and sounds to which  
I often would repair, and thence would drink  
As at a fountain. And I do not doubt  
That in this later time, when storm and rain  
Beat on my roof at midnight, or by day  
When I am in the woods, unknown to me  
The workings of my spirit thence are brought.

Here the 'clinical' and the moral readings of mental processes are interwoven in a more complex way. At first it seems 'storm and rain' have woken him at midnight, or found him awake at that time, pensively con-



sidering the circumstances of his father's death: 'the one *specific* experience he describes as having the power to recall the whole episode', as David Ellis remarks, 'is the noise of the rain beating on his roof at midnight' (Ellis, 31). But in fact the passage is more original in its thinking than this. The 'workings of his spirit' are brought back to the 'spectacles and sounds' of the exposed hillside in a way the subject does not know and of which he is not conscious: '*unknown to me*/The workings of my spirit thence are brought.' It is not that the stormy weather has woken him at night and induced introspection, or that time in the woods takes him back to his childhood: the workings of his spirit take him there at any time, willy-nilly, sleeping *or* waking, without his awareness, knowledge, or consent – even in his dreams. (David Ellis restores to us a striking expression from the early drafts of *The Prelude*: 'islands in the unnavigable depth/Of departed time' (Ellis, 81).)

Being taken back in this way (Wordsworth believes) is like repairing to a fountain, and our interpretation of that simile is a litmus-test of the romantic ideology I mentioned at the beginning of this essay and of its effect on us as its inheritors. Quenching our thirst – 'repairing to a fountain' – is a pleasure; but as water is a staple of human existence drinking it is one of a group of pleasures to which we *must* resort, whether we will or no. Quenching our thirst is not like playing a game, reading a novel, or swimming. Why, after all, does the grown man keep recurring to that scene on the hill, and keep drinking at that particular fountain? Because deep down he still has child-like feelings of guilt about the death of his father: in his heart of hearts perhaps he wanted his father – the ultimate object *in loco parentis* – to be dead, and to free himself of the punitive admonitory figure that was the trouble of his dreams. (In some autobiographical notes Wordsworth dictated in 1847 he recalled becoming 'perverse and obstinate in defying chastisement' as a child, 'and rather proud of it than otherwise.'<sup>20</sup> The adult is *compelled* by these remnant but powerful feelings of guilt to go back: to check, as it were, that he was not guilty, and to reassure himself that he had no role in his father's death in thought or or deed. He is compelled to do this as we are compelled to drink.

That seems to me to be the psychological pattern in Book One of the 1799 version of *The Prelude*: a complex but supremely well-knit set of episodes forming at once a drama and a generalized autobiography from four to fourteen, from the 'naked savage in the thunder-shower' who is neither enveloped by parental love nor separated from it, to the adolescent (and ultimately the young man) chastened by experience and drawn by it into the complex sphere of adult relations (above all, of course, with his dead parents). As Jonathan Wordsworth suggests, 'the breaking up of the "spots of time" and their distribution to other books pulled the center out of the poem of 1798-1799' (quoted in Ellis, 6).<sup>21</sup> Wordsworth's reorganizations pulled the centre out of a psychological account and lent material to an ideological one; and while later readers may have problems here and there,

they generally accept Wordsworth's decision to emphasize the reparatory, restorative, and meliorative function of the imagination. 'As it stands in Book XI of 1805,' Jonathan Wordsworth writes, 'the assertion "There are in our existence spots of time..."', though of course highly impressive, is removed a very long way from the poetry of Book I with which it had originally been connected, and has to take a structural weight that it cannot easily bear.' (Wordsworth, 54.) True enough. But his account of 'Waiting for the Horses' suggests that the new emphasis on imagination is something inherent in the 1799 original:

Wordsworth views his former self with sympathy and detachment, entering into his suffering, making clear his terrible wrongness, and retrieving from the experience that which is of permanent value. The child has not killed his father; God has not corrected his desires; and the moral reflections with which he abases himself are not just trite..., they are the appalling products of remorse. Yet the passion is important all the same – very important. The intensity of hope changes to an intensity of guilt, turns briefly to misplaced and ignorant fervour, and becomes at last the emotional charge that creates a 'spot of time'. As a result the remembered scene, at which nothing happened, and which has in itself no significance, becomes a lasting source of imaginative strength. (Wordsworth, 62)

As a summary of the intellectual process or shift in attitude to his material Wordsworth underwent in extending *The Prelude* and relocating the spots of time, this seems to me remarkably accurate. (And the extension of *The Prelude* from two books to thirteen and from early adolescence to adulthood, it goes without saying, was an event of the first magnitude in the history of English poetry.) But writers on Wordsworth habitually go further than summarizing this process: they endorse it, just as Jonathan Wordsworth does here. 'For the 1805 poem', Stephen Gill writes, 'these passages were removed from the sequence of descriptions of childhood experiences and placed in Book XI at the climax of Wordsworth's testimony to all those factors which had saved him from error and "maintained a saving intercourse" with his "true self".' (Gill, 13.) The spots of time 'affirm [rather than 'assert', for example] this saving intercourse.' (Gill, 85.) Thus what Wordsworth remembered of the circumstances surrounding his father's death 'becomes a continuing source of consolation and strength' (Gill, 84). 'These bleak fundamentals are imaged as nourishment.' 'Repairing to the fountains of these memories, the poet returns to the origins of his strength.' (Gill, 85.) The two-book *Prelude*, accordingly, is 'a hymn of exultation' (Gill, 8), or a 'jubilate' welling up from 'a total, over-mastering absorption in the life of an *active universe*' (Gill, 60). For Duncan Wu, too, the relocation of these incidents involved 'deliverance through the restorative and enduring power of Nature as represented by the spots of time'; 'Nature's ability to renew imaginative vision is affirmed by reference to the experience of death'; the five-book

*Prelude* is 'an optimistic work, as it concludes with the two spots of time that confirm the poet's sense of imaginative renewal' (Wu, 6, 7, 12).<sup>22</sup> Even the more cautious David Ellis speaks of 'Waiting for the Horses' as 'a perpetual source...of spiritual refreshment' (Ellis, 34). So the spots of time are 'key moments in the history of his [Wordsworth's] imagination',<sup>23</sup> rather than the history of his life.

But Jonathan Wordsworth's summary, excellent though it is, falls victim to a set of beliefs: a faith or hope on William Wordsworth's part that what is described for us by Jonathan Wordsworth (and Stephen Gill, Duncan Wu, and many others beside) is the case; that the faculty of memory *is* a faculty of imaginative renewal and moral healing. 'The intensity of hope changes to an intensity of guilt, turns briefly to misplaced and ignorant fervour, and becomes at last the emotional that creates a "spot of time"'. As a result the remembered scene...becomes a lasting source of imaginative strength.' That Wordsworth wanted the process to take this form I have no doubt; I just don't think it actually does. If the spots of time remained for Wordsworth sources of poetic inspiration (which they clearly did) that is not because some process of moral or imaginative transformation had acted on the memories concerned, but because it had not and could not. It is because Wordsworth's anxieties about his mother and guilt about his father were *not* resolved that they continue to require treatment; they had not been turned into an object of 'permanent value' and they could not be. The poetry arises directly out of the feeling that his self-chastising fervour might *not* be 'misplaced and ignorant', that though these feelings were unconscious they were injurious, that they revealed his true feelings towards his parents, and that *that* was the reason they would not go away. As such they were not sources of nourishment, but something morally far more rigorous, even humiliating.

What happens to feelings that someone has resolved (or stopped trying to resolve) is made sadly clear by Wordsworth's last revision of 'Waiting for the Horses', from the 1850 *Prelude* (xii. 326-35):

and on winter nights,  
 Down to this very time, when storm and rain  
 Beat on my roof, or, haply, at noon-day,  
 While in a grove I walk, whose lofty trees,  
 Laden with summer's thickest foliage, rock  
 In a strong wind, some working of the spirit,  
 Some inward agitations thence are brought,  
 Whate'er their office, whether to beguile  
 Thoughts over busy in the course they took,  
 Or animate an hour of vacant ease.

Psychological analysis has given way here almost completely to an idea of the imagination as recompense and substitute, anodyne and stimulant. But Wordsworth did not come back from his own past with the kinds of moral and imaginative certainties he hoped so earnestly to find, and which he campaigned for so doughtily in the latter books of *The Prelude* – magnificent as those are in so many respects. He came back with something more interesting and unprecedented: a stype and standard of human normality encompassing psychological events and manifestations that cannot be converted into anything else than what they are.

In trying to sketch the possibilities of a 'concentrated, sober, even stern' way of looking at the spots of time and the versions of the great poem in which they figure – and therefore tending to differ from accounts of *The Prelude* that foreground hymns of exultation, imaginative renewals, and perpetual sources of spiritual refreshment – this is the right place to say how much encouragement and guidance I have drawn from past contributions to the *Critical Review*. Robin Grove used the expression quoted above in 1966; in the same essay he spoke of Arnoldian accounts of Wordsworth seeking 'to dissolve or make transparent whatever is vexing, alien and complex in the verse', and of Wordsworth's idea of nature ('Instead of prompting conventional fervours and aspirations') bringing 'definition to human lives in ways not usually open to the conscious mind'.<sup>24</sup> In 1973 Ros Eason discussed 'The Ruined Cottage', saying that Wordsworth's 'own equilibrium was no more easily won than Margaret's'; that 'For Margaret herself, there is less and less possibility of nature's tendencies being felt as sustaining and providential'; and that the strength of the poem 'lies in its ability to face the fact that for others the inanimate universe may not necessarily appear in a sustaining or comforting relation'.<sup>25</sup> I don't think A.L. French in 1974 would have had much patience with the account of the spots of time offered here. (Stressing 'the poet's Oedipal feelings about his parents', he wrote, was 'a feat of reductiveness which has the odd effect of making the strange and disturbing into the familiar'.) But he also spoke of 'the desperation of Wordsworth's struggle to remain emotionally poised in a world...which, at any rate in his earlier years, must

have seemed insufferably hard to live in', and of the fact that in Wordsworth's best poetry 'his perceptions are so strange...that there is a constant temptation to assimilate them to categories already known and hence comforting.' French also commented that in parts of *The Prelude* Wordsworth finds 'that *really* seeing into the life of things can mean losing your grip on your humanity and its normal modes of thinking and grasping.'<sup>26</sup> None of these remarks are necessarily inconsistent with the approach taken to *The Prelude* by Jonathan Wordsworth, Stephen Gill, and Duncan Wu. (And I am no doubt as guilty of domesticating Wordsworth's genius as anybody else.) But I think such remarks allow readers of Wordsworth to stand back a little from aspects of his ideology and teleology – to see (as Simon Haines put it in 1991)<sup>27</sup> that Wordsworth's poetry 'is both autobiography and plea; it persuades by form as well as argument, by proffered personal experience as well as by generalization.'

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<sup>1</sup> This famous expression is a slight misquotation. What Wordsworth wrote, in a letter to Lady Beaumont of 21 May 1807, was: 'Never forget what I believe was observed to you by Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must himself create the taste by which he is relished.'

<sup>2</sup> See M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Lansdown, *The Autonomy of Literature* (London: Macmillan, 2001), 120-7. Stephen Gill describes this passage and others like it as 'astonishing breakthroughs into the language of psychology familiar to us today'. (Gill, *William Wordsworth: 'The Prelude'* (Landmarks of World Literature series; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2; cited below as Gill.) There is not space here to quote in the remarkable corollary passage from Book Three of the 1805 *Prelude* (121-440): 'The great mass/Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all/That I beheld respired with inward meaning.' 'I had a world about me – 'twas my own,/I made it', etc.

<sup>5</sup> Reprinted in William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995); cited below as *The Prelude*.

<sup>6</sup> F.R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), 164. J.R. MacGillivray reminds us, where the childhood memories Wordsworth enshrined in the first book of *The Prelude* are concerned, that 'The reminiscences are varied to represent, not only the particular activities of the child, usually at play, but activities of each of the four seasons, of day and night, morning and evening, within doors and without, in society and solitude.' ('The Three Forms of *The Prelude*', 106, in W.J. Harvey and Richard Gravil (eds.), *Wordsworth, 'The Prelude': A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 99-115.

<sup>7</sup> Reprinted in *The Prelude: The Four Texts*, and cited below as 1799.

<sup>8</sup> Reprinted as William Wordsworth, *The Five-Book Prelude*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997); cited below as Wu.

<sup>9</sup> Reprinted in *The Prelude: The Four Texts*, and cited below as 1805.

<sup>10</sup> David Ellis, *Wordsworth, Freud and the Spots of Time: Interpretation in 'The Prelude'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 69; cited below as Ellis.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 39; cited below as Wordsworth.

<sup>12</sup> See David Ellis's discussion of 'screen memories', in Ellis, 66.

<sup>13</sup> I should make it clear that *The Prelude* is not the strictly chronological account we would expect from a standard biography: the woodcock-snaring, birds'-nesting, and boat-stealing were all done around Hawkshead, too, later in Wordsworth's period at school there.

<sup>14</sup> It seems he did. James Jackson drowned in Esthwaite on 18 June 1779. See Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Gill, *Wordsworth: A Life*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> David E. Simpson, 'The Spots of Time: Spaces for Refiguring', 141, in Harold Bloom (ed.), *William Wordsworth's 'The Prelude'* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 137-44.

<sup>17</sup> 'It seems an odd chance', Jonathan Wordsworth writes, 'that this of all passages in Wordsworth's poetry should be linked to the ghost of a murdered father.' (Wordsworth, 63.)

<sup>18</sup> That the horses from home and the gibbet were powerfully etched on Wordsworth's memory is testified to by the fact that both recur in his early poetry: the horses in 'The Vale of Esthwaite' ('Long, long, my swimming eyes did roam/For little Horse to bear me home') and 'Guilt and Sorrow' ('He looked, and saw upon a gibbet high/A human body that in irons swang').

<sup>19</sup> See Wordsworth, 422, note 30.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Gill, *Wordsworth: A Life*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> It is not just readers, then, who 'have been inclined...to lift the spots of time too readily out of their larger context', but Wordsworth himself. (See Herbert Lindenberger, 'The Structural Unit: "Spots of Time"', 88, in Bloom, *Wordsworth's 'The Prelude'*, 77-88.)

<sup>22</sup> Earlier I discussed the 'blue chasm' in the clouds Wordsworth saw from the peak of Mount Snowdon in terms of the unconscious; for Wu it 'is an image, finally, of hope' (Wu, 9).

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Bishop, 'Wordsworth and the "Spots of Time"', 134, in Harvey and Gravil, *Wordsworth, 'The Prelude': A Casebook*, 134-54. Bishop sees the poem in this light, though he says elsewhere (148): 'We have group of memories; these share a vocabulary of imagery, a vocabulary which seems to combine into a story, a story which, so far as it is interpretable, tells of the fears, curiosities, and guilt of childhood.'

<sup>24</sup> 'Wordsworth', *Critical Review*, 9 (1966), 55-68.

<sup>25</sup> 'Wordsworth and Ordinary Sorrow: "The Ruined Cottage"', *Critical Review*, 16 (1973), 39-55.

<sup>26</sup> 'The "Fair Seed-Time" in Wordsworth's *Prelude*', *Critical Review*, 17 (1974), 3-20.

<sup>27</sup> "'Tintern Abbey": Restoration or Evasion?', *Critical Review*, 31 (1991), 28-46. I should also like to mention Robin Grove, 'Wordsworth: Reflections on Water', *Critical Review*, 29 (1989), 42-66.