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The Prophetic Wordsworth:

Anxiety and Self-fashioning

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PhD in Literature and Philosophy

1700-1900

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Literature and Philosophy 1700-1900

The Prophetic Wordsworth: Anxiety and Self-fashioning

Summary

The thesis investigates the prophetic in Wordsworth's 'golden decade' (1798-1808). It establishes the following arguments: the prophetic in Wordsworth should not be treated of only incidental interest; it is a mode of his self-fashioning, as well as a mode of his writing, channelling the poet's anxieties about his authorship, readership, reception and posterity.

The thesis contains an introduction and a short conclusion, with two main sections amounting to 7 chapters. Chapter 1 to 3 form Part I, focusing on the prophetic as a mode of self-fashioning. Chapter 1 re-examines *The Prelude*, arguing that self-doubts and struggle are inherent to Wordsworth's prophetic aspirations. Chapter 2 discusses three major reasons that make Wordsworth's self-fashioning as a poet of prophetic quality possible: personal aspirations, knowledge economy, and prophetic discourse of his time. Chapter 3 investigates anxieties generated in self-fashioning: anxiety of influence and anxiety about reception. Chapter 4 to 7 form Part II, exploring the prophetic as a mode of writing. Chapter 4 studies the apocalyptic vision of the rupture in human history in *Lyrical Ballads*. Chapter 5 looks into Wordsworth's concern with the nation in 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty'. Chapter 6 focuses on the dual prophetic quality of *The White Doe of Rylstone* and its links to discourse of duty and Catholic Emancipation. Chapter 7 studies the prophet-like speaker and the prophetic nature of the narrative in *Peter Bell*. It also considers the discrepancy between the poet's ideal reader and his actual reader as the reason why the poem fails to appeal.

The claim to innovation in the thesis is that it offers a corrective reading of the prophetic as a mode of self-fashioning and a mode of writing in Wordsworth. It also sheds new light on the poet's acclaimed major works such as *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as widely criticised minor ones such as *Peter Bell*.

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I dedicate the thesis to my dear parents with love.

Abbreviations

- EY *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Early Years*
- MY *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Middle Years*
- LY *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Late Years*
- SL *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, A Supplement of Letters*
- CLC *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

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Introduction

This thesis looks into the prophetic in relation to Wordsworth's self-fashioning as a poet in his acknowledged 'golden decade' (1798-1808)¹. It aims to put forward the following arguments: Wordsworth was conscious of creating a poetic identity for himself throughout his career and especially in the 'golden decade'; he actively participated in his 'self-fashioning' as a poet, both in and out of the texts, by resorting to the idea of the prophetic (the thesis will demonstrate later on what the prophetic entails and how Wordsworth made use of it); the prophetic serves as his mode of self-fashioning as well as a mode of writing, meanwhile channelling his anxieties. The prophetic sits at the core of Wordsworth's self-fashioning: it is both the aim and the method.

Wordsworth scholarship has been vigorous, but it arguably tends to focus on three main issues: the poet's poetics, philosophy and biography, of which, Geoffrey Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (1964), M. H. Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971) and Stephen Gill's *Wordsworth, A Life* (1989) set the perimeter respectively. Relatively few works concentrate on Wordsworth's awareness and deliberate self-fashioning as a poet. The biographies, due to genre limits, easily slip into an account of the poet's life and writing, as happening at the same time. We are given a sometimes detailed account of Wordsworth's practical concerns regarding establishing himself as a poet, such as the correspondences with publishers, patrons and friends. Seldom do we look into Wordsworth's conscious effort at self-fashioning within his poetic texts. The same kind of negligence applies to the prophetic, which tends to be treated as passing comments and not much more, with the possible

¹ Matthew Arnold asserts that 'within one single decade of those years, between 1798 and 1808, almost all his [Wordsworth's] really first-rate work was produced'. The idea of the 'golden decade' then became established in Wordsworth studies. Matthew Arnold, 'Preface to *The Poems of Wordsworth*', in *Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, a Casebook*, ed. by Alun R. Jones and William Tydeman (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1972), pp. 65-75 (p. 68).

exception of Ian Balfour's *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (2002). But even in Balfour's book which values the prophetic for its own merit, there is little said on Wordsworth apart from just a few pages at the beginning of the book. This thesis attempts to bring into the spotlight the argument that Wordsworth deliberately fashioned his poetic identity in his poetry, and that the prophetic is an essential and indispensable part of that process.

1. The Prophetic redefined

The concept of prophet and prophecy is much abused. Walt Whitman, in 'Death of Thomas Carlyle' (1881) candidly asserts:

The word prophecy is much misused; it seems narrow'd to prediction merely. That is not the main sense of the Hebrew word translated 'prophet;' it means one whose mind bubbles up and pours forth as a fountain, from inner, divine spontaneities revealing God. Prediction is a very minor part of prophecy. The great matter is to reveal and outpour the God-like suggestions pressing for birth in the soul.²

Whitman suggests that prediction does not play a significant role in prophecy. The etymology of the word prophet shows that prediction is indeed not essential. The Hebrew word for prophet is נָבִיא (nabi'), meaning a spokesperson. The Greek word for prophet is προφητης (Prophetes). The 'φη' element means 'to say', 'to speak', and in combination with the prefix 'προ', it can mean 'to declare openly'. A προφητης is an oracle prophet whose task is to 'interpret it [the oracle]', 'to put it into human speech and to proclaim it to those seeking advice'³.

² *The Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, ed. by Louis Untermeyer (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), p. 769.

³ G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume VI, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), p. 793.

Not much about futurity is coded in προφητης, yet modern readers are somewhat obsessed with futurity and by extension, prediction. Johnson's *English Dictionary* (1755) narrows down the meaning of the prophet to 'one who tells future events; a predictor; a foreteller; one of the sacred writers empowered by God to foretell futurity.'⁴

As language evolves, words naturally lose or gain meanings. Some become flat, while others are enriched. The emphasis on the futurity of 'prophet' in a modern context is perfectly natural. However, as this thesis attempts to demonstrate, it is not in our best interest as readers of Wordsworth to flatten 'prophet' and emphasise only prediction and futurity. More diverse interpretations free from a linear futuristic way of thinking can be made if we take the concept of prophet and prophecy out of the restrictive narrowed modern definition.

Emphasising futurity is one problem when dealing with prophet and prophecy. The other problem is the emphasis on the biblical source. Prophets are plural. There are different kinds of prophets: biblical and classical, and as discussed later in this thesis, the bardic prophets.

The Hebrew נָבִיא, and the Greek προφητης mean similar things, but at the same time, are very different. They both refer to someone who is inspired by a divine source and speaks forth the truth. But the divine sources are different: the Hebrew prophets are biblical, interpreting the Hebrew God, which is certainly not the divine source of the Greek prophets. In the Greek system, there are oracle prophets who are sometimes mentioned by name, or indicated as a group. Pythia, the priestess of the Oracle of Delphi inspired by Apollo, more often than not, uttered words in ecstasy that no one could discern, and it is the prophet's task to interpret them. Plato, in differentiating Pythia and the prophets, asserts that Pythia speaks under the constraint of the divine god, while her inarticulate words are

⁴ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Times Books, 1799).

articulated by the prophets with rational discernment. Reason is what distinguishes the group prophets from the oracle prophet.

The interpretations by these Greek prophets usually take the form of hexameter verse or prose, which highlights the overlapping area between the prophets and the poets. Can a prophet be a poet? Or can a poet be a prophet? Edward B. Pollard and William Norman Guthrie offered an affirmative answer to each of the two questions a century ago. Pollard, in examining the prophet, claims that both the prophet and the poet are concerned with truth, are seers, that each has to do with the universal, the ideal, and each stands for spirituality. 'Herein the Hebrew prophet showed himself ever a true poet.'⁵ Guthrie juxtaposes the poet and the prophet, and concludes that men and women find in the poet's work a similar condition and their 'most intimate thoughts, their elusive feelings, their most secret deeds all foretold'.⁶ Thus the destiny of humanity permeates the poet's work, making him a possible prophet. In fact, when mentioning the poet as prophet, we may as well scrutinise the shared mission of the divine muse and the human poet. It is said that the muse knows all, calls the poet, imparts and breathes into him a divine voice. The early Greek poet Pindar calls himself the spokesman of the muses. 'Give thy oracle, Muse, and I shall interpret'.⁷ The poet Pindar is seen as an oracle prophet. He interprets the muse, and 'his own genius is essentially imparted when he speaks as *προφητης* of the muses'.⁸ In such cases, the poet actually becomes the *προφητης* of the muse. Apart from being the spokesman of the muse, the poet is sometimes the spokesman of men, for he can express public opinion. All in all, the Greek *προφητης* carries out the function of declaring, proclaiming and making known, and thus the prophet plays a meditating role. It is only later, in some Christian and bardic contexts,

⁵ Edward B. Pollard, 'The Prophet as a Poet', *The Biblical World*, Vol. 12, No. 5 (1898), 327-332 (p. 332).

⁶ William Norman Guthrie, 'The Poet as Prophet', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1898), 402-412 (p. 412).

⁷ C. M. Bowra, *Pindar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 8.

⁸ Kittel, p. 794.

that the prophet may also be regarded as one who foretells the future.

The question of the borderline between and/or the interchangeability of poet and prophet, of poetry and prophecy, has been addressed again recently by Ian Balfour in his acclaimed book *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (2002).⁹ Balfour offers an extensive discussion of the prophetic in the Romantic period, both German and English. He distinguishes prophecy as a mode from prophecy as a genre, the former being his focus. Balfour also substitutes the restrictive controversial word ‘prophecy’ with the more comprehensive ‘prophetic’. As its title suggests, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* focuses on ‘prophecy’. In his discussion of the prophetic, the rhetoric of prophecy is given priority. Part One of the book investigates eighteenth century writings on prophecy, English and German, including those of Robert Lowth (1710–1787), Richard Hurd (1720–1808), William Warburton (1698–1779), and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1753–1827). Part One focuses on the poetic features of prophetic writing, and demonstrates that the prophetic can and should be seen as poetic. Part Two studies the poetic writings in the Romantic period, namely William Blake (1757–1827), and S.T. Coleridge (1772–1834) on the English side, and Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) on the German side. The book shows their historicity and complexity: it demonstrates the prophetic elements by tracing how those poetic writings engage themselves both in the politics of their present time and beyond. But there is very little discussion of Wordsworth.

The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy offers a point of departure in the study of the prophetic in the Romantic period by treating the prophetic as a proper subject. A majority of Balfour’s texts of choice speak with an explicit religious register, for instance, Lowth’s lectures on the Hebrew Bible as poetry, Hurd’s *Twelve Sermons Introductory to the Study of the Prophecies* (delivered in 1772), and

⁹ Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002).

Eichhorn's *Einleitung in das alte Testament* (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1780-1783). Even the texts from Blake are marked by the poet himself as 'Prophecy' (*America* and *Europe*). However, the modern society is an increasingly secularized one. Not all writings in the romantic period possess as much religious register as Lowth's or Hurd's, but nevertheless, as Balfour argues at the beginning of the book, the prophetic, in the Romantic context, is more of a mode of writing than a genre of writing.

This thesis borrows from Balfour the assertion that the prophetic is a mode of writing, but differs from Balfour in at least two significant ways: first, the poet of choice. The texts Balfour chooses were produced by people, in some way or another, linked to the church, or worked with religious texts. Lowth, Hurd and Warburton were or became bishops, Herder and Eichhorn wrote extensively on theology and philosophy. Even in Part Two where Balfour shifts the focus onto poets, religion is always an explicit concern: Blake was a self-proclaimed prophet, Coleridge wrote considerably on religion. Hölderlin perhaps is the only exception here. The present thesis studies a major English Romantic poet Wordsworth who was judged and appreciated by his poetic merit rather than his religious undertaking, even if as Stephen Prickett demonstrates that Wordsworth's poetry influenced many nineteenth century religious thinkers, such as John Henry Newman (1801-1890) and John Keble (1792-1866).¹⁰

To draw out the prophetic quality in Wordsworth, on the one hand, reaffirms that the prophetic, in the Romantic period, is widely adopted as a mode of writing, and on the other hand, re-establishes its importance in the poet's poetic life and composition. The prophetic in Wordsworth deserves more than just a passing comment or the assumption that it is a phenomenon to be taken for granted. In fact, it is first adopted as a means of self-fashioning in an attempt to counteract anxieties of influence and

¹⁰ Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: the Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

of reception. By arguing for this, the present thesis is asking what the prophetic does for the individual in the personal domain, which is a second difference from Balfour.

Balfour does mention Wordsworth in the introduction, but as it is a very short discussion and some of his observations can be contested, it leaves much room for further inquiry. For instance, Balfour observes that Wordsworth in *The Prelude* pictures a figure of a prophet speaking without an audience, but the thesis argues that his contemporary audience and his audience in posterity were very much on the poet's mind while he was composing *The Prelude*, as reflected in the text. Also, the prophetic quality, for Balfour and many others, whenever mentioned, tends to be associated closely and exclusively with *The Prelude*. While it is true that prophetic aspirations are explicit in *The Prelude*, the poem was not published until after the poet's death. Meanwhile, Wordsworth, towards his later career, was already seen as a prophetic figure. Hazlitt in *The Spirit of the Age* comments on Wordsworth: 'Milton is his great idol, and he sometimes dares to compare himself with him. His Sonnets, indeed, have something of the same high-raised tone and prophetic spirit.'¹¹ This suggests the prophetic Wordsworth in his lifetime comes not from the unpublished *Prelude*, but from the published sonnets. Examining across the poet's writings will confirm that the prophetic is present in many of his compositions.

2. The Scope and Structure of the Thesis

As stated above, this thesis studies the prophetic elements and quality, not only of *The Prelude*, but also of Wordsworth's other writings, especially in the 'golden decade'. Wordsworth himself sees his

¹¹ *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Volume 7, Liber Amoris, The Spirit of the Age*, ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), p. 166.

poetry written and published before this period as juvenile pieces, as he grouped *An Evening Walk* (1793) and *Descriptive Sketches* (1793) as ‘juvenile poems’ in the 1827 *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth* (the poet’s first attempt to publish his collected works). The ‘golden decade’ starts from somewhere near 1798 when Wordsworth was staying at Nether Stowey, conversing daily with Coleridge on poetry, and planning to work on a collection of poems, which later became *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). After that, Wordsworth’s career seemed to take off. He was writing vigorously. Alongside three editions of *Lyrical Ballads*, he was writing and revising *The Prelude*, published *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), and wrote many fragments which were to be published in *Excursion* (1814), and as *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1815), and *Peter Bell* (1819).

This present thesis will mainly examine poems in the golden decade, drafted, finished or published (*Lyrical Ballads* and *Poems, in Two Volumes* were published during this period; *The Prelude* took its final shape around 1805; *White Doe* and *Peter Bell*, written in the period but published later). *The Fenwick Notes* (dictated in 1843) is also investigated as the poet’s literary autobiography.

The number of the sample poems is small, six in total. Each chapter focuses specially on one poem in relation to a particular prophetic quality. The reason for doing so is well-explained by David Simpson in *Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination: the Poetry of Displacement* (1987). Simpson alerts us to the danger of materialist literary criticism committing to an all-embracing theory especially in the study of poetry: ‘We are faced with particular poems, the conditions of whose production vary to a degree that no theory, whether of ideological determination or individual creativity, can convincingly prescribe.’¹² This thesis values such particularity and chooses a small number of poems, all of which possess prophetic qualities to some degree. In line with Simpson, the thesis does not aim to establish

¹² David Simpson, *Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination: the Poetry of Displacement* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 11.

the prophetic as a theoretical approach to all of Wordsworth's poems, but rather, it attempts to highlight the prophetic as an important part in the composite of the poet's identities and his compositions.

The thesis contains an introduction, and a short conclusion, with two main sections amounting to 7 chapters. Chapter 1 to Chapter 3 form Part I of the thesis, whose main task is to demonstrate the prophetic as a mode of self-fashioning. It examines three key components in Wordsworth: self-fashioning, the prophetic and anxieties. Chapter 1 by re-examining the prophetic in *The Prelude* demonstrates that, much like the biblical prophets, Wordsworth's prophetic aspirations are generated not without self-doubts and struggle. Aspiration and struggle form a circular narrative which governs the structure of the text. Wordsworth, towards the end of *The Prelude*, establishes the link between poet and prophet: the visionary power to see the truth. The bard, possessing this power and producing verses to music, is Wordsworth's ideal type of poet. Chapter 2 interprets Wordsworth's prophetic aspirations as his mode of self-fashioning. It starts by revisiting the concept of self-fashioning in Greenblatt. Departing from Greenblatt's idea of self-fashioning which largely focuses on the individual interacting with the social and historical context, this thesis highlights Wordsworth's self-fashioning as a poet in and out of his texts, leaving his struggle in personal life for another occasion. Chapter 2 considers three major reasons why self-fashioning is possible for Wordsworth and why the prophetic plays an important part in it: the poems reveal that for Wordsworth, writing seems to be a necessity; the historical context of knowledge economy makes writing as a profession achievable; his contemporary prophetic discourse has a strong influence on the poet's prophetic aspirations. Chapter 3 investigates the intricacies of self-fashioning as a poet for Wordsworth, particularly his anxieties— anxiety of influence and anxiety about reception. It argues that the prophetic is not only a mode of his self-fashioning, but also a tool of combating his anxieties to reaffirm his poetic identity. *The Fenwick*

Notes is studied here as Wordsworth's literary autobiography, his last effort at self-fashioning. The selectively disclosed truth behind his poetic composition speaks to the poet's audience in posterity. It is his final yet revealing touch.

Chapter 4 to Chapter 7 form Part II. The main focus is the prophetic as a mode of writing in Wordsworth. On the whole, it argues that the prophetic, first adopted by the poet as a mode of self-fashioning, soon becomes a mode of his writing. Chapter 4 studies the apocalyptic vision in *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection usually studied for its poetic innovations and politics. Studying the prophetic sheds new lights on this well-established work of Wordsworth. This chapter argues that there is an apocalyptic vision of the rupture in human history in *Lyrical Ballads*, and for Wordsworth, poetry, recording human story, can bring much-needed continuity. Chapter 5 looks into Wordsworth's concern with the nation, and the text of choice is 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' (published in *Poems, in Two Volumes* in 1807). It analyses the poet's sense of national superiority reflected as pride and fear in strange juxtaposition. The complexity of his feelings is conveyed through the use of Christian pleading and pagan images. By invoking great precursors such as Milton, Wordsworth candidly claims his identity as a poet of prophetic quality. Part of Wordsworth's intention in invoking Milton is to ask the great precursor to teach 'manners, virtue, freedom, power' (Sonnet 14 in 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty', 8). Manners and virtue are the primary concern of Chapter 6 and 7. Chapter 6 focuses on *The White Doe of Rylstone*, a poem less studied but nonetheless important to the poet. It brings out the dual prophetic quality of the poem, with the doe as a central prophetic presence and the poem as a prophetic writing addressing human concern. The poem not only is engaged with a contemporary philosophical discourse of morality and duty, but also addresses a major issue of the day, Catholic Emancipation. Chapter 7 extends the discussion of morality by discussing *Peter Bell*, a badly received poem in its

own day and indeed subsequently. Wordsworth was bitter about its reception as he took the poem seriously. This chapter looks into the prophet-like speaker and the prophetic nature of the narrative. It also explores why the poem fails to appeal by examining the discrepancy between the poet's ideal reader and his actual reader.

It has to be said that given the fact Wordsworth was constantly working on revisions once a poem was drafted, it is difficult and futile to arrange the poems strictly according to the chronological order of composition. The thesis, therefore, discusses the poems in Part II in the order of their original publication. For the sake of convenience and consistency, unless otherwise specified, the poems used in this thesis are all taken from the Cornell edition of Wordsworth.

Part I

The Prophetic as a Mode of Self-Fashioning

Chapter 1

The Prelude: Prophetic Aspirations Revisited

There is no other poem of Wordsworth that can express his prophetic aspiration, self-doubt, affirmation, love and struggle more than *The Prelude*. The Cornell edition of the poem calls it *Poem Title not yet fixed upon by William Wordsworth Addressed to S.T. Coleridge*, because Wordsworth himself did not give the poem a specific name. It was the poet's wife Mary Wordsworth who named it 'The Prelude' in the posthumous publishing of the poem in 1850, in fourteen books, with the full title *The Prelude, or the Growth of a Poet's Mind*. The poem is a work in progress throughout the poet's life, therefore, manuscripts of its different versions have been an area of interest. Scholars have agreed on five relatively stable versions of the poem: a two-book version in 1799, a five-book version of early spring 1805, two thirteen-book versions, respectively in 1805 and 1820, and a fourteen-book version in 1850. In 1926, Ernest de Selincourt edited and published a critical edition of *The Prelude*, with 1805 version and 1850 version on opposite pages. He then published the thirteen book 1805 version in 1933. Both were revised and republished by Helen Darbishire, respectively in 1959 and 1960, with the latter made into a second edition by Stephen Gill in 1970; the Penguin edition of *The Prelude* by J. C. Maxwell was published in 1971, with the 1805 and 1850 texts in parallel; the Norton edition which presents the 1799, 1805 and 1850 versions, edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill, was published in 1979. A significant gesture of the Norton edition was to provide a scholarly 1799 version of the poem, alerting readers and critics to the fact that *The Prelude*, as a work in progress, had undergone through significant revisions; the definitive edition of *The Prelude* widely-used comes from

Cornell university press which has published the poem's different variations, including *The Prelude, 1798-1799*, edited by S. M. Parrish, in 1977; *The Fourteen-book Prelude*, edited by W. J. B Owen, in 1985; *The Thirteen book Prelude*, edited by Mark Reed, in 1991, in two volumes. Reed provided two reading texts of the poems: volume 1 presents stage AB version based on the first two fair copies of the poem, made in late 1805 and early 1806, by Dorothy Wordsworth between November and February (Dove Cottage MS. 52; *Prelude* Ms A), and Mary Wordsworth between December and February (Dove Cottage MS. 53; *Prelude* Ms. B); volume 2 presents stage C version made between 1818-1820, which are incomplete and often unreliable. Quotations in this chapter, if not otherwise specified, are taken from Volume I, stage AB reading text, because it is the first complete version and is thus most useful to our discussion.

Much has been said about *The Prelude*, to the extent that the study of Wordsworth nowadays cannot leave out this important poem. Various literary investigations have been carried out to elucidate the poem. The prophetic has been noticed and acknowledged, but only as a garnish, not a main course. There is a tendency to mention the prophetic, and then the discussion quickly shifts to other topics. A famous example is M. H Abrams's renowned book *Natural and Supernaturalism* (1971). Simply put, Abrams acknowledges Wordsworth's invocation of the prophetic spirit, but his focus is to establish a redemption model in the romantic poetry. In the romantic model, human beings' fall is the alienation from nature and fellow men, and the redemptive power lies in imagination.

The prophetic was discussed, for its own merit, in Hartman's essay 'The Poetics of Prophecy', first published in 1981, included in his *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* in 1987. Hartman examines two 'spots of time' in *The Prelude* alluding to the death of the poet's father and climbing Snowdon. Hartman argues that there is a poetics of prophecy which can be applied to Wordsworth's poetry,

typically reflected as voice and vision in the form of a ‘blast of harmony’. He then unfolds tension in the ‘blast of harmony’ in Jeremiah by closely examining how the pressures are reconciled on the textual level, the pressure of prophets offering a ‘timely utterance’ and the contradictions within the utterance seen as an event. Hartman’s discussion posts some interesting questions. He admits that the relationship between poetics and prophetic is complicated, hard to be accommodated, and open to unresolved questions.¹³ Curiously enough, the later Wordsworthians seem not to have picked up on Hartman’s suggestion of treating the prophetic as a poetic. Even Ian Balfour’s much acclaimed and in some sense ground breaking book does not do so. The second part of *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* deals with the prophetic in the poems of Blake and Hölderlin, but not Wordsworth.

The prophetic in Wordsworth seems to be taken for granted. It is so obvious that it is invisible, and even worse, there is not much to talk about, other than that it is there. But as this chapter tries to demonstrate that there is a new perspective on how the prophetic can be interpreted by disclosing the complexity of the poet’s prophetic aspirations expressed in the poem in comparison to its biblical counterparts. The prophetic is more than an aura or a feature. It is a mode of Wordsworth’s self-fashioning.

1.1. ‘Something unseen before’ and ‘a mighty scheme of truth’: Poet and Prophet Compared

In general, *The Prelude* traces the poet’s personal development, the various influences that helped to shape his mind—literature, politics, philosophy, and also the crisis of belief he experienced. Eventually, it presents a narrative of the growth of his mind. It also conveys a picture of the poet’s sense of identity,

¹³ Geoffrey Hartman, ‘The Poetics of Poetry’, in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 163-181.

first and foremost, as a prophetic poet. Wordsworth explicitly speaks of his aspiration to be a prophet in Book XII.

.....Dearest Friend,
 Forgive me if I say that I, who long
 Had harbour'd reverentially a thought
 That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
 Connected in a *mighty scheme of truth*,
 Have each for his peculiar dower a sense
 By which he is enabled to perceive
Something unseen before: forgive me, Friend,
 If I, the meanest of this Band, had hope
 That unto me had also been vouchsafed
 An influx, that in some sort I possess'd
 A privilege, and that a work of mine,
 Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,
 Enduring and creative, might become
 A power like one of Nature's...
 (*The Prelude*, 1805, XII, 298-312)¹⁴

As the Introductory chapter tries to demonstrate, the concept of 'prophet' should be considered in the broader sense as someone proclaiming the truth. Prophets are of different kinds. The word can refer to the ancient Greek oracles, or biblical prophets, or what Wordsworth tries to establish in *The Prelude*—prophets of nature.

Balfour claims that the analogy between a poet and a prophet is made hypothetically,¹⁵ but the thesis will argue that the use of subjunctive mode 'if' is false modesty. Such an analogy is firmly grounded in Wordsworth's belief that poets and prophets share some fundamental qualities. First, they both possess the ability to see things that others cannot see, and seer is indeed another name for prophet

¹⁴ William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude, Volume I*, ed. by Mark L. Reed (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 311. Unless specified, quotations from *The Prelude* in this chapter are all from the 1805 version, reproduced as the stage AB reading text by Mark Reed in the Cornell *Thirteenth-Book Prelude*. Italics mine.

¹⁵ Balfour, p. 23.

in the Old Testament. For Wordsworth, the poet possesses ‘more than usual organic sensibility’¹⁶ and can see ‘something unseen before’. Second, they are both concerned about disclosing truth. God’s words are the prophet’s truth, the Delphic oracle discloses Apollo’s intention, whereas poets make or reveal truth in that ‘something unseen before’ as their subject. Each one sees something of the truth and imparts it. By doing so, they become interlinked and form a ‘mighty scheme of truth’. This ‘mighty scheme of truth’ as an aim also connects its two groups of contributors, poets and prophets together. Third, both poets and prophets, having perceived part of the truth, seek to impart what they see and what they understand. Biblical prophets speak to the nation, the Delphic oracle speaks to those who consult it, while poets speak to their readers.

Wordsworth adopts the concept of prophet and transplants it into his poetic scheme. In his system, the poet takes the place of the prophet, in line with this comparison, nature takes the place of God in the Hebrew bible and of the Greeks gods. For a clear and concise comparison, even if at the risk of being too simplistic: the Delphic oracle is dedicated to Apollo, the biblical prophets see themselves as the mouthpiece of God, and Wordsworth sees poets as the messengers of nature, or one might say that Apollo speaks through the Delphic oracle, God speaks through biblical prophets, and nature speaks through poets like Wordsworth.

Such design is bottom up instead of top down. Wordsworth is concerned about the poet’s role as a prophetic figure in the first place. In search of his divine inspiration, he turns to nature. This helps to explain the problematic pantheist tendency in his poems as noticed by scholars of previous generations. The reality is, perhaps, that Wordsworth has not given nature much thought in ontological terms. It is simply given. Wordsworth is concerned with what nature does rather than what nature is.

¹⁶ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads: and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 744.

Nature to him as a poet plays a similar role as God to the biblical prophet and gods to the classical prophets. As prophets of nature, like prophets of God and of Apollo, poets aim to teach and to instruct.

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
 A lasting *inspiration*, sanctified
 By reason and by truth: what we have loved
 Others will love; and we may *teach them* how,
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells, above this Frame of things
 (Which 'mid all revolutions in the hopes
 And fears of men doth still remain unchanged)
 In beauty exalted, as it is itself
 Of substance and of fabric more divine.
 (1805, XIII, 442-452)

For Wordsworth, like the prophets, the poet has the responsibility to instruct and to teach and, more specifically, to teach about the magnificence, beauty and divinity of the human mind. Wordsworth feels compelled to justify his claim that he is fit for such responsibility. He presents an initiation story by examining various forces—political, literary, or historical, and their effects on the cultivation of his mind. By doing so, he also makes his own mind a subject for experiment and exploration, as an example of the human mind at work. In a way, *The Prelude* kills two birds with one stone: it aims to prove the poet's capability to write and teach about the complexity of the human mind, and it does so by showing the complexity of one particular specimen: his own mind.

1.2. 'A Chosen Son' yet 'so much wanting': the Aspiration and Struggle

Although forcefully put forward in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth's aspiration and claim as a prophet of

nature are not pretended as simply given. It is through experiencing hope, joy, self-doubts and disillusion at various turns of fortunes that the poet reaffirms himself. This process, as reflected in the poem, resembles the experience of biblical prophets in the Old Testament. Several distinctive features that apply to the Old Testament prophets are shared by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, which mainly are: the need to answer the prophetic calling; the resistance to such calling; the emotional tension coming out of the process; experiencing voice and vision; and concerns with nation and justice.

The claim of prophetic calling among the Old Testament prophets are the most common. Moses encountered the Lord revealing himself in a burning bush, commanding him to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites to march out of the land of oppression (Exodus 3.1-12). The commandments Moses spread were demanded by God to be followed (Exodus 20.1-23.33). Jeremiah was ordered to be a prophet by the Lord (Jeremiah 1.4-5); the spirit came into the prophet, enabling him to hear God (Ezekiel 2.1-27), and in many other cases, the teachings of the prophets would simply begin with 'the word of the Lord that came to' whoever delivered the prophecy (Hosea 1.1; Joel 1.1; Jonah 1.1; Micah 1.1, etc.).

Although the Lord speaks to and through the prophets, more than one of the latter exhibit signs of resistance to such calling. Moses was afraid of people not believing him, himself not being eloquent, and pleaded the Lord to send someone else (Exodus 4.1-13); Jeremiah resisted by claiming that he was a child and thus could not speak. 'Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.' (Jeremiah 1.6).¹⁷ Isaiah is unusual in apparently accepting the call at the outset (Isaiah 6.8). It is interesting to notice here that the resistance is associated with a sense of inadequate command of language. Such fear of not possessing appropriate eloquence was transformed into a fear that the work

¹⁷ The Bible used in this thesis is the King James Version, which may have been familiar to Wordsworth. *The Bible, Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

might not last long. Other prophets manifesting resistance include Jonah who fled from the Lord (Jonah 1.3), and Ezekiel with his protest against God's wrath who pleaded with God to end the torment soon (Ezekiel 9.8; 11.13).

The emotional tension Ezekiel had experienced is common among biblical prophets who were always on the verge of being torn between teaching and the message they proclaimed, the scenes they beheld and their vision of ideal righteousness. Jeremiah more than once called upon the Lord to punish the nation and eliminate evil (Jeremiah 11.18-20; 12.1-6). Far from a formidable prophet, Jeremiah confessed that he was seen as a traitor and mocked (Jeremiah 20.7-8). He was an inch away from surrender. Similarly, Hosea experienced a mixture of anger and tenderness towards Israel. Unfaithfulness, disloyalty, murder and adultery were a cause of mourning (Hosea 4.1-3), but still, the prophets manifested tenderness, 'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely' (Hosea 14.4). Isaiah, on beholding his vision, claims the anguish he experienced 'as the pangs of a woman that travaileth' (Isaiah 21.3).

The form and media as well as the substance of the message received by the prophets are important. More than once, biblical prophets claim that they have seen a miraculous scene which the Lord meant to let them see, and hear voices telling them what to do. The book of Amos opens with a vision Amos encountered (Amos 1.1). The message spoken by Obadiah says 'the vision of Obadiah' (Obadiah 1.1). Eight series of visions form Zechariah's teaching. Isaiah, in a vision, saw the fall of Babylon (Isaiah, 21.1-10). Ezekiel recorded visions of Cherubim and the glory of God (Ezekiel 1.5-28). He then was spoken to by a voice, the voice of Lord God, calling him mortal and sending him to the people of Israel (Ezekiel 2.1). Jeremiah called forth the people to repent and obey the voice of God (Jeremiah 3.21-25; 26.13).

The messages delivered through visions and voices often have a profound concern with the nation. For instance, the primary focus in the Book of Isaiah is the future of Israel. The prophet starts with a condemnation of ‘a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corruptors’ (Isaiah 1.4), then proceeds to an apocalypse, in which there will be volcanic upheavals and earthquakes (Isaiah 24.1); the fall of Babylon and the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, reinhabiting and building a new world and becoming the ‘Holy One of Israel’ (Isaiah 56.5). The nation Israel is treated as a singular addressee in The Book of Jeremiah. The Lord is the God of Israel, and through the prophet’s proclamation, he condemns backsliding Israel and calls for repentance (Jeremiah 3.11-20) and promises the restoration of the nation (Jeremiah 31.1-12). Opening with the same denunciation of a rebellious Israel, The Book of Ezekiel proceeds to oracles against foreign nations, the Ammonites, the people of Tyre, and Egypt, followed by an eventual rescue of the house of Israel. The Lord will seek and rescue the sheep, feed them, and make David the shepherd.

The concern with the nation also often involves attacking the follies of the day and judgement from God. Jeremiah was concerned about the political and religious policies wrongly enforced, claiming those who handled the law did not know the Lord (Jeremiah 2.8), the rulers treated people carelessly and shamelessly (Jeremiah 6.14-15) and the whole infrastructure was based upon unrighteousness and injustice (Jeremiah 22.13). The Book of Isaiah denounces the people of Israel who were conducting evil and corruption, and making the once faithful city a treacherous place (Isaiah 1.4; 1.21). The arrogant deed of refusing to listen to the prophet’s teaching in Amos would evoke God’s anger and vengeance (Amos 2.12-16). The pride of Edom would gain punishment (Obadiah 1-4). Any deed manifesting idolatry was seen as betrayal. The doubt about and the demand of God’s imminence were disclosed in the incident of the tablet, and Moses was commanded by the Lord to

fight against the disbelievers (Exodus 32.19-28). Those turning their back on the Lord and worshipping other gods would be punished in Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1.6-9).

The appeal to justice is another distinctive feature among biblical prophecies. Isaiah pictures the salvation achieved by maintaining justice (Isaiah 56.1). Jeremiah demands God to judge righteously and show his retribution (Jeremiah 11.20; 12.1). Habakkuk continuously pleads God to bring unrighteousness to an end (Habakkuk 1.3; 3.8). The Book of Malachi asks for the God of justice to end the evil and arrogance (Malachi 2.17; 3.14). The destruction, violence and injustice all around will be eliminated, and the prophets put faith in God, picturing God's punishment of the sinful nation and bringing justice to the human world. Later on, this kind of aspiration to justice is often exhibited in literature. Justice and righteousness which cannot possibly be restored within a short time in reality, find their way in literary works, as seen in the use of poetic justice.

Even though God may not bring righteousness at the time being, the hope of the future restoration of a new social order and justice occupies a fair amount of prophets' accounts. In times of fear and suffering, there will also be a consolation of love and healing from God (Jeremiah 31). A blueprint of the restoration of the people of the Lord occupies almost one third of The Book of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 33-48). In Hosea, the prophet expects a return from the long exile and reconstruction of the society (Hosea 11.11). The hope of future restoration also appears in the Book of Amos, 'And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them' (Amos 9.14).

Almost all the aforementioned shared features among the Old Testament prophets are registered in *The Prelude*, but only in varying degrees. The present chapter will focus on the first two features, the prophetic aspiration or calling, and the emotional tension. Visions and national concerns will

appear later on in the discussion of other poems such as *Lyrical Ballads* and ‘Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty’, where they are more explicitly shown than in *The Prelude*.

For a start, the sense of prophetic calling in the biblical prophets is translated into a sense of being chosen in *The Prelude*. Wordsworth’s sense of his poetic vocation or calling is vivid and literal. Early in the poem, the poet rejoices in his childhood and school-time memories. He made nature his playground, wandering in the woods and hills, bathing in the river, and plundering bird nests. It was a carefree time, full of joy and happiness. It was especially so when the poet gained maturity after his crisis recorded in Book XI. He was convinced that nature had favoured him and provided a shaping hand.

...But I believe
 That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
A favor’d Being, from his earliest dawn
 Of infancy doth open out the clouds,
 As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
 With gentlest visitation: not the less,
 Though haply aiming at the self-same end,
 Does it delight her sometimes to employ
 Severer interventions, ministry
 More palpable, and *so she dealt with me*.
 (1805, I, 363-372)

These are interesting images and emotions. Light going through clouds and reaching the ground is a fairly common composition in religious paintings. Rubens’ ‘The Conversion of St Paul’ (1620s) shows Christ up in the clouds and lights reaching to St Paul who has fallen off his horse and is lying on the ground. Benjamin West used the similar concept in ‘Joshua Passing the River Jordan with the Ark of the Covenant’ (1800), in which the light serves as guidance. Light through clouds also appears in some apocalyptic paintings, such as Francis Danby’s ‘The Opening of the Sixth Seal’ (1828) in which a

beam of light goes through the rock. Wordsworth's light through clouds here seems to be calm and gentle, but not without a sense of the supernatural at work.

There is a hint of fear in such favour. 'I grew up/ Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear' (I, 306-307). Nature did not only bestow a carefree childhood upon him, but also employed 'severer interventions'. Wordsworth continues with the boat stealing episode. The boy Wordsworth stole a boat and while rowing it, he found the mountains behind him fearful with their unknowable forms in the darkness. This fear troubled his sleep for several days. Jonathan Wordsworth in *William Wordsworth, the Borders of Vision* (1982) regards the fear of unknowable forms as one of the borderline experience: '...the child had approached that borderline of human experience at which sounds of undistinguishable motion can be heard and the supernatural apprehended—whether it is present or not.'¹⁸

Severer interventions from nature than the boat stealing episode gradually unfold. The poet experienced a hard time at Cambridge. As Stephen Gill's investigation in *Wordsworth, a Life* shows, the poet did not do well academically, only graduating with a pass.¹⁹ Wordsworth confesses that for someone who came from the northern village, 'A northern Villager', 'a mountain Youth' (III, 32-33), he was not fit for the manner of life at Cambridge. Here is his description of that experience: 'to myself I seem'd/ A man of business and expense' (III, 23-24), and 'From Street to Street, with loose and careless heart./ I was the Dreamer, they the Dream'(III, 27-28). Not only was the manner of life at Cambridge overwhelming, but also he did not find scholarship in academia particularly interesting. He felt misled by the nature of classic scholarship of his time which prized verse in Latin and Greek, something he described as the

¹⁸ Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth, the Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 44.

¹⁹ Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth, A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 38-44.

...overpriz'd
 And dangerous craft of picking phrases out
 From languages that want the living voice
 To make of them a nature to the heart,
 (VI, 129-132)

Coleridge in Chapter 1 of *Biographia Literaria* points out this phenomenon of being required to find words and phrases in classical poets to express one's own idea, even though Latin was almost a dead language.

...Whatever might have been the case in the fifteenth century, when the use of the Latin tongue was so general among learned men, that Erasmus is said to have forgotten his native language; yet in the present day it is not to be supposed, that a youth can think in Latin, or that he can have any other reliance on the force or fitness of his phrases, but the authority of the author from whence he has adopted them. Consequently he must first prepare his thoughts, and then pick out, from Virgil, Horace, Ovid, or perhaps more compendiously from his *Gradus*, halves and quarters of lines, in which to embody them.²⁰

Wordsworth thinks this craft endangers both young scholars and old ones, because it lacks vitality. It does not possess the power to enlighten: 'To tell us what is passion, what is truth,/ What reason, what simplicity and sense.' (VI, 133-134)

It was under such circumstances that Wordsworth developed the feeling that he was 'not for that hour,/ Nor for that place.' (III, 80-81) But he then quickly recovered from the thought and reaffirmed himself by addressing his sense of being favoured, as a 'chosen son'.

...But wherefore be cast down?
 Why should I grieve? *I was a chosen Son.*
 For hither I had come with *holy powers*
 And faculties, whether to work or feel:

²⁰ S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 21.

To apprehend all passions and all moods
 Which time, and place, and season do impress
 Upon the visible universe; and work
 Like changes there by force of my own mind.
 (III, 81-88)

The power of the human mind is one of Wordsworth's major themes. The mind possesses a holy power that enables him to feel, and to apprehend. But what needs to be highlighted is the word 'chosen', suggesting the belief that he was specially chosen by nature and endowed with 'holy powers/ And faculties', like prophets chosen by God or gods.

The sense of being chosen continued from the Cambridge years to his residence in London. Wordsworth calls London the 'great city'. His description of entering 'the great city' in Book VIII is not without religious reference. The poet sat on the 'On the Roof/ Of an itinerant Vehicle...' (VIII, 693-694) and saw the buzzing city life, full of 'vulgar men', 'vulgar forms' (695) and 'Mean shapes' (697). At this exact moment he experienced something mysterious and divine, 'A weight of Ages did at once descend/ Upon my heart' (703-704). He could not think but feel, because there was 'no thought embodied, no/ Distinct remembrances; but weight and power,/ Power, growing with the weight' (704-706). Wordsworth perhaps was awed, even overwhelmed by the magnificence of the city of London as a living reminder of the long history that had produced it and was still continuing.

...alas! I feel
 That I am trifling: 'twas a moment's pause,
 All that took place within me, came and went
 As in a moment, and I only now
 Remember that it was a thing divine.
 (VIII, 706-710)

This particular episode of entering London the great city reminds the reader of the scene in which

Jesus enters the great city Jerusalem (John 12. 12-19). The crowd greeting Jesus were ‘vulgar shapes’. Wordsworth adopts the image and transforms it in the street scene in London. The great city of London was like the great city Jerusalem in the poet’s eyes. There is also a similar sense of retrospection in both: when Jesus sat on a donkey, the disciples did not know what was going on initially. ‘These things understood not his disciples at the first’ (John 12.16); Wordsworth did not know what he experienced at first either. Only years after that moment, did he ‘Remember that it was a thing divine’ (710).

The phrase ‘the great city’ also reminds us of the grand opening of *The Prelude*. It is only when Wordsworth has escaped from this great city that he feels he can think about his future, and he does so in a way that recalls *Paradise Lost*, which is suggested by the Norton critical edition of *The Prelude*.²¹ The opening of *The Prelude* is *Paradise Lost* continued. The concluding lines of *Paradise Lost* run as:

The World was all before them, where to choose
 Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
 They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
 Through Eden took their solitary way.
 (Paradise Lost, XII, 646-649)²²

‘The World was all before them’, and with ‘Providence their guide’, Adam and Eve exit Paradise. They obtained a newly gained freedom, with all the possibilities ahead. In the opening lines of *The Prelude*, the poet saw himself as the captive in the city who was recently set free. He was free, and with a joyful heart, questioned himself where to choose his ‘place of rest’:

²¹ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 28, note 3.

²² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 317.

What dwelling shall receive me? In what Vale
 Shall be my harbour? Underneath what grove
 Shall I take up my home, and what sweet stream
 Shall with its murmurs lull me to my rest?
 The earth is all before me: ...
 (I, 11-15)

Exiting from Paradise marks the beginning of human history, while exit from the great city marks the beginning of Wordsworth's poetic career to come. But what the Norton critical edition has not highlighted is the aspirations following this echo of *Paradise Lost*. The speaker came out of the great city with a mission. He must prophesy, for prophecy in poetic form flowed into him:

... to the open fields I told
 A prophecy: poetic numbers came
 Spontaneously, and cloth'd in priestly robe
 My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
 For holy services: ...
 (I, 59-63)

'poetic numbers came/ Spontaneously'. He had been 'singled out' for 'holy services'. Wordsworth is not shy in putting forward his sense of being chosen to prophesy. The claim provides *The Prelude* with a strong opening. By suggesting that something beyond the secular world is at work, it also gives the poem a sense of the sublime.

Like the biblical prophets who struggled to answer the prophetic calling and to find language appropriate to their calling, the poet exhibits a similar difficulty in living up to his aspirations. He felt incapable of doing so: '... for either still I find/ Some imperfection in the chosen theme;/ Or see of absolute accomplishment/ Much wanting, so much wanting in myself,/ That I recoil and droop...' (I, 264-268). Although he came with 'holy powers and faculties', he felt there was still 'so much wanting'

in himself. The compulsion to fulfil his prophetic mission and the feeling of being incapable of doing so are at two ends of the spectrum. The struggle between these two builds up the tension and functions as a thread that holds *The Prelude* together. To a certain extent, the poem is about the poet's journey to combat such incapability in order to justify his talent as a poet.

The tension between the sense of being chosen and the feeling of not being capable in answering the calling can also be seen in moments of hesitation and uncertainty when he hopes a mature age would elevate his mind and perfect his thoughts so he could fulfil his obligations as a poet. The act of postponing poetic production is also interwoven with Wordsworth's theory of the mind. For him, human minds interact with objects. These interactions might not have immediate impressions on the mind, but they were proven to be at work later at a more mature age: 'if haply they impress'd/ Collateral objects and appearances,/Albeit lifeless then, and doom'd to sleep/ Until maturer seasons call'd them forth/ To impregnate and to elevate the mind.' (I, 621-625).

Alternatively, if thoughts were indeed generated in those early interactions, a more mature age can recall them and arm the mind with power. For Wordsworth, it is the power to produce.

... my hope has been that I might fetch
 Invigorating thoughts from former years,
 Might fix the wavering balance of my mind,
 And haply meet reproaches, too, whose power
 May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
 To honorable toil. ...
 (I, 649-654)

The 'honorable toil' for the moment is to bring out the story of his life, to demonstrate the power of the human mind. The expectation of delaying any poetic work until his maturity is repeated towards the end the poem.

Of these, said I, shall be my Song, of these,
 If future years mature me for the task,
 Will I record the praises, making Verse
 Deal boldly with substantial things, ...
 (XII, 231- 234)

Here, Wordsworth is wrapping up *The Prelude* after retracing his growth through childhood, and life in Cambridge, London, and France. We would naturally expect that the poet finally found the confidence and reassurance he needed. Yet he did not. He still recoiled from the task hoping that future years would bring him the maturity to produce appropriate verse. Thus *The Prelude* forms a circle: it begins with aspiration, and with aspiration it finishes. But it never will be the same when the poem finishes. Tensions were built up. The poet struggled between his prophetic calling and a sense of inability to meet its demands.

Wordsworth's prophetic ambition and recoil from it echo with those of the Old Testament prophets, but at the same time, there is also a Hellenistic tendency in his use of the word 'prophet'. The figure Wordsworth aspires to be is a prophet poet, and primarily a poet, with prophetic quality. The relation between poets and prophets in Wordsworth was briefly discussed earlier in the Introduction, where the argument was made that poets and prophets are interlinked through the shared scheme of truth. Truth is what concerns them both, and teaching about truth is what links the two professions. The Delphic Oracle conveyed the divine message in verse form. It is both prophet and poet. Over time, the two professions grew apart. Wordsworth's use of prophet and poet has a tendency to bring the two back together. The poet's profession is uplifted through its association with prophets.

Apart from the biblical and the classical prophets, Wordsworth also looks up to the literary figure close to the prophet, the bard. Throughout *The Prelude*, there are four poets that he calls bard—Spenser,

Shakespeare, Milton and Thomson: ‘And that gentle Bard,/ Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State,/ Sweet Spencer’ (III, 279-281); ‘...that darling Bard/ Who told of Juliet and her Romeo’ (IX, 638-639); ‘Time out of mind, honor’d by Milton’s name;/ The very shell reputed of the abode/ Which he had tenanted. O temperate Bard!’ (III, 297-299); ‘...the Bard who sang/ Of the Enchanter Indolence hath call’d/ “Good-natured lounging”’(VI, 200-202). The phrase ‘Good-natured lounging’ is from Thomson’s ‘The Castle of Indolence’:

Here naught but candour reigns, indulgent ease,
 Good-natured lounging, sauntering up and down:
 They who are pleased themselves must always please;
 (Canto I, Line 27-129)²³

Wordsworth’s admiration for these four poets is no secret, but what is worth noticing is the fact that he often refers to them as bards. ‘Bard’ is not simply an archaic name given to poets. It highlights two distinctive features of this specific group of poets, which are—the use of music, and the concern with nation (which places the bard close to the biblical prophets). Wordsworth’s idea of the poet as the prophet of nature is further complicated by his invocation of the bardic figure. The bard is the Wordsworthian prophet poet.

1.3. ‘The holy life of music and of verse’: Assimilating the Bardic Tradition

The Oxford English Dictionary states that the word ‘bard’ comes from Celtic culture—‘An ancient Celtic order of minstrel-poets, whose primary function appears to have been to compose and sing

²³ James Thomson, *The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson*, ed. by H. Frowde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908), p. 258.

(usually to the harp) verses celebrating the achievements of chiefs and warriors, and who committed to verse historical and traditional facts, religious precepts, laws, genealogies, etc.²⁴ *A Dictionary of Celtic mythology* gives the definition of the ‘bard’: ‘the current standard English definition of this Celtic word, as a poet of exalted status, i.e, the voice of a nation or people’.²⁵ In both Irish and Scottish Gaelic, this kind of poet is called ‘bard’ as well; the Welsh term is ‘bardd’; in Greek, it is βάρδος (bārdos), referring specifically to the Celtic poets. The various forms of the word bard indicate a shared bardic tradition among these cultures.

Historical records show that the bards had already been an established group as early as the time of Caesar. They were intricately linked with the Druids. In Chapter 13 to Chapter 20 of Book VI in *Commentarii de Bello Gallic (The Gaelic War)*, Caesar gives a detailed description of the society of Gaul and the Druids’ status within it, which becomes an indispensable source for studies of the Druids. In these descriptions, the society of Gaul was divided into three classes, the King, land-owning freemen consisting of knights and Druids, and landless unfree men. The Druids were engaged in sacred things, conducting special rituals, settling controversies, and decreeing rewards or punishments. Succeeding generations of Druids were trained for this role. They were also exempted from wars. ‘Tempted by these great rewards, many young men assemble of their own motion to receive their training; many are sent by parents and relatives. Report says that in the schools of Druids they learn by heart a great number of verses, and therefore some persons remain twenty years under training.’²⁶

The indication of Druids being familiar with verses is strengthened by Strabo who observes in Book IV of *Geographica* that the Druids have intricate relations with the bards, with whom they share

²⁴ OED. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/15474?rskey=iF5ilD&result=1#eid>. Accessed 10 June, 2012.

²⁵ James Mackillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 31-32.

²⁶ Caesar, *The Gallic War*, trans. by H. J. Edwards (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann Ltd& Harvard University Press, 1917), Book VI, Chapter 13, pp. 337-339.

the same priesthood in Gaul. ‘Among all the Gallic peoples, generally speaking, there are three sets of men who are held in exceptional honour; the Bards, the Vates and the Druids. The Bards are singers and poets; the Vates, diviners and natural philosophers; while the Druids, in addition to natural philosophy, study also moral philosophy.’²⁷

Singers and poets the bards were, they mostly celebrated the brave deeds of distinguished men. Ammianus Marcellinus suggests in his *Res Gestae* (literal meaning as ‘things having been done’, and translated as *The Roman Historie*) that ‘the Bards sang to the sweet strains of the lyre the valorous deeds of famous men composed in heroic verse.’²⁸ The Elizabethan poet Michael Drayton in his *Poly-Olbion* also writes ‘Ye sacred bards, that to your harps melodious strings/ Sung th’ancient heroes deeds (the monuments of Kings)’ (1612, 31-32)²⁹. Harp in hand, and singing heroic deeds, bards are noted especially for their musical skills, also shown in the poetry itself. The earliest Gaelic poetry used a less fixed word order and alliterations, and was deliberately obscure. Later in the seventh century, rhyme was introduced, and the basic principle was to divide the lines according to syllables. A variety of stanzas types were invented based on the number of lines, the length of each, and the rhyme-scheme. One of the simplest and common used form is the *debide*, a quatrain with seven syllables in each line, and the rhyme-scheme as aabb.³⁰ It should be noted that unlike epic poetry, these poems are usually short, and designed to be sung with the harp, although virtually none of the music that accompanied to them survived.

The tradition of the bards in Gaul was preserved and continued to be in Wales and Ireland. In

²⁷ Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. by Horace Leonard Jones (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann Ltd& Harvard University Press, 1923), p. 245.

²⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, trans. by John C. Rolfe (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann Ltd& Harvard University Press, 1935), Book XV, Chapter IX, 8, pp. 179-180.

²⁹ *A Complete Edition of the Poets of Great Britain, Volume the Third, Containing Drayton, Carew and Suckling* (London: Printed for John & Arthur Arch, 23 Gracechurch Street. and for Bell & Bradfute & I. Mundell & Company, Edinburgh., 1793), p. 240.

³⁰ For a brief overview of early Gaelic poetry, please refer, ‘Verse’, entry under ‘Gaelic Literature’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/art/Celtic-literature/Verse>, accessed 6 January, 2014.

early Ireland, two classes of poets were distinctive, the *fili* and the *baird*, the former learned, and the latter less so. The highest among *fili* was the *Ollam*. It is said that mastering over 350 stories and twelve years of study were required to become an *Ollam*. The Norse invasions from the eighth century gradually destroyed distinctions between the *fili* and the *baird*, but training for such vocations continued until the seventeenth century.

Bards in Wales enjoyed an even higher position than in Ireland. *Cynfeirdd*, meaning early or original poets, is a name given to the poets who sing in Welsh. Five of the earliest bards renowned in the sixth century were Talhaearn, Blwchfardd, Aneirin, Taliesin and Cian. But Welsh manuscripts of only two of them survived, known as *The Book of Taliesin* and *The Book of Aneirin*. Tennyson in his *Idylls of the King* briefly mentions Taliesin with a slightly different spelling Taliessin. ‘Taliessin is our fullest throat of song,/ And one hath sung and all the dumb will sing.’ (‘The Holy Grail’, 300-301)³¹

The bardic tradition in Wales was prominent for six centuries from the sixth to the twelfth century, before the legendary massacre of the bards under the rule of King Edward I in the late thirteenth century. It was said that during the turbulent years of the Welsh war, King Edward I transported Welsh bards to England with the intention of hearing them sing. But the bards refused to sing for the Saxon invader, hung up their harps and remained silent. This angered the King, leading to a subsequent massacre of 500 Welsh bards, which was addressed by Thomas Gray in his ‘The Bard’ (1757) (how Gray’s ‘The Bard’ illuminates our reading of Wordsworth, especially our reading of his national concerns will be discussed later in Chapter 5). In Gray’s poem, the bard is cloaked in a robe, with his beard loose, his hair blowing in the wind, harp in hand, and surrounded by a zealous yet sorrow air.

³¹ Lord Alfred Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*, ed. by J. M. Gray (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 214.

‘Robed in the sable garb of woe, /With haggard eyes the Poet stood;(Loose his beard, and hoary hair/
Stream’d, like a meteor, to the troubled air) /And with a Master’s hand, and Prophet’s fire,/Struck the
deep sorrows of his lyre.’ (I.2, 15-22)³² The vivid and informative description of a bard drew special
attention from artists, and several paintings of ‘the bard’ were modeled on it, including ‘The Bard’ by
Thomas Jones (1774), by Benjamin West (1778), and by William Blake (1809). More than a decade
before his tempera painting of the bard, Blake had already shown his interest in bards in the opening
of *Songs of Experience* (1793). ‘Hear the voice of the Bard!/Who Present, Past, & Future sees/Whose
ears have heard,/The Holy Word,/That walk’d among the ancient trees.’ (‘Introduction’, 1-5)³³

It is not just Thomas Gray, William Blake and painters like Thomas Jones who showed interest
in the bardic tradition five centuries after its heyday. In fact, the second half of the eighteenth century
witnessed a bardic revival. In the 1760s, James Macpherson published *Poems of Ossian* (1760-65), a
collection of poems he claimed to be a translation from ancient Scottish Gaelic manuscripts. The
controversy over whether the poems were really translated from the original manuscripts, or whether
Macpherson simply wrote them himself, lasted for nearly half a century but never reached an
agreement.³⁴ Nevertheless, the interests in the bard became more and more noticeable. Thomas Percy,
later Bishop of Dromore, published *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), a collection of ballads
and popular songs. Evan Evans devoted himself into the study of Welsh literature, collecting and
transcribing Welsh poetry. His *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* came out in
1764. In 1784, Edward Jones’ *Musical and Poetical Relics of the Welsh Bards* was published. Five

³² *The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray*, ed. by H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 19.

³³ *William Blake, The Complete Poems*, ed. by Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 30.

³⁴ Regardless of the debate on its authenticity, modern scholarship has rediscovered the merits of Macpherson’s work and its importance to the Scottish Romanticism. See Fiona Stafford, ‘Scottish Romanticism and Scotland in Romanticism’, in *A Companion to European Romanticism*, ed. by Michael Ferber (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 49-66.

years later, Charlotte Brooke published *Reliques of Irish Poetry*. Brooke's book was directly influenced by Percy's title, but with the Gaelic original to show that there were genuine sources to the translations. Edward Williams, best known as Iolo Morganwg, a poet with a special interest in Druidism and the bard, collaborated with Owen Jones and W. O. Pughe on a collection of medieval Welsh literature under the name *The Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales* (1801-1807).

Both Edward Jones and Edward Williams were present at the congregation of Welsh bards in September, 1792, recorded by *The Gentleman's Magazine*. A group of Welsh bards residing in London gathered on Primrose Hill and performed a ritual, in which a circle of stones was formed as an altar. Two odes on the Bardic discipline and Bardic mythology were recited separately by David Samwell and Edward Williams. Earlier that year in July, Ireland was celebrating its own bardic tradition by holding the 'Belfast Harpists' Festival'.

There are various traces of Wordsworth's awareness and interaction with the eighteenth century bardic revival. *Memoir of William Wordsworth* recorded that when attending the Hawkshead Grammar school, he was often found 'either alone, or with a favorite companion, repeating aloud beautiful passage from Thomson's *Seasons*.'³⁵ In a letter to Allan Cunningham, editor of the four volume work *The Songs of Scotland, Ancient and Modern* (1769), Wordsworth confessed that 'I have been indebted to the North for more than I shall ever be able to acknowledge. Thomson, Mickle, Armstrong, Leyden, yourself, Irving (a poet in *spirit*), and I may add Sir Walter Scott were all Borderers.'³⁶ In the same letter, he also talked about Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* as a fraud, claiming that he hopes the public taste has been improved 'since the time when Macpherson's frauds met with such dangerous

³⁵ Christopher Wordsworth, 'Memoir of William Wordsworth', in *The New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register*, ed. by A. A. Watts, Vol 11 (1819), pp. 48-50.

³⁶ LY, I, p. 402.

success.³⁷ Macpherson's success, along with various other publications of ancient bardic verses mentioned above, reflected the popularity of and the interests in the bardic tradition.

Wordsworth is no stranger to such tradition. Richard Gravil in *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation, 1787-1842* (2003) explores the poet's fascination with the ancient Druid bards. He argues that influenced by the social context of rehabilitation of Druidism during the eighteenth century, Wordsworth produced some of his best poems. For Wordsworth, the bards have a healing and connecting function. 'Their role as to commune with the invisible world, and to assure the tribe that paradise can be the simple produce of the common day'.³⁸ Like the Druid bards who were poets of the tribe, Wordsworth finds himself defending the common people as early as in poems written in 1790s (Part 2); in depicting the minstrel figures and shadowy survivors such as Lucy, the discharged soldier, and the leech-gatherer, Wordsworth is 'reconfiguring the tribal past to reflect a more pacific, milder future' ³⁹(Part 3). Part 4 of the book further demonstrates the complexity of Wordsworth's bardic vocation by investigating the poet's several sets of two consciousness at work: man writing and child experiencing; the poet's desire of change versus his dread of change; and his pagan belief confronted by his Christian belief.

Gravil's book provides an interesting angle to see Wordsworth in the light of the bardic tradition, but his focus is largely on the poet's tribal or national concern, as he claims 'To Wordsworth a bard is one who urges upon his tribe'.⁴⁰ Gravil's research answers the question of what Wordsworth, following the bardic vocation, can do to the general public and serve his people, which is undoubtedly an important concern, but the thesis is more focused on why Wordsworth looks up to the bardic

³⁷ LX, I, p. 402.

³⁸ Richard Gravil, *Wordsworth's Bardic Vocation 1787-1842* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 29.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

tradition and how his bardic aspirations help him to construct a poetic and personal identity.

The bardic poetry fascinated him—bardic verse and music are inseparable. Together they form poetry. Poetry is frequently referred to as song in *The Prelude*: ‘Thus far, O Friend! did I, not used to make/A present joy the matter of *my Song*,/ Pour out, that day, my soul in measur’d strains’ (I, 55-57); ‘Imagination! lifting up itself/ Before the eye and progress of *my Song*/ Like an unfather’d vapour; ...’ (VI, 525-527). As Robert Lowth had demonstrated, the Hebrew Bible is full of poetic songs: ‘...the voice/ Which roars along the bed of *Jewish Song*’ (V, 203-204). Poetry, in general, is song:

... Then, last wish,
My last and favorite aspiration! then
I yearn towards *some philosophic Song*
Of Truth that cherishes our daily life;
With meditations passionate from deep
Recesses in man’s heart, immortal verse
Thoughtfully fitted to *the Orphean lyre*;
(I, 229-235)

This seems to be an echo of Milton’s pastoral poem ‘L’Allegro’ (‘The Happy Man’), in which the poet claims

Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonsons learned Sock be on,
Or sweetest Shakespear fancies childe,
Warble his native Wood-notes wilde,
And ever against eating Cares,
Lap me in soft Lydian Aires,
Married to immortal verse
.....
That Orpheus self may leave his head
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heapt Elysian flowers...

(L'Allelgo, 131-147)⁴¹

Orpheus is a musician, poet and prophet in Greek mythology. The story of him retrieving his wife Eurydice from the underworld is constantly revisited by literature. Overcome with grief upon discovering his wife's dead body, Orpheus played such sad music that made the gods weep. They suggested Orpheus go to the underworld and use music as a plea to bring Eurydice back. Orpheus did so. His music moved Hades and Persephone, who agreed to let Eurydice come back to the upper world, but on one condition: Orpheus should walk in front of Eurydice and must not look back until they both return to the upper world. Orpheus, carried away with excitement, forgot the condition. He looked back for his wife, and she vanished, this time, forever.

Having Orpheus in mind, and possibly influenced by Milton's 'L'Allegro', Wordsworth aspires to produce 'immortal verse' that can correspond to and be as good as what was sung to 'the Orphean lyre'. The idea of verse fitted to music finds resonance in 'Home at Grasmere'. The poet describes the involuntary passion urging him to compose as music traversing the soul. 'Thinking in solitude, from time to time/ I feel sweet passions traversing my Soul/ Like Music; unto these, where'er I may,/ I would give utterance in numerous verse.' (960-963)⁴² Another example can be found at the beginning of *The Prelude*. The poet felt 'A corresponding mild creative breeze' (I, 43), recognised its power, and expressed his urge to dedicate himself to 'The holy life of music and of verse' (I, 54). He would speak 'Of truth, of grandeur, beauty, love, and hope—/ Hope for this earth and hope beyond the grave' ('Home at Grasmere', 964-965).

Prophet, poet and bard in Wordsworth overlap with each other. The boundaries between them are

⁴¹ John Milton, *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. by Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 23-24.

⁴² William Wordsworth, *Home at Grasmere*, ed. by Beth Darlington (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 102.

not clear cut. Poetic licence enables him to merge these three roles altogether and create a new identity—a poet who inherits the bardic tradition and speaks of truth.

Then the question naturally comes: what do we make of Wordsworth resorting to this prophet-poet-bard composite? It seems that this composite is vital in Wordsworth's self-fashioning and the construction of his sense of authorship as a vocation.

1.4 The Prophetic and Authorship: a Brief Account

To engage with the discussion of the age-old concern about authorship, one could start by reflecting on the Homeric question (the debate over the identity or identities of Homer), which was much discussed by Robert Wood in the generation before Wordsworth.⁴³ The evolving definitions and connotations of authorship are of such complexity and vivacity that they themselves form a literary tradition. The debate never ceases. Questions centring on what is an author and what is the author-function are raised and discussed. To name just a few: Plato banishes the poet from the Republic because the poet writes following divine inspiration and is not in his right mind; Horace claims that the purpose of writing is to entertain and instruct; the Latin term for author is 'auctor', and is etymologically associated with authority. The invention of copyright protection in the late eighteenth century was indispensable in the establishment of writing as a profession; the Romantic poets, by exploring subjectivity and the self in writing, were among the first to articulate the modern concept of authorship in full, a fact acknowledged by both Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, two important figures in the modern discussion of authorship. Their revolutionary poetics not only engage with the

⁴³ Robert Wood, *An Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer (1769 and 1775): with a Comparative View of the Ancient and Present State of the Troade* (Georg Olms, 1775)

tradition of authorship discussion, but also bring it to a whole new level. Barthes famously decentres the author by claiming the author is dead in his 2500 word essay ‘The Death of the Author’ (1967). Foucault, in answering Barthes, aims to recover and construct the historicity of the author in ‘What is An Author?’ (1979).

It is particularly interesting that both Barthes and Foucault acknowledge that the modern concept of authorship begins to be fully articulated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Seán Burke in his preface to *Authorship: from Plato to Postmodern: a Reader* (1995) also suggests that the historical change in the conceptions of authorship is a fruit of ‘romantic revolutions and the eighteenth-century philosophical and aesthetic discourses’⁴⁴. Andrew Bennett in *The Author* (2005) states that the Romantic theory of authorship is a paradox. On one hand, the Romantic authors are designated as ‘autonomous, original and expressive’,⁴⁵ on the other hand, their idea of genius is the ability to go beyond the mortal and to transcend the self, which in a sense, ‘evacuate[s] authorship of subjectivity’.⁴⁶

Wordsworth’s involvement in the discourse of Romantic authorship is the typical romantic paradox as Bennett calls it. He strives for an originality and individuality, but at the same time, he goes beyond the focus on the self and calls for the prophetic spirit, as if verses he is writing or about to write are products of the divinity which speaks through him, as if he is submissive to that prophetic power. So often, Wordsworth wobbles between autonomy and the prophetic strain. To follow either way is bound to be problematic and prone to create anxiety. Harold Bloom gives one aspect of this anxiety a name—‘the anxiety of influence’—to describe poets’ anxiety about breaking away from their precursors and meanwhile producing poetry that can enable them to join their precursors.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Seán Burke, *Authorship: from Plato to Postmodern: a Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. xix.

⁴⁵ Alan Bennett, *The Author* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 56.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn, 1st end published in 1973 (New York, N.Y.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

But Wordsworth's anxiety may be more complex than just the anxiety of influence. It is complicated by the social historical context in which the poet is situated. We may find useful to follow Foucault's method of historicising the author. We may also feel enlightened by looking at Stephen Greenblatt's theory of self-fashioning. Contemporary with Foucault's essay, Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) puts forward the theory of self-fashioning as the process of constructing one's identity according to social rules and norms, as well as through combating the 'monsters' which confine or threaten the self.

Greenblatt's theory of self-fashioning is based on the Renaissance context. It cannot and should not be simply transplanted without modification onto the study of the prophetic Wordsworth, or any aspect of Wordsworth in general. Chapter 2 and 3 will investigate how the prophetic contributes to the poet's self-fashioning and is related to the poet's anxieties. Wordsworth's choice of the prophetic in self-fashioning and combating anxiety is a personal one, made possible by the developing knowledge economy and the millennialism of his time.

Chapter 2

Wordsworth's Self-fashioning and the Prophetic:

Personal Choice, Knowledge Economy and Contemporary Millennialism

2.1. Self-fashioning Revisited

The concept of self-fashioning is introduced by Stephen Greenblatt in his 1980 book *Renaissance Self-fashioning*. Greenblatt investigates six cases of self-fashioning in the Renaissance context. They are Thomas More, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, William Tyndale, and Thomas Wyatt. Some of his core conclusions are that self-fashioning works against something perceived as an alien or a threatening 'other', often constructed as a distorted image of authority; in a person's self-fashioning, there is more than one 'other' involved, and while one 'other' is destroyed, another takes its place; self-fashioning is a paradox involving one's submission to and destruction of an absolute power or authority; the authority is at least partially located outside oneself, but at the same time, is experienced by the subject; self-fashioning is, although not exclusively, often in language; during self-fashioning, the subject is bound to lose a part of the self.⁴⁸

In retrospect, Greenblatt's writing confirmed and helped to formulate a trend in literary criticism: the debate on and practice of New Historicism as a methodology. Historicism, a fundamental aspect of academic literary studies, is a way of thinking which emphasises the locality and temporality of

⁴⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, Illinois; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

knowledge. It believes that any knowledge acquired should not be considered without its specific context, historical, geographical, or cultural. New Historicism is a revised Historicism. It suggests that, especially in literary studies, the historical interest we take in certain areas reflects our need to understand the present. Any interpretation of the past is tinted by the critic's own context. Therefore, as times change, our understanding of great literature also undergoes changes. Great literature is timeless because readers of any time and culture should still find resonance in it.

The interest of the present thesis in the prophetic Wordsworth is influenced both by the prophetic and millennial trend of the poet's times, and the twenty-first century awareness of our everlasting effort to find, define and construct the self, or to use Greenblatt's term, self-fashioning. Greenblatt's theory is revolutionary because it highlights the presumption that the self is not a given but can be fashioned, and fashioned by the subject itself, although not without cultural and historical interference. But the important implication is that one can wilfully take an identity and write oneself into it, which is what the authors Greenblatt studies did. The first half of the book focuses on the struggle of individuals in pursuing an identity in a time when humanity was just starting to be unchained from the constraining power of religion. To seek an individual identity is the spirit of that age, which can be seen in the case of More, Tyndale and Wyatt. The focus of the second half of the book shifts from the author who produced the text to the characters within the text. For example, the chapter on Shakespeare is largely about how social and cultural beliefs function as driving forces in the tragic story of Othello and Desdemona.

In both halves, an important part is missing. Greenblatt argues that self-fashioning mostly is done through language. His subjects are all male authors, and he investigates how each author writes in reaction to and interaction with his own historical contexts, but how authors write themselves into a

specific authorial identity is hardly touched upon. The relationship between the author and the text is taken for granted. Take the discussion on More for example. It centres on More as a political figure struggling against papal supremacy and royal supremacy as reflected in *Utopia* (1516). But there is a distance between *Utopia* and its author, in the sense that how much the author chooses to represent his true self remains questionable. The case of Shakespeare and *Othello* (first performed in 1604) is also problematic. The discussion is rich in showing how much power ideology and social rules or decorum exercise over one's sexuality, but it does not discuss Shakespeare's involvement as an author in this play. Greenblatt himself recollects in the epilogue that as he progressed in writing the book, he perceived more acutely the complications of self-fashioning in which cultural institutions also play a key part. His book, by and large, focuses primarily on the intervention of those cultural institutions, especially religion. The book, however, does not focus on the authors' self-fashioning as authors in the literary context.⁴⁹ But to expect this single book to answer all questions related to the author's self-fashioning would be asking too much. Neither is it realistic. That is why we constantly need dialogues, reinvestigations and revisitings.

This present thesis borrows from Greenblatt the term 'self-fashioning', but focuses primarily on understanding one case: the identity of prophet poet that Wordsworth chose to give himself and its relationship with the overall construction of his poetic identity. Keats was perceptive in pointing out the 'egotistical sublime',⁵⁰ but he did not see the significance of this egotistical side of Wordsworth.

⁴⁹ The fact that Greenblatt pays specially attention to religion is partly determined by the social historical context of the Renaissance society in which religion was still very much in force, whereas the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Wordsworth was in was an increasing secular one. Therefore, the thesis links the prophetic elements in Wordsworth to the literary tradition of invoking the prophetic spirit, rather than to any religious institution.

⁵⁰ John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 386-387. Keats in a letter addressed to Richard Woodhouse on 27 October, 1818, discusses the poetic character: 'As to the poetic character itself, (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone)...' The phrase 'egotistical sublime' has ever since been used by critics with a slightly negative connotation, referring to Wordsworth's tendency of imaginative self-obsession.

Looking back, Wordsworth is a forerunner of self-fashioning in the Romantic context. His self-fashioning has two stages, first as a poet, and then, as a prophetic poet, which are made possible by at least three elements: his personal choice, the knowledge economy and wide-spread millennialism in his time.

2.2 ‘Close me in’!: Exile at Home and the Urgency of Writing

In the dreadful winter of 1799, William and Dorothy Wordsworth walked many miles to Grasmere, a small village located in the central Lake District, which was to be their first home. Wordsworth’s letter shows the excitement the new cottage brought. He wrote to Coleridge, ‘...will you believe me when I tell you that we walked the next ten miles, by the watch over a high mountain road, thanks to the wind that drove behind us and the good road, in two hours and a quarter, a marvellous feat of which D. will long tell.’⁵¹ Is Wordsworth exaggerating here? Because more than 4 miles an hour in mountains would be very fast. He must have been exuberantly high-spirited, and such a cheerful spirit must have helped his writing, because in the spring of 1800, months after they moved into Grasmere, Wordsworth finished a substantial part of ‘Home at Grasmere’, and in the autumn and winter later that year, he was preparing the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Stephen Gill, in *William Wordsworth, A Life* (1989), notices the interplay between the new home to be and the poet’s spurt of creativity. ‘Wordsworth welcomed the providential power that vouchsafed him a glimpse of the Promised Land and matched the promise with an energy now felt within.’⁵²

The attachment to the place Grasmere, and the inclination to see it as something of a promised

⁵¹ EY, p. 280.

⁵² Gill, *A Life*, p. 168.

land, a paradise, are apparent throughout the poem, but equally noticeable, is the hesitation and anxiety. Bruce Clarke notices Wordsworth displaces ‘the solicitude and anxiety he feels for his own domestic predicament’ onto the missing swan.⁵³ Anthony Harding, in ‘Forgetfulness and the Poetic Self in “Home at Grasmere”’ talks about the prevalent fear of solipsism in the poem.⁵⁴ Paul Magnuson, in *Coleridge and Wordsworth, A Lyrical Dialogue* (1988), devotes a chapter to ‘Home at Grasmere’ which focuses on the doubts dispersed in the course of the joyous homecoming and links them to the poet’s rivalry with Coleridge.⁵⁵ Sally Bushell investigates the ‘Freudian Slip’ in the manuscript changes in the vapour and traveller metaphor, and notices ‘the traveller is now emphatically not to be identified with the poet or his problems with self-situating and creative confidence.’⁵⁶ And for Polly Atkin, Dove Cottage is more of a dwelling place when passing through at Grasmere than a perpetual home.⁵⁷

This present section also addresses anxiety in ‘Home at Grasmere’. It will argue that alongside the joyful return, there are moments of loss, sorrow and estrangement. These moments give homecoming into Grasmere a sense of a self-imposed exile; whereas the only true home, for Wordsworth, is not to be confined in any physical place. It is in his writing.

Our discussion begins with a metaphor. A hundred lines into the poem, the speaker, with fond recollections of the vale from childhood, asks Grasmere to take him in.

Embrace me then, ye Hills, and close me in;

⁵³ Bruce Clarke, ‘Wordsworth’s Departed Swans: Sublimation and Sublimity in “Home at Grasmere”’, *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Fall, 1980), 355-374 (p. 371).

⁵⁴ Anthony Harding, ‘Forgetfulness and the Poetic Self in “Home at Grasmere”’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 22 (1991), 109-118.

⁵⁵ Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge and Wordsworth, A Lyrical Dialogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 228-244.

⁵⁶ Sally Bushell, ‘The Making of Meaning in Wordsworth’s “Home at Grasmere”: Speech Acts, Microanalysis and “Freudian Slips”’, *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (FALL 2009), 391-421 (p. 407).

⁵⁷ Polly Atkin, ‘Paradox Inn: Home and Passing Through at Grasmere’, in *Romantic Localities: Europe Writes Places*, ed. by Christoph Bode and Jacqueline Labbé (London, Pickering and Chatto, 2010), pp. 81-98.

Now in the clear and open day I feel
 Your guardianship;...
 (129-131)⁵⁸

The word ‘guardianship’ is quite revealing. The speaker visualises the relationship between him and the vale as one between the ward and the guardian. In contrast to the relationship between a parent and a child which is biological and natural, the relationship between the guardian and the orphan is artificial, and because of this, it is prone to be broken and cause problems. Cheryl L. Nixon in *The Orphan in Eighteenth Century Law and Literature: Estate, Blood and Body* (2011) demonstrates that the orphan was both a historical and a culture phenomenon, and the practice of guardianship was common in the eighteenth century.⁵⁹ According to Nixon’s research, orphans’ situations in most cases were determined by their class status. The young poor orphans would be taken to the workhouse, and start the apprenticeship at a certain age; the richer ones would be formally placed with a guardian or several guardians, who would be responsible for the property and finance management if any, while the ‘middling’ ones would be taken care of by relatives or friends, usually done in an informal way. Disagreements between guardian and orphan, for example, about property management or access to finance, more often than not, rendered them on bad terms.

The same potential instability exists in the speaker’s relationship with Grasmere. At least three layers of meaning can be detected in this loaded comparison. The first is the fear of being underserving

⁵⁸ *Home at Grasmere*, p. 46. Unless specified, the quotations from ‘Home at Grasmere’ are from MS B, reproduced by the Cornell edition. As the present section investigates Wordsworth’s anxiety at a fairly early stage, MS B, the earliest full text, is a more appropriate choice than other versions of the poem.

⁵⁹ Cheryl L. Nixon, *The Orphan in Eighteenth Century Law and Literature: Estate, Blood and Body* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 48-49. Nixon refers to E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981). Life expectancy was short in the eighteenth century, 27.88 in 1731, which increased to 38.17 in 1776. The short life expectancy implies that a fair number of people died when their children were still young. Nixon also refers to T.H. Hollingsworth’s research, which shows that in 1668-1779, 44.7% of males died between the age of 15 and 50. This might mean that a great number of under-aged children were left behind. T.H. Hollingsworth, ‘A Demographic Study of the British Ducal Families’, in *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, ed. D.V. Glass, and D.E.C. Eversley (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1965), pp. 354-378.

of the vale. To call a place home needs an assertion of belonging to the place. But in 'Home at Grasmere', there are some moments when the assertion is undermined. The speaker confesses that he was not born to be a nature admirer. He was much less responsive to nature. 'That in the day of childhood I was less/ The mind of Nature, less, take all in all,/ Whatever may be lost, than I am now.' (94-96) The converted nature lover frequently recurs in Wordsworth. One may well remember the temper in 'Nutting' when the boy ravages the trees: '...—Then up I rose,/And dragg'd to earth both branch and bough, with crash/ And merciless ravage...(41-43)⁶⁰; in *The Prelude*, he is the '...plunderer then/ In the high places, on the lonesome peaks,/ Where'er, among the mountains and the winds,/The Mother-Bird had built her lodge.'(I, 337-340). In 'Home at Grasmere', the speaker, now more of a nature admirer, is so overwhelmed by the favour Grasmere provides that he is worried about his unworthiness of such favour.

Another way of deciphering the metaphor is to see how the speaker positions himself in the relationship. By comparing Grasmere to a guardian, he is entering the state of orphan-hood. A sense of loss accompanies the rejoicing journey back to the Lake District, and overshadows the joy. The speaker, together with the fictionalized Emma, are two ships sailing in the storm and searching for a place called home. Friendless and parentless when arriving at Grasmere, they are orphans, whose lives were broken long time ago. Settling back into a place known in childhood, if not quite their native place, they aim to restore their broken lives, and Wordsworth does this imaginatively by seeking to connect with other lives in three stories. They are: the man with a moderate property who seduces a local maid and dies of guilty conscience; the widowed father who still grieves over the death of his wife but manages to live on; and the widowed woman who holds dear the memory of her deceased

⁶⁰ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 220.

husband. These stories are about loss, endurance and hope. They also share a feature of brokenness: matrimony is broken, either by infidelity, or death; subsequently, families and normal lives are broken. It is this shared brokenness that bonds the orphaned speaker and Emma with the dwellers of Grasmere. Together they form a community.

No, we are not alone; we do not stand,
 My Emma, here misplaced and desolate,
 Loving what no one cares for but ourselves.
 (646-648)

However, meanwhile, regardless of the speaker's will to ally himself with Grasmere dwellers, he maintains the perspective of an observer and outsider, by comparing the gradually unfolding Grasmere life to the landscape revealed through vapour dispersing before the traveller's eyes. It is not difficult to see why the speaker associates himself with the traveller. Years have passed while he has been away from Grasmere vale. Time and distance have already put an intangible gulf between him and the place. Edward Said describes the gulf as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.'⁶¹ This is how Said views exile. For Wordsworth, the rift is more self-willed than forced, as no political persecution or banishment is involved. The sense of exile is perhaps not as strong as that in Said, but the sadness of his coming back to Grasmere with a mindset of homecoming and yet finding himself more like an observer resonates with Said.

There is also an unsettledness implied in this traveller metaphor, which has something to do with the circular narrative Kenneth Johnston notices. Johnston argues that 'Home at Grasmere' is

⁶¹ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), p. 173.

characterized by a sense of circularity, both in structure and in imagery. Instead of proceeding as a linear narrative, the poem turns back on itself, as if in ‘a hall of mirrors’.⁶² The circularity of the poem creates a tension between settling into Grasmere and setting out on the road. Being a traveller means no nesting at Grasmere. Two seemingly contradictory moods are running throughout the poem, alongside each other. One is the overwhelming joy, happiness, and the urge to establish a home; the other is loss, sorrow, and a subliminal urge to distance himself from the place.

Joseph Brodsky in his 1987 talk ‘The Condition We Call Exile’ speaks from experience when he discloses the truth about exile, especially a writer in exile. Exile includes: the feeling of displacement and misplacement; the quest for and urge to restore significance lost in the new society; a writer in exile is ‘by and large a retrospective and retroactive being’;⁶³ he focuses on the past, which can be easily turned into the repetitiveness of nostalgia, and delays the arrivals of the present.

To say Wordsworth in ‘Home at Grasmere’ fits into the condition Brodsky describes would be simplistic, but there are certain undeniable similarities between the poet in Grasmere and the writer in exile. The place the speaker is banished from is not a physical place, but an idealized lost home in the past, when he used to live in the Lake District and make trips to Grasmere. These golden days, once passed, are irreplaceable and irretrievable. Grasmere and its people are relics of a past which is lost but firmly stamped on the speaker’s mind. The fond recollections are repeated throughout the poem. However, slightly different from the process of hanging onto the past and delaying the present that Brodsky describes, Wordsworth is looking constantly towards the future. The aspiration in ‘Home at Grasmere’, like *The Prelude*, relates to experience and poetry which are still to come. So much so that the present seems to be absent. His mind is always on the road, wandering, searching for a home to

⁶² Kenneth Johnston, “‘Home at Grasmere’, Reclusive Song’, *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter, 1975), 1-28 (p. 4).

⁶³ Joseph Brodsky, ‘The Condition We Call Exile’, *Renaissance and Modern Studies* (1991: 34:1), 1-8 (p. 4).

lodge in.

Then what is home to Wordsworth? At least in 'Home at Grasmere', the answer is: his writing. Writing is the comfort zone for the poet to fall back on when the reality is cold. There is 'an internal brightness' 'That must not die, that must not pass away' (886-887). It urges him to write. There is also a sense of secrecy and exclusivity that is not to be shared, which makes writing an irresistible call.

Possessions have I, wholly, solely mine,
 Something within, which yet is shared by none—
 Not even the nearest to me and most dear—
 Something which power and effort may impart.
 I would impart it; I would spread it wide,
 Immortal in the world which is to come.
 (897-902)

Writing is Wordsworth's mission, self-assigned. A writer in exile always sees himself posthumously and imagines his glorious return, as Brodsky puts it. Wordsworth writes to restore and immortalise the past. He is not looking for his glorious return, but for his glorious arrival on the literary stage. The ambition is apparent when he calls for the 'prophetic Sprit, Soul of Man' (1026) to offer him guidance, so

...that my verse may live and be
 Even as a Light hung up in heaven to chear
 Mankind in times to come!...
 (1032-1034)

The aspiration, hope, and confidence, repeated throughout the poem and intensifying at the end overshadow the moments of exile in 'Home at Grasmere'. Those moments are not transient, instead, they are inherent in Wordsworth's perception of Grasmere. After all, Grasmere is a place where 'joy

spreads and sorrow spreads.’ The moments of exile at home, in Wordsworth, at the turn of the eighteenth century, continue to hunt us today. As Adorno puts it: ‘it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.’⁶⁴

So far, the main issue in focus is Wordsworth’s sense of exile in ‘Home at Grasmere’. Towards the end of the poem, the poet seems to reach a conclusion that the way to reconcile his sense of displacement is through writing. His urge to write is a personal choice, but at the same time, if we consider this personal choice in a broader historical context, specifically the context of knowledge economy, Wordsworth’s career decision seems to be inevitable.

2.3 ‘I would impart it’: Wordsworth’s Grand Plan and the Knowledge Economy

Towards the end of ‘Home at Grasmere’, it becomes increasingly explicit that writing, to the speaker, becomes a calling.

Something which power and effort may impart.
I would impart it; I would spread it wide,
Immortal in the world which is to come.
(900-902)

‘Home at Grasmere’ was published posthumously in full for the first time as Book 1, Part 1 of *The Recluse*, by Macmillan in 1888. There Wordsworth further explains what it means by this ‘something which power and effort may impart’. It is love and knowledge, of human kind: what it means to be human, or, the knowledge of humanity.

⁶⁴ Theodore W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1978), p. 39.

Love, knowledge, all my manifold delights,
 All buried with me without monument
 Or profit unto any but ourselves!
 It must not be, if I, divinely taught,
 Be privileged to speak as I have felt
 Of what in man is human or divine.
 (*The Recluse*, 697-702)⁶⁵

Wordsworth's grand plan to impart knowledge of humanity may sound aspirational and abstract, but if contextualised in the history of knowledge and the knowledge economy around his time, it becomes clear that the poet's plan not only is the motivation behind his writing and thus personal, but also can be incorporated into the social, historical and economical discourse of his age. By linking writing, knowledge and Wordsworth's participation in this link all together, one can get a better understanding of Wordsworth's theory of what is a poet and how poetry should be written. But before that discussion unfolds, we need to briefly revisit the history of knowledge, what it means and what position it held in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and what it meant for Wordsworth specifically.

The question of knowledge and its related issues have always been part of the intellectual investigation which can be traced back to Plato's classic definition of knowledge in *Theaetetus* (around 369 BC). Knowledge, mainly propositional knowledge, is justified true belief. Modern analytical philosophy has questioned Plato's proposition and proved that it is not usually the case: Edmund Gettier demonstrated that one could have justified true belief but not knowledge. The study of knowledge at the moment seems to agree upon broadly defining knowledge as processed, systemized, and 'cooked' information.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ William Wordsworth, *The Recluse* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1888), p. 46.

⁶⁶ Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge from Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2000), p. 11.

Knowledge has been discovered, produced, preserved, distributed and studied for thousands of years. It is extremely difficult to give a concise picture of the history of knowledge without being reductive. There are many different types of knowledge, perceptual, social, technical, philosophical, and others; knowledge produced by different social groups, for example, the knowledge of the elite and of popular culture; knowledge that is oral or printed, defined according to the way it is transmitted.⁶⁷ Knowledge can also be culturally specific: the situation in Europe may not be the same as in other parts of the world. We can only attempt to highlight a few things to give a flavour of what the situation was just before Wordsworth's time.

After Plato's classic definition of knowledge, another serious and influential attempt to define knowledge closer to Wordsworth's time is Francis Bacon's tree of knowledge in his *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). Bacon makes a bold attempt to replace Aristotle with one of his own books *Novum Organum* (*The New Organon*, 1620), and divides knowledge into three sub categories: memory, reason and imagination.⁶⁸ History belongs to the category of memory, while philosophy belongs to the category of reason, and poetry, along with music and painting belong to the category of imagination. Wordsworth's idea of writing to impart knowledge of human nature is a crossover between 'science of man' in philosophy in the category of reason, and secular poetry in the category of imagination. David Hume enters the discussion of knowledge by distinguishing 'relations of idea' from 'matter of fact'. Propositions that are relations of ideas are discovered by 'the mere operation of thought'⁶⁹ which does not necessarily depend on the actual existence of things, for example, the principles of algebra; while in contrast, the 'matter of fact' describes the world as the way it is.⁷⁰ Wordsworth's interest in

⁶⁷ Peter Burke, pp. 13-17.

⁶⁸ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. by William Aldis Wright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), illustration to face page 75.

⁶⁹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 18.

⁷⁰ For a much detailed discussion on knowledge, see Jennifer Trusted, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Knowledge*, 2nd edn (Houndmills and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997)

knowledge, however, does not seem to attempt to define and categorize knowledge, but to distribute it. This attitude is interlinked with the role of writing in the late eighteenth century and the historical context of professionalization.

Particular in the eighteenth century with the continuing rise of capitalism, knowledge became more commodified than ever. It gradually formed an economy of its own. Bacon's assertion that 'knowledge is power' makes more sense in the context of the division of labour and professionalization. Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) suggests that the driving force of the wealth of nation is the division of labour. It brings out specialization, from which professions evolve. Specific profession requires specific knowledge. Following this logic, knowledge can be perceived as a cornerstone in, what the full title of the book suggests, 'the nature and causes in the wealth of nations'.

Recent studies on knowledge make the relationship between knowledge and economy explicit by coining the term knowledge economy. William Christie, in his study of periodical enlightenment (a term he introduces to address the periodical culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century) attempts to revisit and re-examine what it means by knowledge economy and in what occasions we might use it. His definition draws upon previous studies in the past century, and is comprehensive. To paraphrase Christie, by knowledge economy, we usually mean an economy dependent on knowledge—knowledge required behind each profession; an economy marked by the expansion of knowledge producing occupations and institutions; an economy in which the sale of information contributes to the gross domestic product; knowledge economy can also mean, in a narrow sense, as the economy of knowledge, which includes the organization, distribution and maintenance of knowledge; and finally, knowledge economy is based on the notion that knowledge is cultural capital.⁷¹

⁷¹ William Christie, 'The Modern Athenians: The Edinburgh Review in the Knowledge of Economy of the Early Nineteenth Century', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 39 (2013), Issue 1, 115-138. <http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol39/iss1/12/>, accessed 24 March, 2014.

Writing undoubtedly is an important medium for preserving and distributing knowledge, and it was increasingly becoming a profession in the eighteenth century, with all the connotations that a profession could encompass, including skills, experience, regulations, and more importantly, what concerns a man like Coleridge—profits.

The literary manuscripts usually circulated among the elites in the early modern period gradually became recognised as private property. The Statute of Anne (1710), known as the first copyright law in Britain, played an important part in driving writing into a profession. Before The Statute of Anne, The Licensing of the Press Act of 1662 was the law in force till 1679, and then from 1685 to 1695, until the House of Commons refused to renew it. What The Licensing Act did was to censor and regulate the printers. Any printer had to have a license before setting up a business. The Act served as a way to protect the licensed printers from losing profit to the unlicensed press in the booming printing culture. So when the House of Commons refused to renew the Act, the printers argued that authors have an inherent right to their writing which deserves to be protected, and thus printers should still be censored and regulated. The Statute of Anne was the product of that lobbying. The rationale behind the argument of the press may focus on profit, but it granted authors professional recognition. According to the terms, the author possessed the copyright of his/her works for 14 years.⁷² This formally confirmed that the work was the author's property. This, and the fact that the printing and selling of the works would generate profits, incorporated the author into the economic system. Writing was no longer just the gentleman's leisure labour or entertainment. If it never was, then in the eighteenth century, it certainly was even less the case. What Adam Ferguson predicted in his *An Essay*

⁷² *Annæ Reginae An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by Vesting the Copies of Printed Books in the Authors or Purchasers of such Copies, during the Times therein Mentioned* (London: printed by the assigns of Thomas Newcomb, and Henry Hills, 1710)

on the *History of Civil Society* (1767) —‘writing may become a trade’⁷³—became reality.

However, not everyone was happy with writing as trade. In chapter 11 of *Biographia Literaria* (1817), with the interesting title ‘An affectionate exhortation to those who in early life feel themselves disposed to become authors’, Coleridge offers his opinion on one’s motive for becoming a writer. For him, literature is a ‘product of what is truly genial, than weeks of compulsion’⁷⁴, therefore, ‘NEVER PURSUE LITERATURE AS A TRADE’.⁷⁵

About two decades prior to the publication of Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*, Wordsworth expresses his motive of writing to impart knowledge in ‘Home at Grasmere’. Roughly around the same time, in the 1800 *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, he provides an idealistic picture of what a poet should do in this culture of professionalization. His view of the effect of professionalization on the human sensibility is largely negative and it is the writer’s duty to elevate the reader’s taste.

The famous assertion that ‘all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’⁷⁶ comes with a precondition, which shows that the spontaneous feelings are not innocently spontaneous. They are built on, modified and directed by thought which is representative of past feelings. Wordsworth’s logic is that the poet possesses ‘more than usual organic sensibility’⁷⁷ who contemplates these representatives of past feelings. By the repetition and continuance of this contemplation, the poet, having already possessed the outstanding sensibility, will also possess a strong mind. Just obeying blindly what the mind tells him, which is the ‘spontaneous overflow of feelings’, the poet is able to produce poetry that enlightens the reader, and it is the poet’s obligation to enlighten and to improve the reader’s capability of understanding. The reader must learn the beauty

⁷³ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. by Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1995), p. 171.

⁷⁴ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 224.

⁷⁵ *Biographia Literaria*, p. 223.

⁷⁶ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 744.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 744.

and dignity of the subject of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, which is the rustic life. The more capable he is in terms of appreciating the beauty and dignity of this form of life, the more elevated he is going to be. Wordsworth continues: 'it has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavor to produce to enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged.'⁷⁸ He also believes that a writer should engage in this service and it became especially so when he wrote the Preface, as the literary taste then needed to be improved significantly. The degeneration of taste, to Wordsworth, was an aftermath of professionalization. According to him, a series of causes contributed to reducing the mind which is potentially powerful to a 'state of almost savage torpor'.⁷⁹

The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where *the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident*, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.⁸⁰

The third among the three causes Wordsworth lists is 'the uniformity of their occupations' which 'produces a craving for extraordinary incident'. Adam Smith gives ample description and reason of the mundanity that comes with the specialization of labour and subsequently professionalization.

In the progress of the division of labour, the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour, that is, of the great body of the people, comes to be confined to a few very simple operations; frequently to one or two. But the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects, too, are perhaps always the same, or very nearly the

⁷⁸ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 746.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 746.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 746-747. Italics mine.

same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention, in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.⁸¹

The simple operations do not allow much room for the human mind to exercise its capacities, which will lead to the degeneration of the mind. Wordsworth seems to agree on the first part of the mind being confined to simple and repetitive operations, but he does not go as far as Smith to condemn specialization as derogatory and damaging. Instead, he is rather mild in simply stating that the dullness of the mind caused by professionalization makes people crave extraordinary events, hence the literary taste of the general public is in great danger. The treasures of literature were no longer appreciated, but the bizarre taste in Gothic fiction became dominant.

There is a paradox here: Wordsworth is in some sense blaming professionalization as indirectly leading to a degraded literary taste, but meanwhile, he also hopes that the literary taste of the reading public could be improved exactly by the professionalization of the author. His discussion of what is a poet and what a poet does is his attempt to regulate the writing profession, to lay some of the ground principles, essential skills, and ethical purposes of that profession, which is also what professionalization is about apart from the trade side.

In a way, Wordsworth's personal choice as a writer, in theory, would be made possible by a knowledge economy which professionalises writing. Meanwhile, as Chapter 1 demonstrates, the poet does not simply want to be a poet, but a poet of the prophetic kind. Such aspiration of his is both a character and a product of his time.

⁸¹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Volume Two (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1910), pp. 263-264.

2.4 The Prophetic Contextualised

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the prophetic was so much talked about that it formed a discourse of its own. Wordsworth was swept into that discourse, and it was inevitable that the poet came up with his own understanding of the poet's role.

Various factors contributed to wide-spread prophetic aspiration, among which are the American Revolution and the French Revolution. Both of the revolutions happened in the second half of the eighteenth century. Discussion of the millennium and the second coming were very popular. Apocalyptic nightmares were attached to the revolutions, and the aspiration that humanity would be born again became dominant. Blake's vision in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (composed between 1790 and 1793) is an example. 'The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed by fire at the end of six thousand years is true, and I have heard from hell... the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt.'⁸²

Similar thoughts on the world reborn were expressed in Richard Price, philosopher and preacher, who speaks of the American revolution as a historical defining moment in which humankind will be set free: 'Perhaps, I do not go too far when I say that, next to the introduction of Christianity among mankind, the American revolution may prove the most important step in the progressive course of human improvement. It is an event which may produce a general diffusion of the principles of humanity, and become the means of setting free mankind from the shackles of superstition and tyranny...'⁸³ Price's aspirations were subsequently ridiculed by Edmund Burke in *Reflections on the*

⁸² *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman (Berkeley and Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 39.

⁸³ *Richard Price and the Ethical Foundations of the American Revolution: Selections from His Pamphlets, with Appendices*, ed. by Bernard Peach (Durham: Duke University Press, 1979), p. 183.

Revolution in France (1790). He describes how, after imagining ‘the free, moral, happy, flourishing, and glorious states of France, as in a bird-eye landscape of a promised land, he [Price] breaks out into the following rapture: ‘What an eventful period is this! I am *thankful* that I have lived to it; I could almost say, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation...*’⁸⁴ Burke’s *Reflections* then was attacked by Thomas Paine in his *Rights of Man, Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution* (1792):

Never did so great an opportunity offer itself to England, and to all Europe, as is produced by the two Revolutions of America and France. By the former, freedom has a national champion in the western world; and by the latter, in Europe. When another nation shall join France, despotism and bad government will scarcely dare to appear. To use a trite expression, the iron is becoming hot all over Europe. The insulted German and the enslaved Spaniard, the Russ and the Pole, are beginning to think. The present age will hereafter merit to be called the Age of Reason, and the present generation will appear to the future as the Adam of a new world.⁸⁵

The heated discussion on the revolutions and the aspiration to ‘a new world’ bespeak a religious zeal. Indeed, around this time, there was renewed interest in the millennium, encouraged by self-proclaimed prophets like Richard Brothers (1757–1824) and Joanna Southcott (1750-1814).⁸⁶

Richard Brothers served in the navy from 1772 to 1783, and was discharged in July, 1783 on half pay, reason unclear. In 1787, Brothers moved to London. His prophetic career started in 1791 when he claimed to have visions of imminent judgment of God on London, and insisted it was because of him that the city was spared. Some of the other claims he made include the French Revolution as a sign of God’s judgment, and the British Government, rather than its people, as the cause of God’s

⁸⁴ Burke, *Select Works, Vol. II: Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by Edward John Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 77.

⁸⁵ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man, Common Sense, and Other Political Writings*, ed. by Mark Philip (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 321.

⁸⁶ Information on Brothers and Southcott in the thesis primarily comes from *The Romantics*, ed. by Stephen Prickett, (Methuen, 1981), pp134-135, and Oxford National Biography.

wrath. His career took off around 1793 when he claimed to be a descendent from King David through James, brother of the Christ. Brothers gave himself a title: Prince and Prophet of the Hebrews and Nephew of the Almighty. His mission was to gather the tribes of Israel and lead them back to Palestine. Brothers' fame soared with the publication of *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times* (1794). He envisaged that the lost tribes of Israel would gather in London in 1795; he would take the crown from George III and lead the tribes back to Palestine; Jerusalem would be rebuilt and there would be world peace from 1798.⁸⁷ In the severe winter of 1795 with crop failures and the rise of food prices, Brothers' popularity increased. Four editions of his *Revealed Knowledge* were published in the same year, in London, Dublin, United States, and Paris. On 3 March, Brothers was arrested, and was declared insane on 27 March. He was then confined as a criminal lunatic.

During Brothers' confinement, many of his followers turned to Joanna Southcott, whose 1801 publication of *The Strange Effects of Faith; with Remarkable Prophecies* (made in 1792) caught the public eye. Southcott did not dedicate herself to her prophetic career until when she was 50 years old. Before that, she had various occupations in and around Exeter, mostly as maidservant, farm labourer, and upholsterer. Her visionary experience began when she was 42 years old working in the Taylors household. Southcott claimed to hear a voice telling her about future events. Witnesses in Exeter including Lucy Taylor confirmed that some of Southcott's prophecies were proven to be true in the 1790s. Her first book *Strange Effects* soon attracted the public attention. Six followers of Brothers travelled to Exeter, where Southcott was living, to examine the new prophet. They then arranged for Southcott to move to London, where her prophetic career thrived.

⁸⁷ Richard Brothers, *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies & Times, Book First*. Its full title runs on as 'wrote under the direction of the LORD GOD and Published by his Sacred Command: It bring the first sign of warning for the benefit of all nations containing, with other great and remarkable things, not revealed to any other person on earth, the restoration of the Hebrews to Jerusalem, by the year of 1798; under their revealed prince and prophet.' (London: 1794).

Southcott soon became one of the most popular writers of her time. According to James Hopkins, a total of 108,000 copies of her various works were published and circulated from 1801 to 1816. She even toured around in England.⁸⁸ Over the years, she kept her letters and sealed envelopes containing her prophecies in a box the engraver William Sharp made for her. Those letters of prophecies were to be opened by bishops in time of crisis. After her death, her loyal followers protected her box, but questions surrounding the authenticity and the contents of the box never ceased to be. In 1814, at the age of 64, Southcott claimed to be pregnant and about to become the mother of Shiloh. The birth never happened. Southcott died on 27 December 1814. The incident attracted a great deal of public attention. On 31 December, an autopsy was carried out but no foetus was found. Southcott's legacy was remembered, as E. P. Thompson called her in his *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) 'the greatest prophetess of all'.⁸⁹

Enthusiasm for Brothers and Southcott was not limited to the uneducated. The intellectual circle was very much aware of the two prophets, though Southey readily dismissed them and their prophecies as blasphemies.

In his *Letters from England* (1807), Southey links John Boniot de Mainauduc (1750–1797) with Richard Brothers. Mainauduc, a surgeon and animal magnetizer, was a controversial figure. His fame attracted patients, but his method of curing them sound unscientific. He would sit facing the patients, usually women, stare into their eyes while his hands moved around their body without touching them. Many experienced a crisis like convulsion or hysteria, and claimed that the physical pain was alleviated. Southey criticises Mainauduc in his letter LII: 'In a country like this, where the government has no discretionary power of interfering, to punish villainy, and of course where whosoever can invent a new

⁸⁸ James K. Hopkins, *A Woman to Deliver Her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism in an Era of Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 84.

⁸⁹ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London : Penguin, 1991), p. 382.

roguery may practise it with impunity, till a new law be made to render it criminal. Mainauduc might have gone on triumphantly, and have made himself the head of a sect, or even a religion.’⁹⁰ (Mainauduc died suddenly on 22 March 1797). Southey then speaks of Brothers: ‘happily for some of the disciples, who could not exist without a constant supply of new miracles to feed their credulity, Richard Brothers appeared, who laid higher claims than Mainauduc, and promised more wonderful things.’⁹¹

Southey’s view on Joanna Southcott sounds harsher than his on Brothers. In a letter to Charles Watkin Williams Wynn dated 3 September 1806, Southey wrote:

I have just finished an account of Joanna Southcott, which if you are not well informed upon the subject will surprize you. You will hardly believe that such blasphemies should be tolerated, or such credulity be found in England at this time. It would be a fit thing to ship her and a ship load of her disciples off for Botany Bay.⁹²

Brothers and Southcott were just two examples of the rich and complicated millenarianism looming large in Wordsworth’s early career, towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. They differ from other aspirational figures like Swedenborg in the way that a clear prophetic aspiration was expressed. The literary circle, around this time, might have been aware of William Blake’s lifelong engagement with the prophetic. His prophetic books tried to establish a mythology of his own. They started with *The Book of Thel* which came out in late 1789, and include *America a Prophecy* (1793), *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), *Europe* (1794), *The Song of Los* (1795), *Milton a Poem* (1804–1810) and *Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804–

⁹⁰ Robert Southey, *Letters from England*, Volume 2 (Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814), pp. 338-339.

⁹¹ Southey, *Letters from England*, p. 339.

⁹² *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. by Kenneth Curry (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965). p. 427-428.

1820).

Compared to Blake in whom the prophetic is always present and a major theme, Wordsworth is more subtle in presenting the prophetic in his poetry. Until before the turn of the eighteenth century, he published *An Evening Walk* (1793), *Descriptive Sketches* (1793) and with Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). *The Prelude*, where his prophetic aspiration is most explicit, however, was not published until after his death. The way he engaged with the prophetic tradition is also slightly different from the mainstream prophetic writing like those of Brothers, Southcott, or Blake—he looked into the condition of human lives.

...and yet Man,
As long as he shall be the Child of Earth,
Might almost “weep to have” what he may lose,
Nor be himself extinguish’d; but survive
Abject, depress’d, forlorn, disconsolate.
(*The Prelude*, V, 23-27)

This grim picture captures the essential Wordsworthian sadness of human existence— ‘the still, sad music of humanity’ (‘Tintern Abbey’, 91). In illustrating this argument, Wordsworth starts from examining and writing about his contemporary fellow human beings on a local scale, as in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798 and 1800), *Benjamin the Waggoner* (earliest manuscript dated 1806, published in 1819), *Peter Bell* (started in 1798, published in 1819), among many others. He then extends his argument supported by the contemporary and local to a new level—the universal and immortal—the very truth of human existence. Wordsworth sees himself as and strives to be a calmly philosophical poet, and this truth of human existence is his focus. His aim is ‘to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society.’⁹³

⁹³ EY, p. 212.

In other words, knowledge of humanity is the truth Wordsworth wants to discern and distribute. We will see this point in detail in Part II of the thesis as we closely examine poems produced from the late 1790s through to the late 1800s, a golden decade in which the poet's career took shape.

Wordsworth's grand plan of writing to impart knowledge of humanity begins from his experiment on the self. By writing about his own uncertainty, anxiety and sense of exile in 'Home at Grasmere', he presents the world the existential problem he faces, to which the answer is to write. This writing career then was made possible by a knowledge economy which professionalised writing. Furthermore, the kind of poet Wordsworth aspired to be—the prophet poet—was intricately linked to the widespread millennial excitement of his time. However, the seemingly confident process of constructing a prophetic and poetic identity comes not without anxieties, anxiety of influence and anxiety of reception.

Chapter 3

The Prophetic and Anxieties on Course to Self-fashioning

Wordsworth is a pioneer of self-fashioning in the Romantic context. His awareness of self-fashioning as a poet makes him among the first not only to recognise what authorship means in the context of the knowledge economy, but also to act upon the construction of it, by giving himself a prophetic identity within his poetry. Meanwhile, he did this not without anxieties. This chapter will examine the anxieties which serve both as motivations and consequences of adopting the prophetic as a mode of his self-fashioning. They are anxieties of influence, and about reception, reflected within his poems and outside of them.

3.1. ‘Came from yon fountain?’: the Overflowing Prophetic Power

In the opening of *The Prelude*, the poet is asking the source of the power of human mind. “‘This portion of the river of my mind/ Came from yon fountain?’...’ (II, 214-215). The river image is recurrent throughout *The Prelude*. Its metaphorical nature is widely recognised, but interpretations of this metaphor vary. Jonathan Wordsworth suggests that Wordsworth and Coleridge probably discussed using the river as a poetic structural device, but in the end, the river in Wordsworth does not achieve any structural importance, instead, it becomes the metaphor of organic form.⁹⁴ Paul de Man sees the

⁹⁴ Jonathan Wordsworth, “‘The Image of a Mighty Mind’, in *William Wordsworth’s The Prelude: A Casebook*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 225-258 (p. 250).

river as representing the temporal consciousness: ‘the image of a river as the proper emblem for a consciousness that is able to contain origin and end in a single awareness.’⁹⁵ Daniel Robinson observes that the river in Wordsworth is commonly interpreted as a symbol of the poet’s imagination and his poetic power.⁹⁶ Frederic S. Cowell identifies the river image as a dominant presence in *The Prelude*, *River Duddon* (published in 1820) and *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (published 1821-1822), and especially in *The Prelude*, in which the river helps the poem to ‘establish its narratives as well as its psychological and metaphysical dimensions and secure their integrity’.⁹⁷

Indeed, the river metaphor is rich and open for discussion. The overflow and progression of the river can also be seen as the poetic tradition that already exists, passes on, and never ceases to flow. Harold Bloom in his *Anxiety of Influence* (1973) draws attention to the original meaning of the word ‘influence’ as ‘inflow’, the inflow of ethereal fluid coming from the stars, which can affect one’s character and destiny. ‘A power—divine and moral—later simply a secret power—exercised itself, in defiance of all that had seemed voluntary in one.’⁹⁸ The poetic influence Bloom explores echoes with this archaic meaning of influence, with an emphasis on the inflow of poetic power. Although provoking anxiety among the later poets, poetic influence is largely productive, for it is inherited by the later poets and through the struggle against it, the later poets grow into strong poets.

The fluidity and flow in Wordsworth’s river image and Bloom’s theory of the inflow of poetic power are mutually illuminating and supportive. Wordsworth, by associating his mind with the river, is addressing the poetic tradition and submitting himself to it, but by asking the question ‘does it come

⁹⁵ Paul de Man, ‘Time and History in Wordsworth’, in *English Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), pp. 265-288 (p. 274).

⁹⁶ Daniel Robinson, ‘*The River Duddon* and Wordsworth, Sonneteer’ in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 289-308 (p. 302).

⁹⁷ Frederic S. Colwell, *Rivermen, A Romantic Iconography of the River and the Sources* (Kingston, Montreal, London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), p. 9.

⁹⁸ Bloom, p. 26.

from this fountain?’, he is also questioning his submission. The poet exhibits an ambiguous attitude towards the poetic tradition, from which he inherits and attempts to break away. The attempt to break away is bound to be problematic. Bloom sees the later poets’ struggle as going through the following six phases. Clinamen, or poetic misprision: the poet recognises the peril of being a latecomer which is to be deprived of one’s priority and victimized; Tessera, or completion and antithesis: the later poet either completes or revises the dead poet; Kenosis, or repetition and discontinuity: the strong poet rises above repetition and discontinuity, empties the self through imagination and thus defends the self; Daemonization, or the counter-sublime: the later poet, or the ephebe, in wrestling against the precursor, falls into the self-crippling act of demonization and creates a counter-sublimity; Askesis, or purgation and solipsism: the ephebe, through sacrificial writing, drains the self. This process is the real battlefield between the ephebe and the precursor. Bloom names the last phase as Apophrades, or the return of the dead: the ephebe, even though growing to be a strong poet, is still haunted by the dead poet.

Bloom’s writing itself has the charm of Burkean sublimity. His theory of poetic influence and poetic anxiety is itself poetic, but largely confined to the haunting past. The later poets in Bloom’s model are constantly wrestling against the dead in defining their poetic identities, but as Keats’s epitaph says ‘Here Lies One Whose Name Was Writ in Water’, the anxiety about futurity and posterity is also commonly at work in poets. Bloom’s anxiety of poetic influence can be well complemented by Lucy Newlyn’s theory of the anxiety of reception.

Revising Bloom’s anxiety of influence, Newlyn suggests that the anxiety of reception is also a key to understand the Romantic authorship. She believes that Romantic writers are preoccupied with ‘the combined threats of modernity and futurity’,⁹⁹ which is shown in their ‘ambivalent and

⁹⁹ Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism, the Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), p.x.

sometimes even hostile reactions to the growth of literacy, the reading-public, and the rise of criticism.¹⁰⁰

Both of the theories—anxiety of influence from Bloom and anxiety of reception from Newlyn—find ample support in Wordsworth. The prophetic elements flowing in and among the poet's compositions are his strategic ploy to combat these anxieties. The prophetic is inherited by Wordsworth, and through it the poet aims to ally himself with the great strong poets of earlier times and thus establish himself in literary history. Meanwhile, the prophetic, having elevated Wordsworth to a position like his prominent precursors', speaks to his future audience in an authoritative manner. Bloom's theory explores the past, Newlyn's theory interprets the present, but Wordsworth has more to offer. The present thesis argues that Wordsworth's poetry exhibits strongly three kinds of anxiety, anxiety of influence, of reception among his contemporary audience, and anxiety of reception in his posterity. By resorting to the prophetic, he is addressing past, present and future altogether. The prophetic is a tool both channeling and combating against the anxieties. Revealing examples include the poet's Arab dream in Book V of *The Prelude*, the 'Preface' and anonymity of *Lyrical Ballads*, and the dictation of his literary biography *The Fenwick Notes*.

3.2. 'A loud prophetic blast of harmony': The Apocalyptic and Merging Anxieties

There are several ways to interpret Wordsworth's concern, or, to use a stronger word, obsession with apocalypse. One can follow M.H. Abrams's argument in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971). Abrams brings forth the idea of spiritual eschatology in individual writers who represent 'the soul's pilgrimage

¹⁰⁰ Newlyn, p.x.

toward its private apocalypse'¹⁰¹, Wordsworth being one of them. Having claimed that he aims to study the mind of man, the poet shudders at the fear and awe falling upon him while he looks into the depth of the human mind. A parallel is drawn between such fear and that evoked by the apocalypse in The Book of Revelation. Abrams suggests that Wordsworth's marriage metaphor in *Prospectus of The Recluse* (published in *The Excursion* in 1814) is an internalization of the apocalypse, in which the lamb and the New Jerusalem are replaced respectively by the human mind and nature. Another way to interpret the apocalyptic elements is as in Chapter 4 of the thesis, which is to see them as vehicles to channel the poet's self-fashioning as a prophetic poet who attempts to use poetry to bridge the rupture in human history. Or one can approach the apocalypse in Wordsworth as a manifestation of the poet's anxieties, which seems to be the case in the Arab dream in Book V of *The Prelude*.

Wordsworth's use of the apocalypse in *Lyrical Ballads* is embedded in the narratives (details seen later in Chapter 4), while the apocalyptic in the Arab dream reveals a more direct link between itself and its biblical sources. The speaker, while reading, falls into sleep, and dreams of himself in the Arab desert. In the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, the dream belongs to a friend, and the speaker is mainly quoting from the friend, while in the 1850 version, Wordsworth revises the narrative voice and makes the speaker, instead of the friend, the one who experiences the dream. This goes beyond a simple change of narrative voices, in fact, it demonstrates the poet's anxiety more clearly and explicitly. Hence, for this section, the text being used is the poem's 1850 version.

In the dream, the speaker encounters an Arabian knight on a camel who is holding a stone and shell. Critics have been inclined to view the stone and shell as representing geometry and poetry respectively, both of which are fruits of human wisdom. The Arabian knight is hurrying to bury them,

¹⁰¹ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), p. 49.

to keep them safe from the forthcoming flood. The speaker picks up the shell, puts it near his ear, hears the foreign sound, and understands instantly that the shell is telling a prophecy, which says the flood is coming. He then offers to help the Arabian knight with his mission, but upon witnessing dreadful signs of the coming flood, he wakes up.

The Arab dream, with its unusual setting for Wordsworth, has been given its due attention, but the focus of earlier studies is largely on the source materials of the dream. Jane Smyser argues that the Arab dream resembles Descartes', in which he saw two volumes containing all poetry and all sciences.¹⁰² She also suggests that it is probably through Coleridge that Wordsworth came to know Descartes' dream. Helen Darbishire believes that Wordsworth exercises his poetic license to alter the books of poetry and sciences into shell and stone.¹⁰³ Michael Ragussis takes a different approach in claiming that the flood scene in the Arab dream is influenced by Ovid's story of the flood in his *Metamorphoses*,¹⁰⁴ while Glenn W. Most examines the similarities between Wordsworth's Arab dream and Cervantes' narrative of *Don Quixote*.¹⁰⁵

The apocalyptic elements of the Arab dream, although acknowledged, are not very well investigated. An analysis of the Arab dream is included in Morton D. Paley's chapter on Wordsworth in *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (1999). Paley addresses Abrams's internalization theory by arguing that the apocalyptic visions and the millennial aspirations in *The Prelude* are ways through which Wordsworth internalizes an encounter with nature and political events, and engages his emotions during these encounters, 'the encounter of the poet with something outside

¹⁰² Jane Smyser, 'Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science: The Prelude, V', *PMLA*, 71(1956), 269-275.

¹⁰³ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. by Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 540.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Ragussis, 'Language and Metamorphosis in Wordsworth's Arab Dream', *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 36 Issue 2 (1975), 148-165.

¹⁰⁵ Glenn W. Most, 'Wordsworth's Dream of the Arab and Cervantes', *English Language Notes*, Vol. 22 Issue 3 (1985), 52-58.

himself that also turns out to be within him.’¹⁰⁶

This section will follow Abrams and Paley, but moves towards the study of the poet’s anxieties about authorship and posterity. It will argue that the apocalyptic visions in the Arab dream are indeed internalization of an encounter, not however, with nature or political events, but with his readership and posterity. The shell, commonly interpreted as the fruit of human wisdom, poetry and the arts in particular, has wide significance. Wordsworth’s poetic production is only a part of it. The fear of whether the shell will survive the flood and reach future generations is a reflection of the poet’s anxiety about his reception in posterity.

It is understood by now that Wordsworth probably weaves together three sources for the Arab dream—*Arabian Nights*, *Don Quixote*, and the friend’s dream, but the way in which those source materials are dealt with suggests something far more complicated than just grouping them together. At least three elements need to be given special attention: first of all, the speaker as a framing device, travelling in and out of the dream, can be seen as the poet’s surrogate. What the speaker feels and fears resonates with the poet; secondly, the apocalyptic vision as a threat is magnified, which reflects the poet’s anxiety of the unknown future of his reception; thirdly and more suggestively, the moment when the speaker could hear and understand the shell’s prophecy in an unknown tongue is a spot of time which merges the anxiety of influence and the anxiety of reception.

Wordsworth’s apocalyptic vision, namely, the flood in the Arab dream, picks up a theme common in the late eighteenth century. By that time, the enlightenment had already swept Europe with many scientific discoveries and philosophical enquiries. Challenging the established concepts and world order, the Enlightenment also brought out fear and anxiety, which were transformed into millennial

¹⁰⁶ Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 156.

and apocalyptic aspirations, especially in the art world. Furthermore, the influence of Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) started to come into play. *The Enquiry* epitomizes fear and transforms it into an aesthetic principle. 'Indeed, the terror in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime.'¹⁰⁷ By crowning the fearful, the magnificent and the infinite as the sublime, Burke's *Enquiry* encourages the representation of fear and the apocalyptic aspiration.

Among many representations of fear and the apocalyptic, the flood or 'le deluge' from Noah's story in Genesis was particularly popular in English paintings from the last twenty years of the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. It is believed that the French painter Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665)'s *Four Seasons* (1660-1664) is a direct influence. *Four Seasons* are a set of four oil paintings highly referential to the Biblical stories. They are 'Spring' or 'The Earthly Paradise', 'Summer' or 'Ruth and Boaz', 'Autumn' or 'The Spies with the Grapes of the Promised Land', and 'Winter' or 'The Flood' (French title: Le Deluge). Of these four, 'The Flood' was the most influential among the English audience. William Hazlitt allegedly made his own copy of it at the Louvre while journeying in France and Italy. A number of artists offered their versions of the flood as well, some of which are: James Jefferys' 'The Deluge' exhibited in 1775; Jacob More's 'The Deluge' in 1780 (now in the Tate); Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg's 'Shipwreck in a Storm' in 1790, engraved by Thomas Milton in 1797 for Macklin's illustrated bible (1800); Benjamin West's 'The Deluge' in 1791; William Turner's 'The Deluge' exhibited in 1805; Joshua Shaw's 'The Deluge Towards its Close' in 1813; John Martin's 'The Deluge' in 1834; Francis Danby's 'The Deluge' exhibited in 1840.¹⁰⁸

Wordsworth's version of the flood can be seen as incorporated into the larger picture of

¹⁰⁷ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 53.

¹⁰⁸ Morton D. Paley, *The Apocalyptic Sublime* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), pp 8-16.

representing the flood in the art world, but his way of dealing with it suggests something problematic. The dreadful flood in those paintings is perceivable. It is happening now, and one can see the catastrophe it brings. It is more visual and present. Wordsworth's flood, however, is more imaginative, and less visual. Language itself is less visual than painting, but Wordsworth could still choose to depict a flood as it is happening. Yet, instead of doing that, he lets the speaker wake up, stopping the dream short. He leaves the flood as forever coming, never arriving. By suspending the flood from arriving, the Arab dream captures the uncertainty and anxiety the poet feels towards the future reception of his poetry. It is unpredictable what the flood may bring. It could be disastrous, destroying all. Nothing could keep the stone and shell (the fruits of the human wisdom) safe; or it could be purifying, wiping away the evil and bring a more promising world. Similar to the uncertainty the flood brings is the unpredictability of his reception in posterity. Wordsworth, as Abrams notices, is indeed undertaking internalizations, the internalization of the anxiety when faced with his posterity, which is transformed into the impending yet never arriving flood in the Arab dream.

The anxiety about his reception in posterity is an extended version of the anxiety of reception Lucy Newlyn identifies. Newlyn's argument focuses on the interaction between the poet and his contemporary audience and literary criticism. But in the Arab dream, the poet's anxiety not only is relevant to his contemporary reception, but also extends to his reception in posterity. The shell telling a prophecy in an unknown tongue represents a perfect moment of fusion of the anxiety of influence and anxiety of reception.

..... "and this", said he,
 "This other," pointing to the Shell, "this book
 Is something of more worth"; and, at the word,
 Stretched forth the Shell, so beautiful in shape,

In colour so resplendent, with command
 That I should hold it to my ear. I did so, —
 And heard, that instant, in an unknown tongue,
 Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
 A loud prophetic blast of harmony—
 An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold
 Destruction to the Children of the Earth
 By Deluge now at hand.
 (1850, V, 88-99)¹⁰⁹

The shell, representing poetry in general, links poetry of the past, present, and future altogether. The prophecy comes from generations before, and is about a future disaster. It is in a foreign tongue, but somehow, the speaker could understand it immediately, as if it is addressed to him, and to him only.

This miraculous incident demonstrates the poet's anxiety at its best. The earnest speaker's claim to understand the prophecy instantly reflects the poet's fear of not being able to understand. The more eager he seems to be, the more anxiety it reflects. The shell collects poetic voices from the past—the poetic heritage. In claiming that he could understand, the poet is eager to be drawn into that poetic heritage, to be in line with his precursors, and to share the badge of honour. This is where the anxiety of influence comes into play.

Meanwhile, the content of the prophecy that the poet claims to understand demonstrates the anxiety of reception. Wordsworth starts Book V of *The Prelude* with his concern about the possibility of books perishing in the future, and then writes about the Arab dream. He contemplates the scenario in which books face disaster.

Should the whole frame of earth by inward throes
 Be wrenched, or fire come down from far to scorch
 Her pleasant habitations, and dry up

¹⁰⁹ William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 95-96.

Old Ocean in his bed,

 But all the meditations of mankind,

 The consecrated works of Bard and Sage
 Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,
 Twin labourers, and heirs of the same hopes;
 Where would they be?.....

 Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
 Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?
 (1850, V, 30-49)¹¹⁰

Although conveying human wisdom, books, either written on paper or bound with leather, are easily destroyed. The poet seems to be sensitive to the materiality of books in general. However, from the moment he hears and understands the prophecy, the whole narrative takes a more personal tone. The speaker, having understood the great danger, has the urge to help the Arabian knight with the mission. He is not only trying to save the fruit of human wisdom, but also, his own legacy.

The anxiety of influence and of reception reflected in the apocalyptic vision are intensified by the exotic setting. Wordsworth's Arab dream can be seen as influenced by and integrated into the larger oriental discourse in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The need to go into the unfamiliar Arabian Desert and encounter the Arabian knight indicates that the poet is not at ease. Jonathan Wordsworth sees the Arabian knight as a possible Wordsworth, who fears that aspect of himself as the other, and awakes.¹¹¹ There is certain terror of merging into and becoming the other, but the thesis would suggest that what terrorizes Wordsworth more—if he follows the Arabian Knight—is not the possibility of becoming the other, but the possibility of failing the mission. By postponing following the Arabian knight, the poet is also postponing the chance to learn about the

¹¹⁰ *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, p. 94.

¹¹¹ Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth, the Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 206-209.

future. He would rather allow his anxiety to continue.

In retrospect, the Arab dream stands out among other narratives in *The Prelude*, partly because this is a dream which springs out from imagination. Geoffrey Hartman suggests that ‘the dream is sent by imagination to lead the poet to recognize its power, and that what the dreamer desires and fears is a direct encounter with imagination.’¹¹² The Encounter with imagination is certainly one of the many aspects that the Arab dream entails, but the fear and desire perhaps can be better understood with the anxiety of influence and of reception, especially reception among posterity in mind. The Arab dream, with the apocalyptic vision and the complicated feelings it evokes, is an episode of encounter Wordsworth imagines between him as a poet and his posterity. This is a rebuttal to the false impression the ‘Preface’ usually gives, which is that the poet does not cater to readers’ needs or tastes, nor does he care about his reception among readers. Readers are important to Wordsworth. To use Greenblatt’s theory, they perform the role of the alien whom the poet aims to combat and conquer, which is to be discussed in the following section.

3.3. The Anonymous *Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth’s Awareness of Canon-Building

Making his own subjectivity the poetic subject has earned Wordsworth the title of an inventor of modern poetry. His pioneer status is also strengthened by his awareness of the power and controversy of authorship in modern literary context. The problematic nature of *Lyrical Ballads* is a good example of such awareness, namely, its ‘Preface’ and its anonymity.

Reading the 1798 ‘Advertisement’ and the 1800 ‘Preface’ together, one can easily spot a

¹¹² Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 229.

contradiction. In the 1798 'Advertisement', Wordsworth wrote:

readers, for their sakes, should not suffer the solitary word poetry, a word of very disputed meaning, to stand in the way of their gratification; but that, while they are perusing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents.¹¹³

Then in the 1800 'Preface', he takes the issue further by attacking contemporary literary taste and expressing his wish to foster a new one. The attack is so forceful that the 'Preface' reads like mission impossible to readers of his time. On one hand, the poet urges readers to judge for themselves, but on the other, he lectures them on how to read according to the standard he sets up, which are his own poetic principles in the 'Preface'.

The contradiction is apparent. If one can and will judge on one's own, then there is no need for the poet's lecture. Yet, Wordsworth, nevertheless, delivered the lecture in a rather condescending tone. A power struggle is on display in this contradiction. The 'Preface' conveys two important messages: the poet's awareness of his readership and its power, and the alien nature of such readership against its author. Wordsworth's discussion on his contemporary literary taste and his depiction of the ideal reader were the products of the poet's urge to control or at least manipulate the way he wanted his poems to be read. He strived not to surrender to his readers' taste and expectations. Meanwhile, by such discussion, the poet was consciously creating an antagonism between him as an author and his contemporary readers. He retained a calm and condescending manner by pointing out the 'problems' among the latter through the perspective of an outsider. The reader was not seen as an equal on the same intellectual level, but seen as someone whose taste needed to be challenged and corrected. He

¹¹³ *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 738-739.

was alien to the author, an opponent to be convinced, or, even defeated. Greenblatt's conclusion of the self being constructed in the process of combating the alien rings true in this author-reader and subject-alien dynamic created by the 'Preface'.

The awareness of his readership is an undercurrent across Wordsworth's writings in the period we are investigating. As discussed later in Chapter 7, *Peter Bell* highlights the discrepancies between the ideal reader and the real reader; the previous section of this chapter also shows the poet's anxiety about his reception among and beyond the contemporary audience; and later on towards the end of this chapter, the poet's efforts to hold the communication and dialogue open between him and his readers will be emphasized in the discussion of *The Fenwick Notes*.

The other side of Janus posing against this awareness of readership is Wordsworth's construction of his authorship and reputation, which quickly takes off after a dubious start: the anonymous publishing of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. The collection for a long time has situated Wordsworth in the spotlight on the literary stage.

First published in 1798, *Lyrical Ballads* was meant to be a joint collaboration between Coleridge and Wordsworth. The aim was to establish a new way of writing poetry. According to Coleridge, they were working with two different subjects under cohesive poetic principles, 'two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination'.¹¹⁴ Poems concerning the first aspect of the poetic power were taken charge of by Wordsworth, who would 'give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural';¹¹⁵ Coleridge, on the other hand, 'should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least

¹¹⁴ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

romantic'.¹¹⁶

Wordsworth may have started as a collaborator, but in the end, he decided to seize it as his own poetic endeavour with complementary poems from Coleridge. In the 1800 edition, the anonymity of *Lyrical Ballads* was broken when it was signed by an author: Wordsworth. Coleridge was referred to in the advertisement not as a co-author, but as 'a friend'.

For the sake of variety, and from a consciousness of my own weakness, I was induced to request the assistance of a Friend, who furnished me with the Poems of the ANCIENT MARINER, the FOSTER-MOTHER'S TALE, the NIGHTINGALE, and the Poem entitled LOVE.¹¹⁷

Far from the role of a collaborator, this 'friend' was expected only to assist and furnish the poet with a few poems. Furthermore, this 'friend' was not named. Wordsworth, by this time, had not only taken *Lyrical Ballads* as his own intellectual property, but had also made an effort to undermine or even erase Coleridge's contribution to it. It is more than a creative difference as many suspected because Wordsworth himself expressed his reservations on 'The Ancient Mariner' not fitting into his poetic principle.

This gesture raises many questions that are difficult to answer and open to speculations. Why was *Lyrical Ballads* published anonymously in the first place? What made Wordsworth decide to go solo and disregard Coleridge's role? How does it reflect Wordsworth's relationship with Coleridge, his readers and the literary market?

Anonymous publishing is no stranger to literary history. The word 'anonym' came into English from Greek in the late sixteenth century. It was a common practice back then to sign 'anon' to writings

¹¹⁶ *Biographia Literaria*, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 741.

whose author was unknown or preferred not to be known. This was particularly popular among the privileged circle where manuscripts were circulated among friends and the authorship was assumed to be known without being revealed. For instance, Milton did not reveal his name in *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* when it was first presented in 1634, but he announced his authorship of the poem eleven years later by including this poem in *Poems of Mr. John Milton* (1645). The title page reads ‘A MASK of the same AUTHOR PRESENTED at LUDLOW–Castle, 1634. Before The Earl of BRIDGEWATER Then President of WALES. ANNON Dom, 1645.’¹¹⁸ John Dryden’s *Mac Flecknoe*, a rebuttal to Thomas Shadwell’s attack on him in the ‘Dedication’ of *The Virtuoso* (1676), first appeared in a pirated text in 1682. It was included in the anonymous *Miscellany Poems* of 1684. Dryden did not acknowledge his authorship until 1692 when the poem was reprinted as an authorized text in the publisher Jacob Tonson’s series of Dryden’s major poems.¹¹⁹ Another case is Alexander Pope whose earliest version of *The Rape of the Lock*, composed in 1711, was printed anonymously in Barnaby Bernard Lintot’s *Miscellany* series. Jonathan Swift perhaps could be the champion of anonymous publishing in this period, with *Contests and Dissensions* (1701) and *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), among many others.¹²⁰

The anonymity of *Lyrical Ballads* is as interesting as its content. In the introduction of the recent Oxford classic edition of *Lyrical Ballads, 1798 and 1802*, Fiona Stafford hints that such concealment can be a refusal to commercialize the book, or it can gesture towards a genuine surprise to readers.¹²¹ The surprise, of course, is the new poetry it presents and the famous principle of poetry: ‘For all good

¹¹⁸ *Poems of Mr. John Milton, the 1645 Edition*, with Essays in Analysis by Cleanth Brooks and John Edward Hardy (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), p. 56.

¹¹⁹ *The Poems of John Dryden*, Volume One 1649-1681, ed. by Paul Hammond (Harlow, London, New York et al: Longman, 1995), pp. 306-307.

¹²⁰ For a detailed account of literary anonymity, refer to *New Literary History*, Vol. 33, No.2 *Anonymity* (2002), especially Anne Ferry’s article “Anonymity”: The Literary History of a Word’, pp. 193-214.

¹²¹ Fiona Stafford, ‘Introduction’, in *Lyrical Ballads, 1798 and 1802*, ed. by Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. xiii.

poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.’¹²² Such declaration defends itself not only against its contemporary literary taste in the sensational or the gothic, but also against the artificiality in the new-classical period which was passed on to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. For instance, Joshua Reynolds’s discourses on art argues that art works within a set of standards. The skills to produce art can be learned and practised, and the proper way to learn those skills is to study the Italian masters.¹²³ Such arguments are based on the assumption that art can be crafted, instead of being ‘the spontaneous overflow’.

Claiming poetry being all about feelings frees poetry from the rigid set of rules, but exposes its author/s to public scrutiny. To publish *Lyrical Ballads* anonymously was to avoid such scrutiny. Even so, Wordsworth felt the urge to clarify that what was expressed in these poems was not necessarily entirely the poet’s: ‘The poem of the Thorn, as the reader will soon discover, is not supposed to be spoken in the author’s own person.’¹²⁴

The claim suggests a resistance to readers’ interests in finding the poet’s self-revelation or any biographical link between the poems and the poet, which was shared by later poets like Tennyson and Browning. One of the poems in Tennyson’s *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) is called ‘Supposed Confessions of a Second Rate Mind not in Unity with Itself’.¹²⁵ The word ‘supposed’ shows Tennyson’s effort of distancing himself from the speaker. Browning made the same conscious effort of distancing in a more radical way. He published *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* anonymously in 1833, but on finding that a contemporary review went straight into identifying the speaker as the author, he prevented any reprinting of this book until 35 years later.

¹²² *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 744.

¹²³ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), especially Discourse One, pp. 19-25.

¹²⁴ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 739.

¹²⁵ Lord Alfred Tennyson, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (Hamburg: Tredition GmbH, 2013), p. 28.

But what is more interesting is if the anonymity of *Lyrical Ballads* aims at presenting poetry about feelings while denying biographical links between the poems and their author/s, then why it was given an author in the 1800 version, and only the name of one author in this supposed collaborated work?

The answer, on Wordsworth's part, probably lies in his intention of reputation-making and personal canon building. Compared with what Milton did with *A Mask*, there is a possibility that Wordsworth was using anonymity to distance himself from his juvenile writing, should his later writing career diverge from it. By the time *Lyrical Ballads* was published, Wordsworth's name had been associated with two works, *Descriptive Sketches* and *Evening Walk*, both published in 1793, and both were categorized by Wordsworth in his 1815 collection *Poems* as 'Juvenile Pieces', which also included several poems in *Lyrical Ballads*, such as 'The Idiot Boy', 'The Childless Father', and even 'Michael, a Pastoral Poem'. *Lyrical Ballads*, on the whole, perhaps fell into that category of juvenile writing before the poet could realise its potential importance. His reaction was not only to reveal the authorship, but also to seize the sole authorship. Coleridge, the supposed collaborator, in the 1800 Preface became a 'friend' who furnished the author with poems such as 'the Ancient Mariner', 'the Foster-Mother's Tale', and 'the Nightingale'. Wordsworth did not even name this friend, probably to avoid any negative backlash from naming Coleridge. As Coleridge himself admitted earlier in a letter to Joseph Cottle, their publisher, the reason to remain anonymous was 'Wordsworth's name is nothing—to a large number of persons mine *stinks*'.¹²⁶ Wordsworth, here, was carefully presenting himself as a poet who had his own poetic principles, beliefs, and integrity. His ambition was clear. He was about to embark on a journey of career building, and he wanted a place in literary history.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ CLC, I, p. 412.

¹²⁷ The thesis focuses on the thematic interpretation of Wordsworth's poems, for instance, the apocalyptic vision in this chapter and the national concern in Chapter 5. The poetic form is not a primary concern in the thesis, however, it

The poetic image Wordsworth chose to present to the literary world is manifold: an innovator, a reformer, an observer, and an idealist. The prophetic poet is one aspect of this composite, but an important one which has profoundly influenced the shaping of his poetic identity within the texts. It is shown and constructed little by little in the prophetic aspirations and design in *The Prelude*, the apocalyptic fear of a ruptured human history in *Lyrical Ballads* (Chapter 4 of the thesis), the nationalistic concern in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (Chapter 5), and the reflections on duty and morality in *The White Doe of Rylstone* (Chapter 6) and *Peter Bell* (Chapter 7). All of these poems took shape between 1798 and 1808, a decade when Wordsworth's name was gradually established in literary circles. The prophetic assisted the poet to find and shape his individual voice, and carry it through into his later poetry.

In writing, the ending is as difficult and important as the beginning. This can be used as an analogy for the prophetic in Wordsworth. If the prophetic in the poet's early career functions more as a shaping force, in late Wordsworth, the prophetic comes to a natural but controversial end in an act of great self-revelation, *The Fenwick Notes*. The intention of *The Notes* goes beyond satisfying contemporary readers' interests in the origin and process of literary composition. It further proves Wordsworth's ambition to reach his posterity. *The Fenwick Notes* is as innovative as *Lyrical Ballads* in the sense that it serves as a literary autobiography to the poet. The poet's anxiety about his reception among posterity is most explicitly reflected in *The Notes*. The urge of self-revelation with expectations of reaching his future audiences makes *The Notes* function not only as notes to Wordsworth's poetry but also as a work of a prophetic nature.

is interesting to notice that Wordsworth choose the ballad form in his first serious attempt in canon building. Unlike the epic form or the sonnet form which were used by his predecessors like Milton, the ballad form is non-competitive as no 'strong poets' (in Bloom's words) have built their reputation on it. Using the ballad form thus, on one hand, relieves Wordsworth from the competition with Milton, and on the other, reveals his ambition of becoming a 'strong poet'.

3.4. Posterity and *The Fenwick Notes* as Wordsworth's Literary Autobiography

Dictated by the poet to a family friend Miss Fenwick in the first half of 1843, the notes, commonly referred to as *The Fenwick Notes*¹²⁸, were first made public in 1850, in Wordsworth's official biography, the two volume *Memoirs*, written by the poet's nephew Christopher Wordsworth. However, instead of publishing the notes as a whole, the biographer selected, rearranged and edited these notes. *The Notes* were published in full for the first time in 1876, in Alexander Grosart's edition of Wordsworth's *Prose*, but again with some alterations. The scholarly edition commonly used today is that of Jared Curtis, published in 1993. Just as the early publications of the notes did not give the notes much credit as a self-sufficient text, the scholarly use of these notes adopts almost the same approach. *The Notes* were used more often in contextualising Wordsworth's poems, or disclosing the poet's intention, as Wordsworth would have liked. Seldom were *The Notes* treated on their own merits as an independent work. Stephen Gill in *Wordsworth, A Life* (1989) brings forward the possibility of treating *The Notes* as a separate entity by suggesting that *The Fenwick Notes* 'are best read entire, not as a source of information merely, but as a document in Wordsworth's autobiography.'¹²⁹ But there is startlingly little scholarly work on this subject.

Certain perils in treating autobiography as a genre in literary studies may have contributed to the lack of scholarly interest in the notes. Autobiography itself as a genre comes with its inherent instabilities. As Paul de Man suggests, the difficulty of treating any autobiography as a piece of art work lies in the ambiguity of its genre, and its lack of aesthetic values. 'Compared to tragedy, or epic,

¹²⁸ For purpose of convenience, *The Fenwick Notes* will be referred to as simply *The Notes*. The edition cited is *The Fenwick Notes*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1993).

¹²⁹ Gill, *A Life*, p.408.

or lyric poetry, autobiography always looks slightly disreputable and self-indulgent in a way that may be symptomatic of its incompatibility with the monumental dignity of aesthetic values.’¹³⁰ The questions Paul de Man raises do suggest the complexities that autobiographical works possess in contrast to other literary works such as fictions or poetry. Decades have passed since Paul de Man’s book, and the study of autobiography and life writing has been more firmly established. One of the fascinating aspects of the study of autobiography is the complex texture of not only the text itself, but also how the text relates itself to the outside world, how it represents itself, how it imagines itself to be read and what the intentions are behind it. Autobiography, more than any other genres, foregrounds these concerns.

The Fenwick Notes, as Gill suggests, possesses various elements of autobiography. Early in the 1970’s, in the introduction to *Approaches to Victorian Biography*, the editor George P. Landow discusses several features of biography: it is in retrospect; it records a series of past acts, which are often interlinked by causality; occasionally the narrative points to a particular catastrophe as formative in the growth and maturation of the subject. The biography discloses the self by accommodating private experience and making it relevant to others, and in some degree, debunks the personal myth. A contrast between the former self and the self as it is now is detected.

This section will treat *The Notes* as biography as Gill suggested, but will be more specific in arguing that the notes are the poet’s literary autobiography. *The Prelude*, taken as autobiographical poem, is often regarded as the poet’s autobiography in the verse form. *The Notes*, compared to *The Prelude* are much more comprehensive, as it does not only cover Wordsworth’s whole writing career (*The Prelude* stops at sometime around 1805 when it first took shape), but also disclose the background

¹³⁰ Paul de Man, ‘Autobiography as De-Facement’, in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 67-68.

to the writing of the poetry, whereas *The Prelude* primarily focuses on the growth of his mind.

In *The Notes*, the speaker is the poet Wordsworth, at the age of seventy three, retrieving specifics of his poems from memory.¹³¹ It consists of entries named after the poem, under which, date and circumstances when composed are disclosed. Further information regarding how the subjects of the poem were brought to the poet is added. Entries loosely follow the chronological order in which the poems were first published. Their lengths vary from a few sentences to hundreds of words. To see *The Notes* as Wordsworth's literary autobiography is to see the text as a record of literary performances, and they aim to disclose background information, to debunk the myth of the poet's poetic crafts (by which I mean the poems do not spring out from the poet's imagination, but rather have source materials). It is an origin story of the poet's literary performances, and also an excellent example of the intricacies between the selective representation of the self in relation to its imagined readership, and the author's self-fashioning as a publishing poet.

The first question is the readership of *The Notes*. More than one audience seems to be envisaged. Wordsworth declares that the notes are intended for private use and not meant to be published. 'Once more in excuse for much egotism, let me say these notes are written for my familiar friends and at their earnest request.'¹³² But this statement is far more problematic than its literal meaning suggests. To whom Wordsworth is speaking? And for what purpose? If as he claims that the notes are for 'the familiar friends at their earnest request', the reader, having requested the notes, would be eager to learn everything Wordsworth has to say. Being too self-centred is the last thing they would detest. Yet, the

¹³¹ The speaker is Wordsworth, while the note taker is Miss Fenwick. Whether Miss Fenwick had applied her creativity to the notes is not clear. If she did, then a whole new set of questions will be raised, such as the authenticity of the text, and the relationships between the poet as dictator and Miss Fenwick as the note taker. However, there seems to be a consensus that the authenticity of the written text is not to be questioned. This section will cast this question aside and focus on the selective self-representation of the poet in relation to its readership, through which to unfold how Wordsworth, as a publishing author, engages with his imagined reader.

¹³² *The Notes*, p. 43.

poet is being apologetic. He is not apologizing for appearing to be egotistic, but for being egotistic to the wrong audience, which is other than familiar friends. This suggests that the poet has imagined *The Notes* being read by a larger audience. For the sake of his public persona, he is differentiating himself from the ‘egotistical sublime’ as Keats claims, in case the general public might have access to *The Notes*. Further on, another entry confirms the design for a large audience. When recalling the sonnets about the Italy trip in 1837, Wordsworth adds ‘should this note by any possible chance be seen by any of my country men who might have been in the gallery at the time (& several persons were there) & witnessed such an indecorum, I hope he will give up the opinion which he might naturally have formed to my prejudice.’¹³³

The poet may not have had the general public in his mind when he first started the notes, but as much as he would like the notes to stay in private circle, he could foresee they would nevertheless go public at some point. By the time *The Notes* were taken, Wordsworth had long enjoyed his fame. The interesting anecdotes Gill in *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (1998) provides are good examples providing glimpses of the poet’s fame: people would travel to Rydal, come to the poet’s residence Rydal Mount, not go in, but linger at the gate and snatch a leaf from his garden as a souvenir. Wordsworth’s speculation that *The Notes* will reach the general public—later proven to be right—results in an acute sense of his contemporary readership and posterity in the notes.

The idea of ‘the birth of the reader’ as juxtaposed with ‘the death of the author’ and its rationale were developed by Roland Barthes in the 1960’s, his main reason being that linguistics facilitates the destruction of the author. The author is only a writing subject, he claims, while the text, being a ‘tissue of signs’, has language itself as its origin.¹³⁴ Michael Foucault, at various points agrees with Barthes,

¹³³ *The Notes*, p.73.

¹³⁴ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *Authorship: from Plato to the Postmodern, A Reader*, ed. by Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 125-130.

claiming that the text has its own grammarians, and that literary criticism has constructed the figure of the author, but essentially, he modifies Barthes in bringing forward the idea of the author-function. The writing subject matters mainly in the sense that it provides the basis for explaining certain events and their transformations and modifications; it is responsible for the unity of writing by neutralizing the contradictions in the texts.¹³⁵ Thus, the unresolved issue here is how reader and writer fit into each other's scheme, and up to what limit does the author possess authority over the text? How does one exercise that limited authority?

In *The Notes*, the subtle paradox of asking the reader to consider the origins of the poem but excluding his own critical reviews is a revealing example of Wordsworth's awareness and execution of that limited control. The early Wordsworth, on various occasions, defended himself against the criticism and accusations he faced or may have faced. The discussion of what is a poet in the Preface to the 1802 edition of the *Lyrical Ballad* is his defence of poetry, specifically his poetry. Thus, it is slightly surprising to find Wordsworth does not take the opportunity *The Notes* provide to explain himself regarding the principles of composition to ward off the negative reception of certain poems, especially some of his badly received ones, such as *Peter Bell*.

Drafted in 1798 and published on 22 April, 1819, *Peter Bell* invited sarcastic parodies and harsh criticism (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 7). John Hamilton Reynolds in his parody *Peter Bell, A Lyrical Ballad* (1819) draws a portrait of the conceited speaker, targeting Wordsworth and the Wordsworthian subject: 'out of sparrow's eggs I have hatched great truths, and with sexton's barrows have I wheeled into human hearts, piles of the weightiest philosophy.'¹³⁶ Shelley's parody *Peter Bell*

¹³⁵ Michel Foucault, 'What is An Author', in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. by Josué V. Harari (London: Methuen), pp. 141-60.

¹³⁶ John Hamilton Reynolds, 'Peter Bell, A Lyrical Ballad', in *Romantic Parodies, 1797-1831*, ed. by David A. Kent, Dale R. Ewen (Cranbury, London and Ontario: Associated University Press, 1992), p. 174. Reynolds' parody came out a week before Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*, but it contains echoes suggesting that Reynold perhaps had some knowledge of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*. See Introduction in Cornell edition, p. 17.

the Third, composed in October 1819 but unpublished until 1839, mocks the specific theme of redemption in Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*. Henry Crabb Robinson claims that 'Wordsworth has set himself back ten years by the publication of this unfortunate work'.¹³⁷ Leigh Hunt refers to *Peter Bell* as Mr. Wordsworth's 'didactic little horror'.¹³⁸

Wordsworth was disappointed by the poem's reception. In a letter to Lord Lonsdale, he writes: '—*Peter Bell* has furnished abundant employment to the Witlings and the small critics, who have been warring with me for more than 20 years, and seem more bitter than ever.'¹³⁹ It is not only the critics who were bitter, but the poet himself seemed to be wearied of the war against the contemporary critical engagement with his publications. However perfect the opportunity *The Notes* provided, the poet still chose to remain silent. The origin of the subject matter of *Peter Bell* and its various components are explained, but there is little comment and almost no response to the criticism the poem received, as in almost every other entry of *The Notes*. *The Notes* do not engage with the critical discourse around Wordsworth's poetry. Apart from the possibility that Wordsworth may have taken pride in not feeling the need to explain himself, the silence on his part opens a door for future generations to explore aspects of the poems which may not necessarily appeal to the contemporary readers of these poems. The silence itself is an invitation, sent by Wordsworth to his posterity.

Lucy Newlyn argues that this anxiety of reception becomes 'especially pressing at the point where the writing subject displaces past authority through antithetical reading, for it is here that the subject recognizes the threat that reading poses for writing, and therefore its own instability'.¹⁴⁰ The act of not providing commentary on his poems in *The Notes* acknowledges the instability of the meaning of

¹³⁷ William Wordsworth, *The Critical Heritage*, Volume 1, 1793-1820, ed. by Robert Woof (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 655.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 651.

¹³⁹ MY, II, p. 542.

¹⁴⁰ Lucy Newlyn, "'Reading after'": The Anxiety of the Writing Subject', in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 35, No. 4, *Essays in Honor of Geoffrey H. Hartman* (Winter, 1996), 609-628 (p. 616).

written texts: poems referred to in *The Notes*. The efforts to manipulate the reader into reading poems from certain perspectives would be futile. However, Wordsworth is dancing a shackled dance. On one hand, tracing the origin of the poem invites the reader to consider historical and biographical context of the poems, but on the other hand, *The Notes* stop there, refusing to provide critical insights to the interpretation of the poem. It is a half opened door. To fully open it requires cooperation of both the reader and the author. If the Wordsworth collection could be compared to a long ruined historic edifice that archaeologists try to disclose and reconstruct as Kenneth Johnston suggests,¹⁴¹ then *The Fenwick Notes* exist as part of that edifice in its prime. It is a long and narrow corridor, linking every room, which are the published works. It is where the host opens the door for visitors. Walking along the corridor, the visitor can get a glimpse of every room, yet not enough of it. One has to go into the room to see the whole picture, while the host is standing alongside the visitor, pointing to various designs of the house, explaining how they come to be, wishing the visitor could take account of such record into their appreciation, or depreciation. Whichever side the visitor decides is out of the host's hands. There is a perceivable delicate balance of not saying anything, not saying much and saying too much on the host or the poet's part.

There is, however, one exception, which is the entry under *The White Doe of Rylstone*. Wordsworth specifically says here 'let me say a few words on this Poem in the way of criticism.'¹⁴² The reason is that *The White Doe of Rylstone* was read alongside some of Walter Scott's poems, and Wordsworth felt 'the comparison is inconsiderate'.¹⁴³ Scott's poems usually have plenty of actions with various turns of fortune, so such a comparison blames *The White Doe* for its lack of action, which

¹⁴¹ See the metaphor in the opening paragraph in Kenneth Johnston, "'Home at Grasmere': Reclusive Song', *Studies in Romanticism*, 14 (1975), No.1, 1-28.

¹⁴² *The Notes*, p. 32.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

is indeed the main defect for which the poem was criticized. Wordsworth devotes a fair amount of words to explaining why his poem centres on the moral and spiritual, and is not meant to be read as an action poem like Scott's. It is a direct response to the reception of his poem and rare in *The Notes*. The comparison with such an overwhelmingly respected and celebrated figure like Scott seriously threatens Wordsworth's individuality as a poet. In offering his defence, Wordsworth is reclaiming his individuality.

In retrospect, *The Fenwick Notes* provide biographical and historical contexts for Wordsworth's poems, link together the entire poetic oeuvre, and more importantly, serve as an introduction for later readers. Its very existence demonstrates Wordsworth's awareness of his readership and posterity, and, his anxiety of reception among them. By leaving out critical reviews and any engagement with the contemporary criticism of the poems, Wordsworth made *The Notes* open and timeless. It is about the poems written in the past, but its aim is to engage a large and a future audience. This implied futurity and the self-revealing nature of the text make *The Notes* prophetic, a prophecy of why Wordsworth truly deserves a place in literary history. His attempt to utilise the prophetic in self-fashioning reaches its peak and end, the process of which remains inspirational even as today. Such is his rich and timeless legacy.

Part I of the thesis has re-examined the prophetic aspirations in Wordsworth, in the hope of highlighting the prophetic as a mode of his self-fashioning. Anxiety of influence and anxiety of his contemporary reception and reception in posterity are channelled through the prophetic in his poems. Part II of the thesis will argue that the prophetic, initially adopted as the mode of self-fashioning, soon became a mode of writing, prominent in his golden decade. To see the prophetic as a mode of writing sheds new light in our understanding of some of Wordsworth's well-known works, such as *Lyrical*

Ballads, and helps us to understand better those that did not do well when it comes to reception, such as *Peter Bell*.

Part II

The Prophetic as a Mode of Writing

Chapter 4

Lyrical Ballads: Rupture and Continuity in Human History

There is a discrepancy between the current reception of *Lyrical Ballads* and its reception when first published. Modern readers take the collection quite seriously. Any anthology or literary history of British literature will introduce this collection as a crucial and indispensable literary event of 1798. A simplistic approach to this event, but not uncommon, is to assert that *Lyrical Ballads* marked the beginning of British Romanticism, and its 'Preface' served as a manifesto. Such an assertion should be dealt with cautiously because of the ambiguities and controversies in and surrounding this claim: to begin with, Romanticism, rich and complex, has no single origin. Arthur O. Lovejoy's 1924 essay 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms' already demonstrates that Romanticism as a movement comprises 'diversely combinable, intellectual and emotional components of such complexes, that are the true elemental and dynamic factors in the history of thought and of art'.¹⁴⁴ To say a certain work marks the beginning of Romanticism is to overly simplify its complexity. Furthermore, it is in retrospect that we attach importance to *Lyrical Ballads*. The situation in its own time was different. One may recall Matthew Arnold's effort to bring Wordsworth's importance into focus among the Victorians. Arnold sees that Wordsworth's fame started to rise and stabilized in the 1830s for a number of reasons: Byron's death made an opening for Wordsworth; Scott's generous praise had some impact on the public; and Coleridge's admiration for Wordsworth spread among young intellectuals on whom Coleridge had a strong influence. Arnold also remarks that Wordsworth was not fully recognised at home. 'Almost everyone who has praised Wordsworth's poetry has praised it well. But the public has

¹⁴⁴ Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', *PMLA*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jun., 1924), 229-253.

remained cold, or, at least, undetermined.’¹⁴⁵ This certainly can be applied to the case of *Lyrical Ballads*.

Lucy Newlyn’s perspective provides a rough idea of what place *Lyrical Ballads* had when first published. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a readers’ market, and success was measured by the number of books sold. Some of the best-selling authors were Byron, Scott, Rogers, Bloomfield, Campbell, and Moore. Twenty-six thousand copies of Robert Bloomfield’s *The Farmer’s Boy* (1800), now long forgotten, were sold in less than three years, and the publisher Vernor and Hood paid 4000 pounds for its copyright. By contrast, in the same year, Longman paid 8 pounds for the copyright of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.¹⁴⁶

However, for most people, *Lyrical Ballads* is very much better known than *The Farmer’s Boy*. The collection survives and continues to be read. Among many reasons which may have contributed to its longevity, the prophetic qualities are generally overlooked. When associating Wordsworth with the prophetic, the most commonly used text and also seemingly the most obvious choice is *The Prelude*, in which the poet openly expresses his prophetic aspirations. Whereas in *Lyrical Ballads*, the prophetic elements are less noticed than they deserve. The current chapter aims to explore the prophetic features of *Lyrical Ballads* by developing the following argument: an apocalyptic fear of a ruptured human history lies underneath the stories in this collection; this apocalyptic fear is counteracted by literature, which, to Wordsworth, is a way to preserve and continue human history; the narrative pattern, the sense of animal sacrifice, and the moral concern place Wordsworth close to one of the oldest representations of the prophetic—the seer tradition.

¹⁴⁵ Matthew Arnold, ‘Preface’, in *Lyrical Ballads, a Casebook*, pp. 65-75.

¹⁴⁶ Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 8. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* is also consulted. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2676?docPos=8>. Accessed 10 May, 2013.

Prior to discussion, a few textual notes should be provided. The 1798 edition was a joint effort of Wordsworth and Coleridge published anonymously, while the 1800 and 1802 editions were published under Wordsworth's name. This change involves many issues of authorship. Coleridge's contribution to *Lyrical Ballads*, and the intricate relationship and power struggle between the two poets, which are discussed in Chapter 3 of Part I, will not be considered in this chapter. The primary focus of the chapter is on the prophetic quality of Wordsworth's poems in *Lyrical Ballads*. For the sake of convenience, unless otherwise specified, *Lyrical Ballads* refer to Wordsworth's part of the collection, and it includes the single volume of 1798, and the two-volume edition of 1800 and 1802.

4.1. Alternative Prefaces: a Foreword

The prophetic qualities of *Lyrical Ballads* are usually not the first thing to notice. They are overshadowed by the discussion of Wordsworth's poetic theory in the 'Preface', and its practice in the poems, especially the rustic subject matter and language that men use in real life, and the ideology reflected by this choice. However, there has always been a difficulty to map out the theory in the 'Preface' among the poems. Blake's annotation to his copy of Wordsworth's *Poems* reminds us that there is a long-standing discrepancy between the theory in the 'Preface' and Wordsworth's actual poetic works. Blake wrote in 1826: 'I don't know who wrote these Prefaces: they are very mischievous & direct contrary to Wordsworth's own Practise.'¹⁴⁷

Such confusion is common and understandable, which may have been caused by the various editions and prefaces of this collection. The first edition was published in 1798 with a short

¹⁴⁷ George Saintsbury, *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe from the Earliest Texts to the Present Day* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1949), p. 268.

advertisement, while the ‘Preface’ we often refer to appeared in the second edition, published two years later in two-volume *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 (its first volume is roughly the same as the 1798 edition; the difference lies in the order of the poems). The 1800 ‘Preface’ was enlarged in 1802 with added discussion on the concept of the poet. In a way, the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* preceded the ‘Preface’.

The prefaces Wordsworth himself added to the 1800 and 1802 edition surely provide insights to our understanding of *Lyrical Ballads*, however, they are not enough. Wordsworth’s poetic principles are work in progress, which are also scattered among other texts. One should look across the poet’s works around this time to form a relatively full picture. Therefore, the preface-less *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 and *Lyrical Ballads* with prefaces in 1800 and 1802 should also acquire alternative prefaces—*The Prelude* and ‘Home at Grasmere’, two of Wordsworth’s most self-revealing poems. They are roughly contemporary to *Lyrical Ballads*: the first version of *The Prelude* was finished in 1799 in two books. It was enlarged and took its later shape in 1805 (the revisions in 1820 and the published version in 1850 are based on the 1805 version and the differences between the 1805 and 1850 version are more of stylistic rather than substance); ‘Home at Grasmere’ was first written around 1798, and an extract from it was published in *The Excursion* in 1814. The poetic principles they contain are as rich as those in the ‘Preface’, and they may also have guided the composition of *Lyrical Ballads*. The prophetic aspirations in *The Prelude* and ‘Home at Grasmere’ are shared in the stories of *Lyrical Ballads*, starting from the sense of apocalyptic fear.

4.2. A Pyramid of Fears

Many of the stories in *Lyrical Ballads* are about death, loss, mortality, human sufferings and sorrow. Much less noticed or pointed out straightforwardly is the sense of existential crisis which governs and unifies the poems in this collection. It escalates from individuals' fear of physical death to the disappearance of one particular class of men because of social economic change, and covers a wide selection of scenarios in between, forming a pyramid like the one in Maslow's hierarchy of needs¹⁴⁸.

The base of the pyramid and the most basic fear is the fear of physical death—the moment when one ceases to be. The dramatic monologue of 'The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman' explicitly explores the perplexing concept of death, of what it means to die or live. From Wordsworth's notes we know his source was Samuel Hearne. Hearne (1745–1792) was an explorer and fur trader, who joined the Hudson's Bay Company in 1776, and was posted to Prince of Wales Fort (now known as Churchill in Manitoba). His account of the expeditions *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay, to the Northern Ocean* was published in 1795, from which Wordsworth obtained the information that among the Northern tribes, if during the journey, one man fell ill and was unable to pursue the journey with his companions, he would be left behind with provisions and information of the companions' course in case he recovered and was able to join them. Females were treated in the same way under the same circumstances. So it happened that this Indian woman is left behind. We know as the poem progresses that she is given food, her body is declining, and her child is taken away by her companions. She is lying on the ground, feeling herself dying away. Her mind is in a confused state as she is struggling to cope with the idea of death. On one hand, she seems to accept her fate. At the beginning of the poem, she is asking for death.

¹⁴⁸ Abraham Harold Maslow (1908-1970) in his 1943 paper 'A Theory of Human Motivation' published in *Psychological Review*, creates a pyramid model of human motivations. The physiological needs sit at the bottom, topped by needs of 'safety', 'belongingness' and 'love', 'esteem', and finally 'self-actualization'. Wordsworth's pyramid of existential fear, like Maslow's of needs, starts from the physiological level.

Before I see another day,
 Oh let my body die away!
 In sleep I heard the northern gleams;
 The stars they were among my dreams;
 In sleep did I behold the skies,
 I saw the cracking flashes drive;
 And yet they are upon my eyes,
 And yet I am alive.
 Before I see another day,
 Oh let my body die away!
 (1- 10)¹⁴⁹

Wordsworth tells us that when the northern lights vary their positions in the air, they make a crackling sound, as recorded in Hearne's book:

I do not remember to have met with any travellers into high Northern latitudes, who remarked their having heard the Northern Lights make any noise in the air as they vary their colours or position; which may probably be owing to the want of perfect silence at the time they made their observations on those meteors. I can positively affirm, that in the still nights I have frequently heard them make a rustling and crackling noise, like the waving of a large flag in a fresh gale of wind.¹⁵⁰

If this is the sound and scene the woman hears and sees, it must have been very quiet around her. In this fearful silence, she wishes to die, to fall into slumber. Her physical pain and suffering make living unbearable so she is begging to die to end the misery. However, in the third stanza, as she starts complaining about the companions leaving her too soon, we come to know that her desire to live is as strong as the desire to die, if not stronger. When she was well, she wished to live 'For clothes, for warmth, for food, and fire' (15), but as she lies dying, such things do not matter anymore. Her last

¹⁴⁹ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 111-112.

¹⁵⁰ Samuel Hearne, *A journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay, to the Northern Ocean* (London: printed for A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1795), p. 224.

thought is on her poor child: she thinks of the moment when they are separated and remembers with fondness the strange look in her child; she also thinks about things that will happen after her death, and asks the child not to weep for her. Her desire not to be separated from her child is the only thing that makes her cling to life. The more intense her desire to be with her child, the more terror this physical impediment brings. Physical decline, in 'The Forsaken Indian Woman' raises a threat, leading not only towards death, but also towards losing one's love.

The threat of physical decline is also addressed in 'Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman'. Once a huntsman, Simon Lee used to be physically strong, but now, at the age of 70 or 80 ('three score and ten,/ But others say he's eighty.' 7-8), he is thin and weak, with only one eye left which is probably caused by a fierce chase or fight.

And he is lean and he is sick,
 His little body's half awry,
 His ancles they are swoln and thick;
 His legs are thin and dry.
 When he was young he little knew
 Of husbandry or tillage;
 And now he's forced to work, though weak,
 —The weakest in the village.
 (33-40)¹⁵¹

Being 'the weakest in the village', Simon Lee has no one to help him. He is so weak that cutting the root of the tree seems to take him forever, whereas the speaker only takes seconds to finish the job. Witnessing someone who used to be perhaps exceptionally strong in his prime becoming weak evokes the speaker's sympathy. The old man's gratitude for the help brings tears to the speaker, who is left mourning, not only because of 'the gratitude of men' (103), but also man's inability to combat the

¹⁵¹ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 66.

force of natural decline. ‘Simon Lee’ talks about aging, which is rare to see in poetry. Before Wordsworth, a dominant proportion of canonical literature is about youth, strength, glory, power, divinity, and other qualities as such. To write about the old, the weak, and the poor gives Wordsworth a fresh voice.

The layer above physical death in our pyramid model of fear is mental death—when one ceases to perform properly mentally, one is in a sense dead already, as in ‘The Mad mother’, or ‘The Thorn’. Although named as ‘The thorn’, this poem is really about the story of a woman named Martha Ray, who used to be happy and gay. Her fate takes an unexpected turn when she is impregnated and abandoned by her lover, one named Stephen Hill. Martha gives birth to a child, who is already dead in the poem, probably killed by her. The speaker starts the poem by depicting the bizarre looks of the thorn.

It looks so old and grey.
Not higher than a two-year’s child,
It stands erect this aged thorn;
No leaves it has, no thorny points;
It is a mass of knotted joints,
A wretched thing forlorn.
(I, 4-9)¹⁵²

The thorn is given human feature with its height like that of a 2 year old child, and its ‘mass of knotted joints’. It looks wretched. However, the ‘wretched thing forlorn’ is not only the thorn, but also and mainly the woman who has lost her child and her mind. The first five stanzas build up the story. We have a picture of the bizarre looking thorn, a little muddy pond never dries, and a heap covered in moss. Judging by the shape of the heap, it is an infant’s grave. We are then introduced to Martha Ray,

¹⁵² *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 77.

the tragic woman. Her appearance is gothic and fearful. Wearing a scarlet cloak, she goes to the grave and cries repeatedly ‘Oh misery! Oh misery!// Oh woe is me! Oh misery!’ (these two lines are recurrent in the poem. Phonetically, they suit the ballad form). Presumably, she also has a fearful face, as when the speaker sees her face, he turns away. ‘Her face it was enough for me’ (200) (we know the speaker is a man, from line 200, Stanza XVIII, ‘as I am a man’). The day he meets Martha is also a stormy day. She cries from daytime throughout to the night. The clear blue sky disappears, the water in the pond shake, and her cry is heard by all. It is a disturbing scene. Martha is mad. She is suspected of killing her own child. The thorn, the pond and her cry are fearful because of the woman associated with them: Martha Ray is wild, mad and crazy. Her state of being threatens us with the possibility of us being in the same state, in which we cease to function properly mentally. Out of fear, the speaker averts his eye. He does not name the poem after Martha Ray, because her story is heart-breakingly painful to revisit. Therefore, the thorn, as the witness to Martha Ray’s story, becomes the shifted centre of our attention.

Physical decline and mental illness threaten our existence and well-being, bringing fear; meanwhile, one’s self-realization is threatened by a metaphorical death: failing at what one does. David Simpson comments on the fact that Simon Lee is isolated without anyone in the village to help him. For him, “‘Simon Lee’ alludes to an idealized, pre-alienated culture in which the production of poetry by gifted individuals is rewarded by lavish recognition, reputation and wealth.”¹⁵³ It is nostalgic for the time when, under similar circumstances, help would be granted to Simon Lee, and nostalgic also for the time when poetry, produced by hard labour, would be granted recognition.

There is a sense of fear hovering above the narrative. Simon Lee, aged and weak, is no more a

¹⁵³ David Simpson, *Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement*, 2nd edn, first published in 1987 by Methuen & Co. Ltd. (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 159.

hunter, neither is he a husbandman. He is failing at his career. What if the poet, like Simon Lee, can no longer do what he does, which is to produce poetry? What if he, like Simon Lee, gets forgotten, and even worse, resented? That nobody helps Simon Lee is not simply because individuals are alienated in this economy driven culture, but perhaps because he is not welcome in the neighbourhood in the first place.

The hunter is an old profession in feudal society. Hunters serve the landed classes, the aristocracy and landed gentry. There were plenty of reasons why hunters were not popular among rural residents. For a start, hunting itself was disruptive and likely to cause depredations, which foreseeably would not please the farm tenants. Their rents sometimes were lowered, or the loss would be compensated in other ways. However, given the fact that a majority of landowners in eighteenth century British rural society relied on the income from farm rents, the profit from timber and other estate resources,¹⁵⁴ lowering the rent would compromise their income, therefore, likely to cause dispute. Hunters, associated with such depredations and disputes, understandably would not be greeted with much enthusiasm.

The unpopularity of Simon Lee and the abhorred consequences that no one would help him hint at the poet's own fear that his literary output may put him in similar situations. *Lyrical Ballads* is meant to be an experiment, a challenge to its readers, and as reflected in the 1800 'Preface', an attack on its contemporary literary taste. From Wordsworth's perspective, it would be disruptive and likely to cause discomfort among the readers. He aims at fostering a new taste, but this experiment also faces a potential failure. If it fails, the peril of its author being treated as Simon Lee causes fear. The poet's fear of inability to change the literary taste is translated into Simon Lee's weakness and inability to

¹⁵⁴ H. T. Dickinson, *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002), p. 141-142.

combat his natural aging, while the hostility *Lyrical Ballads* would likely face is transplanted into Simon Lee's isolation and alienation.

Up till now, fear of death is approached on an individual level: the decline of physical health, madness, and failure of self-realization as metaphorical death. On the social historical level, death is reflected as the gradual disappearing of a certain class of men, as in 'Michael'. Wordsworth, in a letter to Charles James Fox dated January 1801, laments the disappearing of the 'statesmen' as a social class.

I earnestly entreat your pardon for having detained you so long. In the two Poems, "The Brothers" and "Michael" I have attempted to draw a picture of the domestic affections as I know they exist amongst a class of men who are now almost confined to the North of England. They are small independent *proprietors* of land here called statesmen, men of respectable education who daily labour on their own little properties. The domestic affections will always be strong amongst men who live in a country not crowded with population, if these men are placed above poverty. But if they are proprietors of small estates, which have descended to them from their ancestors, the power which these affections will acquire amongst such men is inconceivable by those who have only had an opportunity of observing hired labourers, farmers, and the manufacturing Poor. Their little tract of land serves as a kind of permanent rallying point for their domestic feelings, as a tablet upon which they are written which makes them objects of memory in a thousand instances when they would otherwise be forgotten. It is a fountain fitted to the nature of social man from which supplies of affection, as pure as his heart was intended for, are daily drawn. This class of men is rapidly disappearing.¹⁵⁵

This letter was sent out with a copy of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, in the hope of promoting it. The disappearing class of men appears in this second edition. A good example is 'Michael'.

Inheriting a small property from ancestors, Michael and his family are living a life blessed with domestic affections, before a relative got into trouble and Michael offered to pay for the expense. It drives the family into a difficult position. They have to sell a proportion of the land. Then an opportunity comes up: Michael's only son Luke can be sent to the city to learn a trade. Both Michael

¹⁵⁵ EY, pp. 314-315.

and his wife are reluctant to send him away, especially Michael, for whom Luke is the apple of his eye. But in order not to lose the land that passes on from generation to generation in his family, Michael sends Luke away. The story ends with Luke convicted and sent overseas. Michael is devastated, and soon dies. His land and property are sold. The cottage they used to live in, 'the Evening Star', was demolished. The only thing that is left to remind people of the existence of Michael and his story is the pile of stone used in building an unfinished sheepfold (Michael had wished to build the sheep fold with Luke to remember his son before he goes to the city).

Another class of men disappearing is the one the Cumberland beggar represents. Wordsworth's concern about the soon-to-be-extinct classes is transparent when he writes in the paragraph preceding 'The Old Cumberland Beggar': 'the class of Beggars to which the old Man here described belongs, will probably soon be extinct. It consisted of poor, and, mostly, old and infirm persons...' ¹⁵⁶

The picture is quite bleak in these stories in *Lyrical Ballads*: things are disappearing—body, sanity, and social classes. Human beings cease to be, physically, mentally and socially. The fear culminates when there is no heir after these disappearing acts: the Indian woman's child is taken away and not to be found; Martha Ray's child is dead; Simon Lee does not have any children; Michael has no heir to inherit the property. In 'Old man travelling' (titled later changed to 'Animal Tranquillity and Decay, a Sketch' in the 1800 edition), the speaker encounters an old man travelling to meet his mariner son who 'from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,/ And there is dying in an hospital' (19-20). ¹⁵⁷ A contemporary review by Dr Burney suggests that we should not readily assume that the poem points against the war, because the son might have died from disease instead of fighting the war. ¹⁵⁸ We do

¹⁵⁶ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 228.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁵⁸ Dr. Burney, review published in *Monthly Review*, XXIX (June, 1799), in *Lyrical Ballads, a Casebook*, pp. 55-57. Burney's speculation is justifiable. Soldiers at war were exposed to not only disease resulted from poor diet, but also epidemics. One of the most wide spread infectious disease during the late eighteenth century typhus fever, which was spread among armies during the Napoleonic wars, as noted by Russell M. Wilder. Wilder, *The Problems of*

not know if the poet's intention is to blame the war for killing the son, nor do we know any information of the old man, however, what we do know is that this man, at an old age, is losing his son, an heir. When these incidences of losing heirs accumulate, it is apocalyptic. Fiona Stafford in "Strength in What Remains Behind": Wordsworth and the Last of the Race' rightly observes that the apocalyptic may not as serious as it seems: 'No longer was the notion of "the last" associated most readily with the Apocalyptic ending of mankind, six thousand years after the Creation: it could just as easily refer to the final representative of a declining people, family, trade, or community.'¹⁵⁹ But this thesis would argue that each people, family, class, occupation or community has its own stories and history. While the declining may not necessarily leads to the apocalyptic end of human race, there is still a potential danger of the rupture of the lineage of that specific history, which by and large, constitutes human history. In this sense, it is apocalyptic.

4.3. The Apocalypse, the Rupture and the Heir

Any discussion of the apocalypse will refer to its biblical sources at some point. The word apocalypse, according to Oxford English Dictionary, comes from the Greek word ἀποκαλύπτειν, meaning 'to uncover, disclose'. The Book of Revelation is called 'Apocalypsis' in the Greek and Latin Bibles. In The Book of Revelation, John is given the vision of the Great War between Michael leading the angels, and the dragon with Satan. Satan is defeated, a new world is subsequently established; the holy city Jerusalem becomes the bride of the lamb, Christ. The defeated Satan is locked in the bottomless pit

Transmission in Typhus Fever, *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jul., 1911), pp. 9-101.

¹⁵⁹ Fiona Stafford, "Strength in what Remains Behind": Wordsworth and the Last of the Race', in *The Last of The Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 134-159 (p. 134).

for a thousand years, after which he would be released for a brief period, only to be defeated again, and his followers will suffer a second death.

This fascinating narrative, with its apocalyptic vision and the aspiration of a new born earth, is widely celebrated in English literature, from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to Yeats' 'The Second Coming', and to contemporary disaster films in popular entertainment. Meanwhile, the study of the millennium in religious and political context is also well established. Norman Cohn's vigorous research in this field produced two books which are still worth revisiting: *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957) and *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come* (1993). Cohn's works, however, do not engage much with the millennium in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a time of turbulence, politically, socially and intellectually, and a time which witnesses the rise of the Romantics, Wordsworth included. Since the renewed interest in the Romantics in the late 1960s, scholars' works on Wordsworth usually makes some mention of the apocalyptic and the millennium. Geoffrey Hartman in his *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (1964) uses the phrase 'apocalyptic imagination' and defines it as 'the kind of imagination that is concerned with the supernatural and especially the last things'.¹⁶⁰ In *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), M. H. Abrams brings forth the idea of spiritual eschatology in individual writers who represent 'the soul's pilgrimage toward its private apocalypse',¹⁶¹ Wordsworth being one of them. Abrams suggests that Wordsworth's marriage metaphor is an internalization of the apocalypse, in which the lamb and the New Jerusalem are replaced respectively by the human mind and nature.

Abrams' idea of internalization has a profound influence on the study of the Apocalypse in Wordsworth. Morton D. Paley addresses Abrams's internalization theory in his recent exclusive study

¹⁶⁰ Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), p. x.

¹⁶¹ Abrams, p. 49.

of the apocalyptic and the millennium *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (1999). In the introduction, Paley offers a brief analysis of the passages in the bible relevant to the apocalyptic and millennial vision, including Isaiah 65, Daniel 2 and 7, Joel 2:28-32, and Matthew 24:29-30. He then situates Romantic poetry in the context of a revived interest in the millennium in late eighteenth century Britain. Various books published at this period concerned themselves with the apocalyptic and millennial aspiration, entangled with looming crisis or catastrophe in the political environment, mainly, the two revolutions (the American War of Independence 1775-1783 and the French Revolution 1789-1799), also later, the abolition of the slave trade (1807). Edmund Burke, Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, Tom Paine, and many others articulated their concerns through publications, and influenced generations to come. As Marilyn Butler in the introduction essay to *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy* (1984) notices, ‘For many of those who afterwards played a part in nineteenth-century, the course taken by the Revolution debate was significant, even formative.’¹⁶²

Paley’s chapter on Wordsworth in relation to the apocalypse and millennium focuses on five visionary moments in *The Prelude*. The passages he selects for analysis are, the discharged soldier in Book IV, the Arab dream in Book V, crossing the Alps and meeting French people celebrating the revolution in Book VI, and mount Snowdon in book XIII (Book XIV in the 1850 version). Paley views the relationship between the apocalyptic and the millennial in Wordsworth to be incoherent. There are moments when the poet is clearly invoking millennium, like in Book X: ‘...“Come now ye golden times,”/ Said I, forth-breathing on those open Sands/ A Hymn of triumph: “as the morning comes/ From out the bosom of the night, come Ye:/ Thus far our trust is verified; behold!”(1805, X, 541-545) The lines are followed by a vision in which the madness of the revolution is ‘...declared and visible,/

¹⁶² *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy*, ed. by Marilyn Butler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.1.

Elsewhere will safety now be sought, and Earth/ March firmly towards righteousness and peace.’ (550-552) However, sometimes the millennium never comes, for example, as noticed in Chapter 3, the dream of flood stops short in the Arab dream. In general, as Paley puts it, ‘what he (Wordsworth) perceives are alternative glimpses of apocalypse and millennium, without any structured relationship, befitting the confusion and turmoil both within and around him.’¹⁶³

One of the merits of Paley’s study is that through these analyses, the apocalyptic moves from a marginal existence scattered in *The Prelude* to a more prominent position. The key word in Paley’s discussion is ‘internalization’, inherited from Abrams. Unlike *The Prelude* in which one can find direct invocation of the apocalypse and millennium, in *Lyrical Ballads*, the apocalyptic is embedded in the narratives.

As discussed in the previous section, the fear of physical death sits at the bottom of the pyramid model of fear, above which there is the fear of mental dysfunction. While Maslow’s pyramid puts the need of self-realization on the very top, the fear of failing at it is also reflected in Wordsworth. At the same time, the disappearance of a certain class, like the ‘statesmen’ Michael represents, can stand for the threat of the metaphorical death of human society, as Wordsworth understood it. Moreover, the no-heir situation raises the ultimate fear and the most apocalyptic—the potential rupture of the human race and of history.

History in Wordsworth is complicated. Alan Liu’s *Wordsworth, the Sense of History* (1989) is a landmark study on this topic. He puts forward a theory of Wordsworth’s denial of history by examining the interplay of nature, history and the self. For Liu, Wordsworth explores the writing of poetry by exploring the idea of the tour and the techniques of painting. The formula Liu generates is that in

¹⁶³ Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 183.

Wordsworth, history marks the background, nature stands in the middle, while the real foreground is the tourist 'I'. Nature functions as a mediating force, which links imagination and the sense of history together, but once this is done, nature no longer plays a part in the self. 'The true apocalypse will come when history crosses the zone of nature to occupy the self directly, when the sense of history and Imagination thus become one, and nature, the mediating figure, is no more.'¹⁶⁴ Further on, Liu argues more radically, that there is no nature in Wordsworth: 'nature is only an idea validating as rightful existence the reservoir, brook, field, forest... More broadly, nature is the name under which we use the nonhuman to validate the human, to interpose a mediation able to make humanity more easy with itself.'¹⁶⁵ For Liu, the negotiation between history, nature, imagination and the self in Wordsworth also results in the breakdown of the genre he has long been using—the picturesque. A new genre is generated from this breakdown: the autobiographical.

There are two main issues in Liu's argument that the present section aims to either question or complicate: first, what history means for Wordsworth; second, how history highlights the prophetic quality in him.

The word history is borrowed from the Latin word 'historia'. Its meaning encompasses many things: the account of a person's life (from the beginning of the 12th century) and/or of events as relevant to a group of people; representations of historical events; narratives of real or imaginary events or story; and what is most commonly used today—recorded knowledge of past events(OED, 2013). Liu treats the concept of history carefully. Instead of simply using the word 'history', he uses 'the sense of history'. The rationale is that the nature of history is absence, since the stuff of history is not manifested here and now, as sight or touch. History is a retrospective term. At present, there is no

¹⁶⁴ Alan Liu, *Wordsworth, the Sense of History* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 31.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

way one could see or touch history. One can only sense history. ‘A sense, not yet formulated into idea, that depends perpetually upon something beyond’.¹⁶⁶

Liu’s reasoning is valid as far as the retrospective nature of history goes, but his argument also presupposes history as a chain of historical events. If we see history in the same light as modern disciplinary studies do, this should not be a problem. But the complication is the word ‘history’ as used today, and as used in Liu’s argument, may not necessarily be the same as the history Wordsworth concerns himself with primarily. The history he values has an antique tone. It points towards the account of the lives and stories of a person or a group of people more than chains of historical events. Wordsworth cares more about the stories, the narrative. Sometimes the stories are linked with historical events as in his crisis in relation to the French Revolution in *The Prelude*, but sometimes the narrative is developed without the presence of external historical events, as in many stories in *Lyrical Ballads*, such as the Indian woman, or Simon Lee. The denial of history, as Liu names it, is a denial of history as in historical events, but not necessarily history itself.

History as events is factual, while history as stories is literary. Wordsworth plays with the idea of poetry recording human history. The self-referential ‘I’ in *The Prelude* full of poetic aspirations, especially prophetic aspirations, is in action in *Lyrical Ballads*. Stories in *Lyrical Ballads* are marked by a sense of loss and sorrow, and are permeated by the apocalyptic fear—the potential rupture in human history. Bleak it may seem, the aspirational poet in *The Prelude* is making a conscious effort in his ballads in the hope of preserving ‘some portion of its human history’ (‘Home at Grasmere’, 635).¹⁶⁷

This ambition to preserve some portion of human history has a biblical tone. The poet’s ambition

¹⁶⁶ Liu, p.5.

¹⁶⁷ *Home at Grasmere*, p. 76.

forms a parallel to that of the prophet Malachi: 'For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts' (Malachi 2.7). The sense of preserving human history exhibits itself in at least two aspects: the role of nature, and the power of narrative.

To Wordsworth, nature and natural landscape function as a memorial of human history. *Lyrical Ballads* is full of memorials: the thorn is a memorial of Martha Ray's suffering; the unfinished sheepfold reminds people of Michael and the slow decay of the class he represents; the locations in 'Poems on the Naming of Places' serve as reminders of people after whom they are named. Objects in nature are treated as reminders of human stories. This view is shared among the poet's compositions around this time. It reminds us of nature in Grasmere. Newly settled in Grasmere, the speaker and his companion cast cheerlessness behind, and are prepared to joyously participate in the shared life in Grasmere vale, in which everything has a history. Even a tree new to the eye could be a familiar friend of someone else's.

Look where we will, some human heart has been
 Before us with its offering; not a tree
 Sprinkles these little pastures, but the same
 Hath furnished matter for a thought, perchance
 To some one is as a familiar Friend.
 Joy spreads and sorrow spreads;
 (659-663)¹⁶⁸

The thorn is Martha Ray's familiar friend, the northern lights are the Indian woman's friends, and the pile of stones is Michael's friend. Among them, sorrow spreads.

Beside, another party preserving human history is the narrative, first in oral form, then in written

¹⁶⁸ *Home at Grasmere*, p. 78.

form. The tales in *Lyrical Ballads* have their own sources, and the speaker is not the first teller. The speaker has already heard of Martha Ray's story before he finally gets the chance to meet her; Simon Lee's situation and Michael's story are known among the locals; Hart-Leap well acquired the name from the story long before the poet wrote a poem about it. The sources register the oral tradition: tales are told from generation to generation, person to person, by word of mouth. That is how the speaker comes to know the story of Martha Ray, or Michael, or Good Blake and Harry Gill.

Wordsworth, in quite a few poems, makes sure that readers are aware of the fact that he is retelling the stories, or in slightly unimaginative terms, recording the stories. 'Michael, a Pastoral' begins with a pastoral picture, in which the reader's attention is gradually directed to a heap of stones. It marks the unfinished sheepfold Michael tries to build with his son before the son goes away. It is the relics of Michael's story, which, according to the speaker, is one of the first tales that touch him. It teaches him passion, nature, and humanity. It leads him onto contemplating 'On man, the heart of man, and human life' (33).

Therefore, although it be a history
Homely and rude, I will relate the same
For the delight of a few natural hearts,
And with yet fonder feeling, for the sake
Of youthful Poets, who among these Hills
Will be my second Self when I am gone.
(34-39)¹⁶⁹

Two things in the above paragraph need to be highlighted: the use of the word 'history', and the sense of recording and inheritance. Referring to Michael's story as a history, the speaker is exploring the literary connotations of history, which is personal story, or narrative, rather than factual historical

¹⁶⁹ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 253.

events, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Retelling Michael's history, to some extent, immortalises it in poetic form. What the poem does is to capture the essence of the tale and preserve it. By recording and immortalising human history, poetry counteracts the apocalyptic fear of disappearance leading to the rupture in human history. What is in peril in reality is compensated by literature. Human history preserved in the poem will be revisited by future generations of poets. In other words, it is literature that carries the human history forward to future generations. Literature performs as the lost heir, to Martha Ray, to the Indian woman, and to Michael.

4.4. Memorial Objects and the Narrative Pattern

Natural objects in Wordsworth carry the memory of human stories, serving as memorials of human history. The reader's attention is first drawn onto those objects such as the thorn, or the heap of stones, then they hear the tale from the speaker telling what story behind those objects, while through those tales, the speaker is preserving some human history for future generations. These natural objects are conjunction points where stories in the past are told by the narratives at present with the hope to preserve some human history for future generations of readers. They are where the past, present and future merge.

Another example of those natural objects is Hart-Leap well. It is the small spring of water about five miles from Richmond in Yorkshire, which acquires its name from the local legend about a chase: Sir Walter chasing a deer to death. The water is where the hart takes its last leap in exhaustion and thirst, in an attempt to drink the water. In this chase, Sir Walter rides at such a remarkable speed that he exhausts two horses in a row. The poem opens with Sir Walter's command: 'Bring another Horse'

(4)! The chase, exciting for Sir Walter, is cruel to the horse and the deer. The horse is exhausted, 'Weak as a lamb the hour that it is yeanned,/ And foaming like a mountain cataract' (39-40). It is a victim sacrificed for Sir Walter's pleasure, so is the deer.

Upon his side the Hart was lying stretch'd:
His nose half-touch'd a spring beneath a hill,
And with the last deep groan his breath had fetch'd
The waters of the spring were trembling still.
(41-44)¹⁷⁰

The deer dies of exhaustion and thirst, while Sir Walter takes pleasure in this exceptional chase. He walks around, seeing and enjoying the beautiful nature, and comes up with the idea of building a pleasure house so he can maximize the pleasure. He dies in due course, but the tragedy of the poor deer is remembered by nature, which seems to take on a bleak look to mourn the death of the deer. 'The trees were grey, with neither arms nor head;/ Half-wasted the square mound of tawny green;' (109-110) A shepherd stops and informs the speaker of the tale, claiming that this place is cursed. It once thrived, now it is bare. No dog, or heifer, or horse, or sheep comes here and drinks from the well. Our sympathy is given to the deer which chooses this well as its death bed, for it is its native land. By contrast, the cruelty of the chase and Sir Walter are abhorrent. The abandoned mansion—the pleasure house Sir Walter built—stands as the monument of the deer's tragic death. Once again, objects serve a memorial function. The poem ends with the speaker's vision, in which nature, abandoning this place, will in due course, come back and thrive again.

The Pleasure-house is dust: —behind, before,
This is no common waste, no common gloom;

¹⁷⁰ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 134.

But Nature, in due course of time, once more
Shall here put on her beauty and her bloom.

She leaves these objects to a slow decay,
That what we are, and have been, may be known;
But, at the coming of the milder day,
These monuments shall all be overgrown.
(169-176)¹⁷¹

Such claim bears a prophetic tone. The pleasure house and the surrounding natural objects are monuments ensuring that ‘what we are, and have been, may be known’(174). The speaker looks forward to the ‘the coming of the milder day’ when humanity becomes milder. The moral is for us ‘Never to blend our pleasure or our pride/ With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels’ (179-180). It is the speaker’s vision that when that milder day of humanity comes, nature will restore beauty in this place, and the gloomy monuments will be overgrown. The speaker not only envisions a future restoration, but also draws a moral lesson that mankind should not seek pleasure or pride at the expense of even the meanest things.

The way ‘Hart-leap Well’ is narrated almost becomes a pattern in Wordsworth: the poem starts with objects or lives in nature, a tree or a lake, or animals, then it unfolds the memories and stories these things carry; by the end of the poem, either a moral lesson is drawn, or a vision is conveyed. In this process, natural objects or animals also become sacrificial or symbolic, like the hart in ‘Hart-leap Well’, the heap of stone in ‘Michael’, or later, the deer in *White Doe of Rylstone* (1815), or the ass in *Peter Bell* (1819). This visionary pattern places Wordsworth in another ancient prophetic tradition—the tradition of the seer.

¹⁷¹ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 139.

4.5. Supernatural Elements and the Seer Tradition

‘Beware of the ides of March.’ In Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, a soothsayer from the crowd warns Caesar when he makes his appearance on the street. According to the Julian calendar which Caesar established, the Ides of March is the fifteenth. It was on this day that Caesar was assassinated. On hearing the warning, he inquires, ‘What man is that?’ and he hears the confirmation from Brutus, ‘A soothsayer bids you beware the Ides of March’ (I, ii, 19).¹⁷² The Oxford English Dictionary refers to the soothsayer as ‘one who speaks the truth...claims or pretends to the power of foretelling future events...’. In the western classical tradition, soothsayers are closely related to the seers. A seer is the one for whom divine revelations are made in visions. There have been many records of both historical and literary seers.

The Delphic Oracle is probably the best known among others. Located high up on the cloud-capped Mount Parnassus, the Delphic Oracle was inspired by Apollo and was an authoritative source of oracles. There had been other sources, for instance, the oracles of Apollo at Patara and Branchidae, at Corope in Thessaly, and at Tegyra, Ptoon and Thebes in Boeotia. According to John Pollard, the supremacy of the Delphic Oracle was established from a very early age. In the period following the first sacred war, ‘Delphi became the political and spiritual arbiter of the entire Greek world’.¹⁷³ Pythia is the most recorded prophetess of the Delphic Oracle. She is believed to deliver prophecies in a frenzied manner. The Greek word for seer is *mantis* (μάντις), one who is in a special mental state. Plato associates *mantis* with *mania*, meaning madness. One of the well-known prophecies Pythia gave concerned Croesus, king of Lydia. Before attacking Persia, Croesus consulted the Oracle and was

¹⁷² William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. by Arthur Humphreys (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 103.

¹⁷³ John Pollard, *Seers, Shrines, and Sirens, The Greek Religious Revolution in the Sixth Century B.C.* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1965), p. 25.

given the prophecy that after crossing the Halys, he would destroy a great empire. Assuming the empire to be Persia, Croesus set out, only to be defeated and kept as a prisoner. On the day when he was to be executed by fire, Croesus was saved by the rain, said to be arranged by Apollo. Croesus went back to the Delphic Oracle, demanding an explanation. The Oracle defended herself by claiming that Croesus must make amends for his ancestor Gyge's crime, and the empire he would destroy was exactly his own.

Herodotus (c.484- 425/413 BCE) in *The Histories* provides the story of another Greek Seer, Euenius of Apollonia. It all begins in the land of Apollonia, where a flock of sheep was considered to be sacred and related to an oracle. They were taken care of by the people of Apollonia and kept in a cave away from the town. One night when Euenius was on shift, he carelessly fell into sleep and the sheep were attacked by a wolf. Sixty of them were killed. Euenius was found guilty and was sentenced to have his eyes cut out. It turned out that the wolf was sent by the gods, and the people of Apollonia had misjudged Euenius, so famine was brought to this land as punishment. The disaster could only be evaded by the people of Apollonia making amends to Euenius at his own wish. Euenius, knowing nothing about the oracle before, was misled into choosing only a house and two pieces of land. But thereafter, the power of divination was bestowed upon him. His son Deiphonus inherited the prophesying gift and served in the war between the Greek and the Persians, performing the ritual of sacrifice, though Herodotus also suggests that Deiphonus may not be Euenius' son, but only one who took advantage of the name.¹⁷⁴

The moral concern and sense of justice are shared in cases of Croesus and Euenius: Croesus had to pay the price for his ancestor's wrongdoing, and Euenius was given the power of divination as a

¹⁷⁴ Herodotus, *Translated from the Greek with Notes*, Vol 4, trans. by William Beloe (London: Leigh and S. Southeby, 1806), pp. 399-402.

compensation for his suffering. Justice is done in one way or another. This kind of moral justice is an important concern in many of Wordsworth's poems. In 'Hart-leap Well', the speaker hopes for a milder humanity in which the meanest spirits won't be treated cruelly as the hart. 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill' imposes upon the reader certain uneasiness by presenting a moral dilemma: poor Goody Blake steals some firewood in cold winter for her survival, while Harry Gill is just protecting his own property.

The moral concern in Wordsworth is presented with the help of certain supernatural power, the result of which is that the poems resemble the narratives of the seer. Like Pythia's prophecy which has elements of ambiguity because she did not say which empire Croesus would destroy, Wordsworth's supernatural treatment of the subjects sometimes causes confusion and is hard to decipher. For instance, Goody Blake vaguely resembles a witch as she casts a curse on Harry Gill. The thorn associated with Martha Ray's tragic story seems to be living forever. The dell the Danish boy lives in is the only barren place in the whole neighbourhood.

Although the moral concern and supernatural elements in Wordsworth resemble the tradition of Pythia, a more direct influence of the seer tradition on the poet may come from literature, specifically, Homer, Shakespeare and Milton. One well-known seer in Homer's *Odyssey* is Teiresias. The legend goes that Teiresias of Thebes was blinded, possibly by Athena or Hera, and was given the prophesying gift in compensation. He once took the form of a woman for seven years. In the *Odyssey*, after arriving at the land of the Cimmerians, Odysseus performed a ritual to awake the dead, when Teiresias rose and informed him of his fortune, telling him 'Know; to the spectres that thy bev'rage taste, / The scenes of life recur, and actions past:/ They, seal'd with truth return the sure reply,/ The rest, repell'd,

a train oblivious fly'(trans. by Alexander Pope Book XI, 180-183).¹⁷⁵ Teiresias thus became a legendary figure appearing repeatedly in Greek literature, including Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (first performed about 429 BC.), in which Teiresias is asked to assist the investigation of king Laius' death. Another seer Homer records is Chalcas, claimed as 'Chalcas the wise, the Grecian priest an guide,/ The sacred seer, whose comprehensive view,/ The past, the present and the future knew.' (Pope trans. I, 92-94) It is believed that apart from predicting the future, seers can also see through the past and present. In fact, the primary task of the oracle was to offer advice about current problems, and was not necessarily confined to predictions of the future. Pythia did not only give predictions of Croesus' future, but also was able to provide interpretations of his present failure and attribute it to the crime his ancestor committed in the past.

The mystique of seers is shown in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (first performed in 1611). Leontes, King of Sicilia, suspects his Queen Hermione has committed adultery with his brother Polixenes, King of Bohemia. In order to confirm his guess, Leontes sends officers to consult the Oracle, and is told that 'Hermione is chaste; Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject; Leontes a jealous tyrant; his innocent babe truly begotten; and the king shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found.' (Act III, Scene 2, 130-134)¹⁷⁶ Leontes, not believing the oracle, finally loses his son, daughter and the Queen, and Camillo flees to Bohemia. The expelled daughter Perdita is saved by a shepherd and later falls in love with Florizel, Polixenes' son. It is only sixteen years later when Perdita and Florizel come to Sicilia seeking marriage approval from Polixenes that the remorseful Leontes regains his daughter and his Queen, who seems miraculously to come back to life from being a statue (or rather, she does not die in the first place, only having been hiding). *The Winter's Tale* is usually

¹⁷⁵ *Poems of Alexander Pope, IX, The Translations, The Odyssey*, ed. by Maynard Mack, Norman Callan, et al (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 390.

¹⁷⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. by Ernest Schanzer (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 48.

taken as a tragicomedy in which the transition from the tragic first part to the merry second part is abrupt, but the oracle serves as a thread uniting the whole plot.

The concept of the seer also appears in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Near the end of Book XII, Adam claims that 'How soon hath thy prediction, seer blest,/ Measured this transient World...' (553-554)¹⁷⁷ The seer he refers to is Michael. Adam learns the future from Michael, knowing that Jesus will be sent by God, suffer for men, be prosecuted, and finally gain resurrection. His disciples will be persecuted too, but Jesus will impart 'the spirit of God' to his believers. On hearing Michael's account, Adam is reassured and comforted, wakes Eve, holds her hands, and marches towards the gate of the Garden of Eden and a new world. Signs showing Milton's knowledge of the Greek seer tradition can also be found in *On the Morning of Christ Nativity, The Hymn* (1629). The young Milton utilizes the oracle for his purpose in praising Jesus. 'The Oracles are dumm,/ No voice or hideous humm,/ Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving./ *Apollo* from his shrine/ Can no more divine,/ With hollow shriek the steep of *Delphos* leaving.' (XIX, 173-178)¹⁷⁸ The significance of the birth of Jesus surpasses all, in comparison to which, Apollo is not divine any more.

The references to seers in Wordsworth may have been influenced by these three preceding poets, although it is extremely hard to pin down the exact sources. The Oracle is mentioned in 'Laodamia' (composed in 1814). Laodamia was the wife of Protesilaus who died in the Trojan War. On hearing her husband's death, Laodamia committed suicide. They were buried aside, and trees growing out of their tombs withered at the top, overseeing the walls of Troy. At the beginning of the poem, Laodamia is performing a sacrifice ritual to ask Jupiter to bring her husband to her sight. Her wish is answered as she has a vision in which Protesilaus appears and tells her about his heroic sacrifice in Trojan War.

¹⁷⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 315.

¹⁷⁸ *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. by Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 400.

‘... The Delphic oracle foretold / That the first Greek who touch’d the Trojan strand/ Should die;...’ (37-39)¹⁷⁹ Protesilaus was among those who were hiding in the Trojan Horse and became the first victims, thus fulfilled the oracle.

Two elements require special attention here, one is the sacrifice ritual Laodamia performs, and the other is the vision she experiences. The sacrifice ritual was common among the ancient seers, especially for those who served the military. The widely used tools for interpretation were animal entrails, flying birds and dreams. Sheep liver was used to foretell the ideal time for sending out troops. There would be a ritual sacrifice, in which the sheep liver was placed on the altar. Blemishes appeared in the liver were studied, and certain patterns of the blemish were interpreted as good signs, while others were claimed to be bad omens. The significance of different types of birds and stories related were also studied. The poet Hesiod is said to have composed a poem called *Ornithomanteia*, offering readings of the signs of birds. Calchas from the *Iliad* is said to be the best interpreters of birds. ‘The best, By far, of augurs versed in flight of birds, one who knew well the present, past and future.’ (Thomas Starling Norgate, Trans. 69-71. Pope’s translation does not make it clear that tools used here are the birds)¹⁸⁰ Another common craft among seers was dream interpreting. In Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* (possibly around 415 BC), Prometheus is said to teach man practices of divination. The first of them is the interpretation of dreams. Xenophon in *Anabasis* provides his autobiography as a seer, in which he records a dream sent by Zeus containing how to conduct ritual sacrifice, read the signs of the birds, and interpret omens. Laodamia offers sacrifice, and in return, she is granted a vision of her husband, in which she gets the truth of her husband’s death.

The animal sacrifice and vision are also addressed in ‘Hart-leap Well’. In a way, the deer plays

¹⁷⁹ William Wordsworth, *Shorter Poems 1807-1820*, ed. by Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univeristy Press, 1989), p. 144.

¹⁸⁰ Homer. *The Iliad*, trans. by T.S. Norgate (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1864), p. 4.

the role of the animal being sacrificed, and the speaker experiences the vision of a milder humanity in which he sees nature restoring the place to its prime. He is functioning as a seer-like figure, which is common throughout *Lyrical Ballads*. There is no definite answer to whether the speakers in those poems are one and same, but they do seem to share things in common. A possible sketch is: the speaker is a traveller who travels among the subjects he writes about: Simon Lee, Martha Ray, Michael, or the old Cumberland beggar. He hears the tales, retells them, and expresses his moral concern. During this process, some supernatural power is in force. Special meanings and memorial functions are given to natural objects to such an extent that these natural objects seem to be supernatural, like the thorn, or the deserted valley in 'Hart-leap Well'.

The picture of a traveller travelling, telling stories with the help of supernatural elements, while addressing the moral, echoes another type of seer: the street seers. Seers in ancient Greece were not limited to the role of military consultants such as Tisamenus and Deiphonus; neither did all of them live high up like the Delphic Oracle. Authoritative as the Delphic Oracle was, its accessibility was fairly limited. The secluded location made the journey less affordable, and it only provided prophecies on the seventh of each month, excluding the three months in winter when Apollo was not attending. The limited accessibility of the authoritative oracle and the belief in and need of consulting seers contribute to the phenomenon that seers became a social class and their practice of divination became a profession. Michael Attyah Flower in *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (2008) points out three kinds of historical seers, the upper-class ones accompanying generals in battle, the oracle prophets living in seclusion, and the street seers providing purifying rituals and various interpretations.

The third type of seers, the street seers, constituted an important part of Greek everyday life. They wandered among the Greeks, and provided healing or fortune telling. Plato in the *Republic* offers a

negative sketch of the seers, who knock at the doors of the rich, persuading them that ‘they have a power at command, which they procure from heaven, and which enables them, by sacrifices and incantations performed amid fasting and indulgence, to make amends for any crime committed either by the individual himself or by his ancestors.’¹⁸¹ For those professional seers, the claim to have inherited a prophesying gift from their ancestors was common. As Flower observes, ‘Seercraft was a high-status profession that tended to be passed down in certain families.’¹⁸² Some seers claimed to be the descendants of the legendary seer Melampus, able to understand the language of animals, and some changed their names in order to create a sense of mystery and authority.

In Wordsworth, the role of this travelling seer-like speaker in *Lyrical Ballads* merges with the poet’s function. The speaker is the poet’s metaphorical self. They share the same poetic aspiration which is to immortalise human history of the past in the narratives with the hope of future restoration. Parallel to the speaker who resembles the street seers in terms of the way they work, poets, for Wordsworth, are connected with ancient seers through their ability to see the truth.

The shared ability to experience an inner vision between the poet and the seer is emphasised. Sometimes such inner vision is contrasted by physical blindness. Teiresias and Euenius are both blind and given the prophesying gift as compensation. Phineas, the seer of the Argonauts, was punished by Zeus for disclosing the plan of the gods and lost his eyesight. Wordsworth in *The Prelude* claims the importance of the inner imaginative faculty by declaring that the bodily eye is ‘The most despotic of our senses...’ (XI, 174). It seems that only by freeing oneself from the outward bondage of the eye can one gain a thorough understanding of the world. In ‘Immortality Ode’ (composed 1802-4,

¹⁸¹ *The Republic of Plato*, trans. by John Llewelyn Davies, and David James Vaughan (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd, 1908), p. 47.

¹⁸² Michael Attyah Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 47.

published 1807), Wordsworth describes poets as eyes among the blind, and blessed seers who understand truth naturally. They are unlike common people who have difficulty in obtaining clarity of insight. ‘Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!// On whom those truths do rest,/ Which we are toiling all our lives to find’(114-116).¹⁸³ Even in his later poetry, Wordsworth seems to be fascinated by the idea that seers can unveil the hidden truth. ‘Roman Antiquities Discovered at Bishopstone, Herefordshire’ in *Miscellaneous Sonnets* (1842) begins with the antiquarians’ search, and then fades into a vivid and imaginative account of the past by the bard and seer. ‘While poring Antiquarians search the ground/ Upturned with curious pains, the Bard, a Seer,/ Takes fire: —The men that have been reappear’ (1-3).¹⁸⁴

If in *The Prelude*, the poet’s prophetic aspirations and self-doubt resemble those of the biblical prophets, then in *Lyrical Ballads*, the narrative pattern (objects or animal—human story—vision or moral lesson) places him close to the seer tradition, with the travelling speaker acting like a reminiscence of the ancient Greek seer, and the poet resembling the seer in terms of acute inner vision, and ability to interpret the past, present and future, and to obtain truth. The moral concern is also expressed at various places in *Lyrical Ballads*, but as discussed above, it can appear with a certain degree of ambiguity.

On the whole, *Lyrical Ballads* is a typical example of Wordsworth’s attempt at self-fashioning as a prophetic poet by making use of apocalyptic elements and the seer tradition. The Apocalyptic elements, conventionally seen as modes of internalization following Abrams, have a different function in *Lyrical Ballads*: they are a vehicle to channel the poet’s perception of poetry: poetry which can

¹⁸³ William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 274.

¹⁸⁴ William Wordsworth, *Last Poems 1821-1850*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 90.

bridge the rupture in human history.

Chapter 5

In the Name of the Nation:

Wordsworth's National Concerns and the Prophetic

Concern for the nation has always been a key component of the prophetic. The biblical prophets concerned themselves with the welfare and morality of the nation; the Welsh bards sang for the national independence of Wales faced with oppression from the English kings; and the Greek military seers looked to the triumph and glory of their nation in the battlefield.

The national concern in Wordsworth resonates with those of the prophets and the bards, in the sense that they all express a deep care and love of the nation with which they choose to identify themselves. But Wordsworth's national concern is a little more complicated. He lived in a time when nations, nationalism, and literature were all taking on their modern forms. The word nation, as a concept, in the post enlightenment era, was given more complex connotations than it ever had before. The enlightened nation is not the same as the nation in the Bible, nor does it mean the same as it did to the Welsh bards. Nation and nationalism as an area of research have become firmly established in their own right. They are being investigated in the context of politics, history, and literature. Figuratively speaking, once the apple has been eaten, Adam and Eve can never go back. Once studies on nation and nationalism have been established, one cannot have a discussion on national concern in Wordsworth without addressing discussions and theories in these areas. They may mean quite different things for Wordsworth and for modern day readers. We need to look at some of the important discussions on this subject to be able to see to what extent Wordsworth's idea of nation does or does not coincide with modern day nation and nationalism.

This chapter will start from a selective overview of the study of the concept of nation, highlighting several influential studies of this field. It then will explore the national concern in Wordsworth, with the aim to demonstrate how Wordsworth's 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' contributes to the discourse of nation in post-French Revolution period, also, and more importantly, the prophetic as an indispensable rhetoric in Wordsworth's writing.

5.1. Nation and Patriotism in Eighteenth Century British Literature: A Brief Account

'There is no great literature without nationality, no great nationality without literature,' claims Yeats when discussing Browning.¹⁸⁵ The concern about one's tribe, or native country men has always been embedded in literature. The Old Testament is an obvious example. But the concept of and discourse on nationalism is a fairly modern invention promoted by Ernest Renan (1823-1892), and in recent half a century, by Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, E.J. Hobsbawm, and in literature, Homi K. Bhaba. A brief overview of the history of the evolution of nationalism will set a context for our discussion.

The word 'nationalism' derives from 'nation', which comes from Latin 'nātiō', meaning 'birth'. The idea of blood and breeding is implied. Middle English changes it to 'nacioun', and in modern English, it is 'nation'. Its adjective form 'national' comes from early modern French 'national'.¹⁸⁶

The nation gradually became an object of study in the late nineteenth century. Studies on nation and nationalism often look back to Ernest Renan for the definition of nation. Renan's 1882 lecture 'What is a Nation' (Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?) offers several influential understandings of the modern nation. According to Renan, the old standards to define a nation—same race, common language, one

¹⁸⁵ William Butler Yeats, *Letters to the New Island*, ed. by Horace Reynolds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 103-104.

¹⁸⁶ Eric Partridge, *Origins, A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London: Routledge, 1961), p. 428.

religion—are no longer applicable in defining modern nations; seeing a nation as a community of interest lacks of sentiments; geographical borders no longer play a decisive role. Renan then offers his solution: nation as a spiritual principle.

Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.¹⁸⁷

This is a liberal definition of the nation. It emphasises the willingness to accept a certain cultural legacy as a determinant in nation formation. This seems to be interestingly applicable to Wordsworth, who places importance on the English legacy formed by ancient Shakespearian kings and knights, and poets like Chaucer and Milton, which we will see in Section 3 in this Chapter.

The discussion on nation was most vigorous in the 1980s and 1990s when several significant works were published and shaped this area of study. They were: Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1982), Ernest Gellner's *Nation and Nationalism* (1983), E.J. Hobsbawm's *Nation and Nationalism Since 1780* (1991), Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (1992) and a collection of essays edited by Homi K. Bhabha named *Nation and Narration* (1990).

One significant difference between the collection of essays edited by Bhabha and the works of Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawm, is the discipline in focus. The essays offer insights on how narratives reflect or form the nation, while works of the other three focus on establishing a theory of the nation. Anderson sees the nation as an imagined community, the rise of which is brought by print-capitalism, new provincial elite and bureaucratic 'weld' or grafting of nations onto empire. Print-

¹⁸⁷ Ernest Renan, 'What is a nation', trans. by Martin Thorn, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 8-22 (19).

capitalism is Anderson's contribution to our understanding of nation formation. He traces the development of the printing industry and argues that after Latin gradually faded out, the printing industry, driven by profits, started to produce cheaper books written in vernacular languages. This created a common language that lies below the wide-spread Latin but is usable across a larger area than local dialect, which contributed to the rise of national consciousness. 'The convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.'¹⁸⁸ Regardless of print capitalism, at least the importance of common language in shaping the national consciousness is important in Wordsworth who repeatedly expresses his pride of speaking 'the tongue/ That Shakespeare spake' (Sonnet 16, 11-12, in 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty', *Poems, in Two Volumes*, 1807).¹⁸⁹

Gellner, in *Nation and Nationalism*, sees nation as a shared membership. His focus is on how the modern nation and nationalism come into being, and the intricate relationship between nation and state. For Gellner, human society shifts from savage culture to cultivated culture. Modern nation and nationalism participate in building the cultivated culture, in which the high culture needs a political entity for its realisation and enforcement. Gellner's *Nation and Nationalism* is an important book, but compared to Anderson's theory, it is of less immediate concern to this thesis. The emphasis of the present thesis is on how Wordsworth, as a poet, articulates his national concern and in turn contributes to the eighteenth century discourse of the nation. Like Renan and Anderson, it puts emphasis on the spiritual principle and language. Hobsbawm's study of historical nation formation since 1780 is not consulted here for the same reason.

¹⁸⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 46.

¹⁸⁹ *Poems, in Two Volumes*, p. 167.

Simon During in 'Literature—Nationalism's other? The Case for Revision' examines the correlation between literature and nationalism in the eighteenth century, which, according to During, is a time when literature and nationalism were both taking a modern form. The project of this essay is to free literature from nationalism, and give literature a neutral voice. Literature is a 'repository of culture, tradition, the life in language itself—an identity which can only be asserted by a rhetorical shuttling back and forth between literature as propositionless force and literature as bulwark against dissolution.'¹⁹⁰ To illustrate this point, During makes prose writing his object of study, namely journalism and the novel, and he proposes to investigate the 'civil imaginary', which provides representations of social existence shown in Addison, Steele, Fielding, Scott, and many other writers at that time. Nationalism did not simply start from the French revolution. In Britain, During argues, nationalism was tied to patriotism in the early eighteenth century, which has more to do with the Tory approach defending civic and legal rights, and valorising constitutions in order to counteract the Whig abuse of power. It first exhibited itself in the idea of benevolence as in Bolingbroke. Gradually, proto-nationalist symbolization entered into literature, along with the discussion of contested ideas of liberty and freedom, represented by Pope and Fielding. By this point, nation and freedom were indivisible. But During argues that literature is innocent of those nationalist symbolizations, because literature, by nature, preserves the cultural and tradition of its time. Later on, Burke proposed the idea of counter-revolution which had an immense influence on the novel. Counter-revolution accepts the nation as the legitimizing socio-political unit. But rather than appealing to the enlightened nationalism which deals with common law, state, freedom, language, reason and so on, counter-revolution turns to family, the church, civil society and a hatred of theory, and thus it has the potential to be universal. Scott's and

¹⁹⁰ Simon During, 'Literature—Nationalism's Other? The Case for Revision', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 138-153 (149).

Austen's writings follow such ideas. Their writings attempt to represent a reality for mimesis' sake, and are unmotivated by conscious political theories. Although localized, they also transcend nature and culture. To conclude, During argues that nationalism, in eighteenth-century England, was antagonistic to oppression; counter-revolution in literature works for the preservation of culture and subjectivity, and it connects the nation to the universal. Nationalism is problematic. It is a prevalent sentiment intricately linked with politics: 'nationalism is reproduced in the mass public sphere by becoming a poetry which is not poetry, authorized by the state.'¹⁹¹

During's controversial revision of nationalism and literature in eighteenth century English literature is illuminating. To a large extent, nationalism in the eighteenth-century British context is not the eighteenth-century nationalism we think we know, which is more about the struggle to gain national independence and sovereignty, as explored in Hobsbawm. This other kind of nationalism, in the eighteenth-century British context, was more concerned with British superiority in terms of liberty and/or freedom, and patriotism, in which literature played an important part.

Dustin Griffin's book *Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2002) provides a useful sketch of how poetry in the eighteenth century reflected and assisted the discourse on national concerns and patriotism. For Griffin, the old distinction between the 'Augustan age' ending in the 1740s and the 'age of sensibility' cannot cover the diversity of the poetry produced in this century. Patriotism was an important theme in this period. Major conclusions Griffin draws are: first, the discussion of patriotism fuelled by the patriot opposition to Walpole in the 1730s was vigorous throughout the eighteenth century, in pamphlets, ballads, and verses;¹⁹² second, poetry in the mid and

¹⁹¹ During, p. 151.

¹⁹² Griffin's book covers a variety of patriotic writings, some of which he discusses in great detail including pamphlets such as Henry St. John Bolingbroke's controversial *The Idea of a Patriot King* (written in 1738, published in 1749) and John Conybeare's *True Patriotism, a Sermon* (1749). In poetry, Griffin chooses to write extensively on William Collins's *Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects* (1746), Thomas Gray's *Elegy* (1751), and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770), among many others. Griffin's book demonstrates convincingly that

late eighteenth century engaged itself with the public discussion of national issues such as war and peace, empire, commerce (examples are the poems of Thomson, Collins, and Gray); third, the patriotic in eighteenth century poetry took various forms; fourth, not only poets but also critics were concerned with the discourse of patriotism.¹⁹³

The eighteenth century tradition of poetry engaging itself with national concern as Griffin observes is reflected in Wordsworth whose national concerns are further complicated by three elements: the ambiguity of patriotism cloaked in the anxiety of empire and the role of poets and poetry, both of which are entangled with the prophetic.

5.2. 'to tread the grass/Of England once again': the Strange Sense of National Superiority

The prophetic is often linked with politics. It is so in Wordsworth as well. *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807) is one of the few occasions when Wordsworth's writing is explicitly about politics. Other works in this category are *The Convention of Cintra* (1809) and the unpublished 'A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff' (1793). But one has to be reminded that these two are both prose, while *Poems, in Two Volumes* is in verse, and Wordsworth was primarily known as a poet in his own time as in ours. *The Prelude* also contains political matters, such as the poet's belief in and disillusionment about the French revolution. But the prophetic in relation to the national concern always involves an audience, and because *The Prelude* was only published posthumously, it is less effective in demonstrating the poet's self-fashioning as a prophetic poet than those works published in his own time. That explained, *Poems, in Two Volumes* is distinctive in terms of the expressiveness of its political interests and the

the patriotic writing was indeed an important phenomenon in the eighteenth century Britain.

¹⁹³ Dustin Griffin, *Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 292-295.

prophetic, especially in the sonnet series, 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty'.

Studies on Wordsworth's complex political outlook have never been lacking. Marilyn Butler in *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981) asserts that the poet's *Lyrical Ballads* empowers the poor and the low, and that is why Francis Jeffery attacked Wordsworth even though he confessed, in private, that he was moved by these ballads. 'He did not dislike Wordsworth's experiment absolutely but he did dislike it in the context of the time, when England was at war with revolutionary France, and fears of subversion from within had never been fully laid to rest.'¹⁹⁴ Nicholas Roe in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (1988) presents a radical Wordsworth in his youth, who was much under William Godwin's influence.¹⁹⁵ E. P. Thompson is sceptical of Roe's argument. He argues in 'Wordsworth's Crisis' that it is not disillusionment with Godwin that contributes to the poet's crisis recorded in *The Prelude*, but rather the disturbing progress and regression of the French Revolution that is responsible for the poet's suffering.¹⁹⁶ David Simpson, highlighting the public discourse in Wordsworth, claims that the poet's writings 'contain a sophisticated (if often implicit) reformulation of the traditional defence of civic or public virtue against the dangerous effect of a commercial and industrial economy.'¹⁹⁷

What has not been given enough attention, however, is the distinctive prophetic voice Wordsworth adopts when voicing those political concerns. The prophetic voice, images, visions, figures and aspirations are what distinguish the poet from politicians or pamphlet writers. Deciphering Wordsworth's political thought is important in understanding the poet, but equally important are the

¹⁹⁴ Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries, English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 61-62.

¹⁹⁵ Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), especially pp.192-198.

¹⁹⁶ E.P. Thompson, 'Wordsworth's Crisis', first published in *London Review of Books*, 1988, reprinted in *The Romantics, England in a Revolutionary Age* (Suffolk: Merlin Press, 1997), pp. 75-95.

¹⁹⁷ David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination, the Poetry of Displacement* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p. 3.

distinctive ways through which he expresses them. And in ‘Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty’, the ways are gesturing towards the prophetic. What Wordsworth does here is innovative. First, the sonnet form has never been much involved in political writings. Choosing it, the poet is adding political tension into a conservative form, and by doing so, he is exploring possibilities of this poetic form; second, unlike his contemporaries such as Burke who offers critical commentaries on political issues, Wordsworth takes a humanitarian approach in writing about individual sufferings and emotions.

‘Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty’ starts with a group of sonnets written in Calais, which can be called ‘the fall of Calais’. These compositions are saturated with lamentations, nostalgia, and disappointments: Calais, once free and full of joy, is now dead and desolate. It is a miniature of the rise and fall of the French Revolution. Wordsworth first came to Calais when he was walking across Europe with his university friend Robert Jones in 1790. That was an exciting time both for the French revolutionists and for Wordsworth as a young university student, inspired by the revolution and the freedom and liberty it promised. Biographical evidence suggests that a decade later in 1802 when these sonnets were composed, Wordsworth’s circumstances had altered greatly. He must have felt being betrayed by the Revolution, which, instead of bringing liberty, introduced a new tyrant. The war between Britain and France kept him away from Annette Vallon and their daughter. The Treaty of Amiens was signed on 27 March, 1802, which made the trip back to France possible. Four months later in August, Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy went over to Calais with the intention to settle the matter between the poet and Annette, before he could marry Mary Hutchinson.

We cannot know how much emotional distress over this personal matter is suppressed in these sonnets. But what is apparent in these Calais sonnets is the poet’s distress about the failure of revolution. The concern, however, is not mainly about Calais and France, but more about England, his

own nation. The emotions are complicated. On one hand, the speaker is proud of Britain as a free standing nation, free from tyrannical rule, but on the other hand, there is also a fear that Britain, as France's neighbour, will be dragged into the French chaos of tyranny. Pride and fear are juxtaposed. One is inseparable from the other.

Several sonnets in the series demonstrate this tension between pride and fear. In Sonnet 1, England is identified as the speaker's dear country. It has to be pointed out that in most cases, Wordsworth does not distinguish England from Britain when addressing his own nation. The complications behind this address are interesting. He does have a sense of the individuality of the English, the Welsh, the Scottish and the Irish, but for the time being in our discussion, Wordsworth, when faced with other European nations like France, tends to see Britain as a whole, and does not make distinctions between England and Britain. For him, England and Britain, as political entity, is interchangeable. We could criticize him because of the hegemony embedded in this address, but dwelling on that topic would be a digression from our current discussion, which focuses on the prophetic as a rhetoric. Wordsworth's national concern manifests itself best in his idea of Britain as a whole facing foreign threats. This sounds familiar if one recalls Linda Colley's argument and comprehensive demonstration that Britishness is fashioned not only in reaction to internal but also external stimuli, including those from the continental and transatlantic connections.¹⁹⁸

While seeing England across the channel from Calais, the speaker, overtaken by patriotic feelings, utters blessings: 'Fair Star of Evening, Splendor of the West,/ Star of my Country!' (Sonnet 1, 1-2) and together with England, 'Blessings be on you both! one hope, one lot,/ One life, one glory!' (11-12). The patriotic feeling is based on the belief in Britain's superiority over other nations, as observed

¹⁹⁸ Linda Colley, *Britons, Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

in During's essay discussed earlier. France, once engulfed in revolution terror, is now desolate, devoid of liberty and freedom, as illustrated by the poet's lament for the Negro woman. She is meek, dejected, and pitiable. She sits there, 'silent, motionless in eyes and face' (9), a representative of the oppressed black race in France.

She was a Negro Woman driv'n from France,
Rejected like all others of that race,
Not one of whom may now find footing there;
This the poor Out-cast did to us declare,
Nor murmur'd at the unfeeling Ordinance.
(Sonnet 9, 10-14)

No background information on the Negro woman is provided within the poem, other than the word 'ordinance', alluding to the complicated history of the French Ordinances about black people, entangled with the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), which cumulated around the time when Wordsworth was in Calais. The revolt of slaves in the French colony of Saint-Domingue started from 1791, of which Toussaint L'Ouverture was an important leader. In 1794, France abolished slavery, but in 1802 the Napoleon army captured L'Ouverture and restored slavery in Saint-Domingue. L'Ouverture was sent to France where he died in Prison. Sonnet 8 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' is dedicated to this black leader. The black woman in Sonnet 9 is probably a victim of the French Ordinance on 2 July, 1802, which forbade all people of colour from entering the continental French and any such person living in France without government approval would be expelled.

The issue of slavery in both France and Britain is a complicated matter. On the French side, there were twist and turns, and regressions in general. As early as in 1571, the French parliament declared the Freedom Principle which says any slave upon arriving at the French soil would be free. The tension

was building up when more and more landowners travelled back to France with their domestic black servants. Initially, Louis XIV granted freedom to individual black slave petitioners. Then government came up with the royal Edict of October 1716, ordering the landowners or traders to register their black slaves upon arrival. If they should fail to do so, the slaves would be recognised as free. The Declaration of 1738 reaffirmed the 1716 Edict and set a limit of three years on the slaves' stay in France. The situation of black people in continental France or those attempting to enter France got worse when the 1777 Declaration Pour La Police des Noirs prohibited the entry of people of colour into France. Slave owners could still bring slaves with them on the sea voyage, but depots at each French port were set up, and the slaves, upon arrival, would be detained and deported. In July 1802, the Declaration was supplemented by another Ordinance, which is probably what Wordsworth had in mind. On top of that 'aucun noir, mulâtre, ou autres gens de couleur, de l'un et de l'autre sexe' (any black, mulatto, or other person of color, of either sex) cannot enter France; any people of colour living in France without government approval would be expelled.¹⁹⁹ This Negro woman in Wordsworth's sonnet is possibly one of those people who does not have government approval.

The speaker laments this unfair treatment black people encountered in France. Pity and sympathy are apparent. Black people in Britain were not much better off than their French counterparts, but this is conveniently omitted by the speaker, who, upon landing on England, describes an immense national pride of being in the 'free' country. The following sonnet, Sonnet 10, is a manifestation of such national pride. Once again, they land on the English arcadia. 'The Cock that crows, the Smoke that curls, that sound/ Of Bells' (2-3), and the boys playing cricket. 'All, all are English' (6)

¹⁹⁹ For a detailed account of the situation of black people in the French Revolution, please refer to Sue Peabody, *Three Are No Slaves in France', the Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancient Regime* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), and Shelby T. McCloy, *The Negro in France* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961).

Europe is yet in Bonds; but let that pass,
 Thought for another moment. Thou art free
 My Country! And 'tis joy enough and pride
 For one hour's perfect bliss, to tread the grass
 Of England once again...
 (Sonnet 10, 9-13)

The picture on this side of the Channel is much more pleasant than that at Calais. The speaker's national pride is generated from the contrast of the current status quo in Britain where things are at peace and France where tyranny rules, upheavals prevail and oppressions happen, like what the black woman experiences.

But England was not 'free' when he wrote them in 1802. Globally, Britain was still responsible for the slave trade. It was a few years before the slave trade was abolished under the Slave Trade Act of 1807, and it was a good thirty years before the Slave Abolition Act (1833), by which slavery itself was abolished, but with exceptions for the sake of economic profits. For example, the territories possessed by the East Indian Company were exempted from this act until 1843. Domestically, the oppression of black people was still an issue, although not as explicit as in France where government acts and ordinances made it clear that people of colour were not welcome within the kingdom. Folarin Olawale Shyllon's book *Black People in Britain, 1555-1833* (1977) offers a very useful account of the situation in Britain. He agrees on 1555 as the first time Africans set foot on the British soil when John Lok, a trader, brought five Africans with the agenda that they would learn English and work as interpreters for the slave trade. Over the years, the population of black people in Britain increased. An estimated ten to twenty thousand black people were residing in Britain throughout the eighteenth century. As a common practise, the West Indian planters, merchants and traders, when returning to

Britain, brought their black personal attendants, who were commonly treated as properties, obliged to wear collars, and freely bought and sold, or bequeathed to relatives.²⁰⁰ The famous 1772 Somerset case, although ended with James Sommersett being discharged, did not end the slave trafficking altogether.²⁰¹

So when Wordsworth composed the sonnets in and around 1802, it is more of national pride than facts that compels the speaker to claim England is free. For the speaker, not only now, but also historically, Britain enjoyed glory. Sonnet 16: 'In our Halls is hung/ Armoury of the invincible Knights of old' (9-10), also 'In every thing we are sprung/ Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold' (13-14). Pride and fear are juxtaposed in these sonnets, as stated earlier in this section. The patriotic feelings is counteracted yet paradoxically enhanced by the speaker's acute awareness of the danger of Britain being absorbed in the chaos in France and losing that moral superiority. When landing in England with joy, the speaker could not help but feel the ghostly presence of Europe hovering above: 'Europe is in Bonds' (9). The English Channel is like a moat separating England and its disastrous neighbour France. Even so, the speaker is still anxious.

Inland, within a hollow Vale, I stood,
And saw, while sea was calm and air was clear,
The Coast of France, the Coast of France how near!
Drawn almost into frightful neighbourhood.
I shrunk, for verily the barrier flood
Was like a Lake, or River bright and fair,
A span of waters; yet what power is there!
What mightiness for evil and for good!
Even so doth God protect us if we be

²⁰⁰ Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain 1555-1833* (London; New York; Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1977), especially chapter 1 and 2.

²⁰¹ James Sommersett was an enslaved African and was sold to Charles Stewart, a custom officer who brought Sommersett back to England in 1679. Sommersett escaped and was recaptured. The case was brought to William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield, who ruled that slavery was no ground in law and therefore, Sommersett must be discharged. E. Neville Williams, *The Eighteenth-century Constitution: 1688-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 387-388.

Virtuous and wise; Winds blow, and Waters roll,
 Strength to the brave, and Power, and Deity,
 Yet in themselves are nothing! One decree
 Spake laws to *them*, and said that by the Soul
 Only the Nations shall be great and free.
 (Sonnet 11)

This sonnet is one of Wordsworth's most prophetic moments in the liberty series. The speaker is standing on the shore and sees France across the sea. The calm water, bright and fair, serves as a barrier, separating France and Britain. Yet, one cannot be sure that Britain is completely safe. The speaker shrinks, for fear of being 'Drawn almost into frightful neighbourhood' (4). On the other side of the sea, where France is, there is power that one cannot completely understand. By the time when *Poems, in Two Volumes* was published in 1807, the Napoleonic wars had been going on for at least 4 years, and it was very clear to readers at that time that Britain was not safe from the French. It all sounds very familiar: not being able to interpret the prophetic visions challenges the biblical prophets and thus brings stress. One thinks of Wordsworth's crisis in *The Prelude*. The poet now begins to see the French revolution turning into a sham. 'What mightiness for evil and for good!' (8) The Revolution betrays its cause, the pursuit of liberty and freedom. Now, feeling disillusioned, the speaker, interestingly, turns into God. 'Even so doth God protect us if we be/ Virtuous and wise' (9).

The sestet of the sonnet when the speaker invokes God asking for protection and reflecting on nations' fates resembles biblical prophets' narratives, in which turning to God for protection and salvation in hard times is common. 'Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.' (Isaiah 12.2) Later, in Isaiah 14.1: 'FOR the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house

of Jacob.’

The influence of biblical prophetic narrative on this sonnet series goes beyond taking pride in and caring about the fate of one’s nation, or seeking protection from God. It is also reflected in the condemnation of the current wrong doings in Britain. Wordsworth’s national concerns are manifold: pride, fear, and condemnation.

The prophetic in Wordsworth, as demonstrated before in this thesis, has many sources: biblical, bardic and ancient Greek. There are moments when the speaker invokes God, and there are also moments when the Christian God is not the only source of protection.

5.3. ‘Plain living and high thinking are no more’: Christian Pleading, Pagan Images and God-like Poets

Wordsworth’s attitude towards the rising commerce and trade in British society is largely dubious. In ‘Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty’, he sees the commercial side of British life as idolatry. In Sonnet 13, the speaker is distressed by the current situation, like many distressed biblical prophets. Oppressed, and not knowing where to look for comfort, the speaker sees life as only dressed up for the show, full of ‘mean handywork of craftsman’ (4).

.....Rapine, avarice, expence,
This is idolatry; and these we adore:
Plain living and high thinking are no more:
(Sonnet 13, 9-11)

‘Idolatry’ and the disapproving attitude remind us of Isaiah’s narrative of the fall of the house of Jacob,

the children of Israel. 'Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.' (2.8) Instead of worshipping God, the descendants of Jacob worshipped idols made by human hands, the goods in consumer society. This kind of worship Wordsworth is condemning rings a bell. Towards the late eighteenth century, a new consumer society was forming, and one of its defining elements was what was later called conspicuous consumption, which is to consume for status. Goods and services were not only pursued for their value, but also, and more often, for their social value as status symbols. Luxury expenditure was debated on by the Mercantilists, and various thinkers and philosophers in the eighteenth century, including Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), David Hume (1711-1776), and Adam Smith (1723-1790).²⁰² Wordsworth is largely against this conspicuous consumption: 'Life is only drest/ For shew...' (Sonnet 13, 3-4). He condemns material goods as 'mean handywork of craftsman' (4). The religious reference is intensified when Wordsworth's speaker turns to God.

...But, great God!
 I measure back the steps which I have trod,
 And tremble, seeing, as I do, the strength
 Of such poor instruments, with thoughts sublime
 I tremble at the sorrow of the time.
 (Sonnet 22, 10-14)

This is his Christian moment. The poet's fear and trembling are like those described by biblical prophets. But Wordsworth is a complicated poet. These sonnets are a mixture of his Christian insights, pagan images and poetic ideals. Elsewhere, the frustration about the commercialised society is also seen. In Part I, 'Miscellaneous Sonnets' of *Poems, in Two Volumes*, there is sonnet 18 that is usually

²⁰² Roger Mason, 'The New Consumer Society', in *The Economics of Conspicuous Consumption* (Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, US: Edward Elgar, 1998), pp. 1-11.

referred to as Wordsworth's manifesto against commercialised society and consumer culture. 'The world is too much with us; late and soon,/ Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;' (1-2). The speaker laments the power of the human mind muted by consumerism. The invocation of God is performed later in the sonnet, but with a slight twist.

.....Great God! I'd rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus coming from the sea;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wretched horn
 (9-14)

What Wordsworth does in Sonnet 11 of the liberty series, is to let the speaker ask God's protection, and trust in God for affirmation. But the society is too corrupted to hold dear any divine voice. The speaker, disillusioned, turns to the pagan mythology for direction and comfort. After all, it is better to be a pagan to have at least some responsiveness to divine voices than nothing at all. Proteus is a sea-god in Greek mythology. He knows all but only offers his insight when captured and defeated. In Book IV of Homer's *Odyssey*, Meneláos is seeking reasons why he is detained. Guided by Eidothea, daughter of Proteus, he sets out to capture Proteus. After changing into many shapes, including a lion, a serpent, a leopard, a boar, sousing water, and then a tall green tree, Proteus finally acknowledges his defeat and answers Meneláos' questions of why he is detained, and how he is going to get back.²⁰³ In Wordsworth's sonnets, the speaker, disappointed in God, turns to the Pagan god Proteus for advice, and possibly, a prophecy and guidance for the future.

²⁰³ *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), Book IV, especially pp74-80.

The sonnet alludes to Homer. Placing the source of comfort not onto the Christian God but the pagan god and prophet Proteus, a figure well depicted in Homer, Wordsworth is possibly seeing the epic poet as his prophet. He is turning to Homer for light and guidance. The invocation of great poets is not uncommon in 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty'. These great poets to some extent take the place of God or any divinity. They are Wordsworth's prophets, his source of knowledge and power.

The invocation of Milton in sonnet 14 is a classic example of attributing godlike or prophetic power to poets. This is Wordsworth's high prophetic moment: 'Milton! Thou should'st be living at this hour:/ England hath need of thee' (1). For Wordsworth, Milton is his model of poets taking responsibility for the nation. Milton believed in the democracy and freedom promised by the Commonwealth of England. He held a post in the council of state and translated international correspondence into Latin for diplomatic purposes. His series of defences while holding the post served propaganda for the English nation-state, the first of which was written in reply to a defence of Charles I, the monarch replaced by the Commonwealth.²⁰⁴

As discussed above, to Wordsworth, the current situation in England is a disappointment. England is like 'a fen/ Of stagnant waters' (2-3). The men dwelling on this land are selfish, in need of 'manners, virtue, freedom, power' (8). In the moment of distress, the speaker invokes Milton to restore the old glory.

Thy soul was like a Star and dwelt apart:

²⁰⁴ The three defences are: *Defensio Prima* or *First Defence*—*Joannis Miltonii Angli defensio pro populo Anglicano contra Claudii Anonymi, aliàs Salmasii, defensionem regiam* (*The defence of John Milton, Englishman, on behalf of the people of England against the royal defence of Claudius the Anonymous, otherwise Salmasius*, 1651); *Defensio Secunda* or *Second Defence*—*Joannis Miltonii Angli pro populo Anglicano defensio secunda, contra infamem libellum anonymum cui titulus 'Regii sanguinis clamor ad coelum adversus parricidas Anglicanos'* (*The second defence of John Milton, Englishman, on behalf of the English people, against an infamous anonymous libel entitled A cry to heaven of the king's blood against the English parricides*, 1654); the third defence—*Joannis Miltonii Angli pro se defensio contra Alexander Morum, ecclesiasten, libelli famosi, cui titulus, 'Regii sanguinis clamor' ... authorem recte dictum* (*The defence of himself of John Milton, Englishman, against the minister Alexander More, who is rightly said to be the author of a famous libel entitled Cry of the royal blood*, 1655)

Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;
 Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
 So didst thou travel on life's common way,
 In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
 The lowliest duties on itself did lay.
 (Sonnet 14, 9-14)

Like the biblical prophets, the speaker experiences moments of distress and looks for the divine help.

Unlike the biblical prophets for whom the divine help comes from God, the speaker seeks guidance from Milton's verse which is 'pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free' (11). The great poet is enshrined and turned into a demigod.

At this stage, we may recall Chapter 1 where there is a brief account of Wordsworth's view of poets. For him, they possess and spread truth, and by the shared truth, are linked with each other. Wordsworth, in *The Prelude*, is hoping that he can be one of them. Not only does he receive guidance from great poets, but also he wishes to be the source of guidance himself. As early as in June 1794 in a letter to William Matthews, he writes: 'I would put into each man's hand a lantern to guide him and not have him to set out upon his journey depending for illumination on abortive flashes of lightning, or the coruscations of transitory meteors.'²⁰⁵ Later towards the end of *The Prelude*, the speaker utters his aspiration to prophetic status in a widely-quoted passage.

That poets, even as Prophets, each with each
 Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
 Have each for his peculiar dower a sense
 By which he is enabled to perceive
 Something unseen before—forgive me, Friend,
 If I, the meanest of this Band, had hope
 That unto me had also been vouchsafed
 An influx, that in some sort I possess'd
 A privilege, and that a work of mine,

²⁰⁵ EY, p. 125.

Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,
 Enduring and creative, might become
 A power like one of Nature's...
 (*The Prelude*, 1805, Book XII, 301-312)

The speaker with an ambition to create works whose power like 'one of Nature's', is affirming the god-like quality of poets as well as aspiring to be one.

The creative nature of the poet's profession has made the poet as a god-like figure possible. Sir Philip Sidney in his *The Defence of Poesy* (1595) touches upon both the prophetic and the creative nature of the poet. The Romans call the poet 'Vates', which is a diviner, foreseer or prophet. The Greeks call a man of this profession a poet, which comes from the word ποιεῖν (poiein), meaning 'to make'. For Sidney, making is more fit for the poet, as 'the poet, only, only bringeth his own stuff, and doth not learn a conceit out of a matter but maketh matter for a conceit.'²⁰⁶

What underpins Sonnet 14 (1802) and *The Prelude* (1805) is Wordsworth's idea of poet and poetry, of what poetry should do, and of the responsibility the poet has. He does not stop his quest for a poetic theory. These poems are extensions of the 'Preface'. Wordsworth's view on the nature of the poet and poetry, to a large extent, follows Horace and Sidney, especially the latter. The Wordsworthian image of the poet teaching 'manners, virtue, freedom, power' has complicated connotations. It concurs with Horace that poetry is to instruct, and it echoes Sidney's view that poetry serves a moral end which is to lead man to act virtuously. Later on in this sonnet sequence, Sidney's national pride in the English language is also shared and complicated by Wordsworth.

5.4. 'Great Men have been among us': National Pride, the Dead and Imagined Community

²⁰⁶ Sidney's *'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 30.

Wordsworth makes it clear that it is an age of degeneration that he lives in. The late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century may not be worse than any other time in history, but the poet Wordsworth, having witnessed failure of the humanitarian promise of the French Revolution and increasingly commercialised society, builds up a sense of disillusionment, fear and despair. In these poems, pleading to God for support in times of sorrow and distress places the speaker close to the biblical prophets. While at the same time, the source of power comes not exclusively from a Christian God, but also from Homer's pagan gods and the great poet Milton. The invocation of a great dead poet is interesting, but not unusual. Thomas Gray, half a century before Wordsworth, provided an excellent example of the complexity involving hard times, poetic inheritance and moral obligations of the poets. Composed between 1754 and 1757, published in 1757, Gray's 'The Bard. A Pindaric Ode' has a lasting influence on poets and painters. The moment of Gray's bard condemning King Edward I and uttering the prophecy is captured and transferred brilliantly onto the oil canvas in Benjamin West's 'The Bard' (1778). This image is classic.

On a rock, whose haughty brow
 Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,
 Robed in the sable garb of woe,
 With haggard eyes the Poet stood;
 (Loose his beard, and hoary hair
 Stream'd, like a meteor, to the troubled air)
 And with a Master's hand, and Prophet's fire,
 Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.
 ('The Bard', l.2, 15-22)²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ *The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray*, ed. by H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 19.

The story in Gray's 'The Bard' refers to the massacre of bards ordered by King Edward I when they refused to sing for the Saxon invader and hung up their harps (for a more detailed account of this event, please refer to Chapter Two of the thesis). Several things link Gray's 'The Bard' and Wordsworth's 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' together. They both deal with a difficult and turbulent time. The national concern is an undercurrent running through both compositions. Both are characterized by prophetic visions, and more importantly, a sense of the prophetic line and inheritance.

Gray's bard and Wordsworth's speaker are both addressing a perilous situation: the opposition between tyranny and liberty. King Edward I, an English king, invaded Wales. The cruelty in killing the bards is a parallel with the tyrannical rule and danger in Napoleonic rule over France.²⁰⁸ On a personal note, the execution of Wordsworth's French landlord might contribute to the poet's disillusionment with the new regime. On 13 July, 1793, Gellet-Duvivier, Wordsworth's landlord, was guillotined, after failed attempt to assassinate Leonard Bourdon, a member of the National Assembly. Annette Vallon's brother Paul was also involved, but he escaped, otherwise, he could have been executed as well. Nicholas Roe argues that reports on the trial appeared in the London press from 24 July. Presumably, they reached Wordsworth, and brought him distress and anger, which were reflected in the 'Salisbury Plain' poems (1793-1794).²⁰⁹

The similar kind of distress and anger in Gray's poem is transformed into the dark curses the bard speaker utters. In the bard's vision, the dead are weaving the King's fate. This image of weaving the individual's fate comes from ancient Greek idea on the Fates, or the Moirae (Μοῖραι). Initially, each human being had his or her own fate, or moira. Gradually, the notion of moira was transformed into

²⁰⁸ Refer to Katie Trumpener's introductory chapter 'Harps Hung upon the Willow', *Bardic Nationalism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 3-36.

²⁰⁹ Gill, *A Life*, pp.77-78. Also Nicolas Roe, 'The early Life of William Wordsworth, 1770-1800', in *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 35-50.

deities. After the Homeric period, the number of Moirae were gradually fixed into three: Clotho (spinner), Lachesis (allotter) and Atropos (unturnable), daughters of Zeus and Themis. They were in charge of each individual's fate from birth to death by regulating the length of the thread which represent that individual. One did the spinning, another wounding up and the third cutting.²¹⁰

Gray comes with his own version of the weavers of fate: Cadwallo, Urien, and Modred, who are all heroic ancestors of the Welsh who fought against foreign invasions: Cadwallo (d. 634) is the King of Gwynedd, a kingdom in the northwest Wales; Urien (fl. c.560–c.580), King of Rheged; Modred, possibly refers to Modred in the Arthurian legend. Gray's invocation of Modred is a little problematic, because Modred, is commonly perceived as son of Arthur and his half-sister, a treacherous villain who fought against Arthur and married Quinevere. Gray might have identified the anger, hatred and vengeance in Modred as the emotion in the speaker bard. In the vision of Gray's bard, the three of them are weaving the King's life thread, in a vengeful manner.

‘No more I weep. They do not sleep.
 ‘On yonder cliffs, a grisly band,
 ‘I see them sit, they linger yet,
 ‘Avengers of their native land:
 ‘With me in dreadful harmony they join,
 ‘And weave with bloody hands the tissue of thy line.’
 (I.3, 43-48)

The speaker bard, by putting himself alongside the three Welsh figures, creates a community, a community of living and dead, united by the national cause. Cadwallo, Urien, and Modred all fought for freedom and independence of Wales. By invoking them, the bard is drawing power from his

²¹⁰ Pierre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, trans. by A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop (New York; Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 294.

predecessors as well as reinforcing his national identity. A sense of inheritance underlines the vision.

What Wordsworth does with the speaker invoking Milton resembles what Gray does with the bard speaker invoking the Welsh figures. Gray's bard curses King Edward for his tyranny and cruelty, while Wordsworth's speaker condemning the contemporary moral decay. Gray's poem on the whole is about various visions the bard has, all of which are about the King's ill fate. The invocation of the dead is in one of the curses he utters. But in Wordsworth, the invocation of Milton and the great dead is to serve a purpose more than just a condemnation of current situation. The dead poets and great men are here to teach. This argument puts Wordsworth in line with Philip Sidney again. Sidney, inheriting from Horace, elaborates on that the purpose of poetry is to teach and to delight. The final end of the teaching is 'to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of.'²¹¹

For Wordsworth, his age is an age of consumer culture which he sees as idolatry, and life is 'only drest/ For shew' (Sonnet 13, 3-4). What can be the saving grace is the voice of poets, great poets like Milton. Milton, to Wordsworth, possesses such power as to elevate the degenerated souls of men from 'their clayey lodgings' in Sidney's words.

Milton! Thou should'st be living at this hour:
 England hath need of thee:.....

 Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power
 (Sonnet 14, 1-8)

Milton, to Wordsworth, exhibits and represents the moral and faith in the golden past which has been

²¹¹ *Defence of Posey*, p. 12.

lost.

Great Men have been among us; hands that penn'd
And tongues that utter'd wisdom, better none:
The later Sydney, Marvel, Harrington,
Young Vane, and others who call'd Milton Friend.
These Moralists could act and comprehend:
They knew how genuine glory was put on;
Taught us how rightfully a nation shone
In splendour...
(Sonnet 15, 1-8)

Richard Gravil notices that the later Sydney [Sidney] Wordsworth invoked here is Algernon Sidney (1623–1683) whose libertarian politics in *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698, posthumous) cost him his life. Wordsworth, on multiple occasions, refers to Algernon Sidney's writings, including in his *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* (1793).²¹²

In these two sonnets, Wordsworth, like Gray, also creates a community, consisting of Milton, 'The later Sydney, Marvel, Harrington,/Young Vane' (3-4). The Wordsworthian speaker takes place of Gray's bard figure. What unites Gray's bard with three Welsh figures is the aspiration of national independence, and what unites Wordsworth's speaker with Milton and great men of his time is the national pride. The Britain in the past is morally superior, with genuine glory and national splendour.

.....In our Halls is hung
Armoury of the invincible Knights of old:
We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held. In every thing we are sprung
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.
(Sonnet 16, 9-14)

²¹² Richard Gravil, *Wordsworth and Helen Maria Williams; Or, the Perils of Sensibility* (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2010), pp. 21-22.

The image of ‘armoury of the invincible knights of old’ is used by William Hazlitt while analysing *Richard II*: ‘*Richard II* may be considered as the first of that series of English historical plays, in which “is hung armour of the invincible knights of old”.’²¹³ Indeed, Wordsworth’s world of ancient glory refers perhaps less to the historical Britain than to the world Shakespeare created. Wordsworth’s national pride springs out of Shakespeare’s world of noble kings and knights. He is proud to share the language that Shakespeare speaks, which further places him close to Sidney, for whom the English language is faultless in terms of rhyme and rhythm. ‘Truly, the English, before any vulgar language I know, is fit for both sorts.’²¹⁴ For Sidney, the Italian language has too many vowels, while the Dutch too many consonants. The problem of French and Spanish is they rarely have words with accents on their last syllables, but English is not subject to any of these defects. The praise of the English language is the finest example of Sidney’s national spirit in *The Defence of Poesy*.

The English language is a focus in both Sidney and Wordsworth, but for slightly different reasons. For Sidney, phonetically speaking, English is a perfect fit for poetry, but for Wordsworth, it is the act of sharing the same language that fascinates him. Because of his admiration for the Shakespearean world, he is proud to speak in ‘the tongue/ That Shakespeare spake’ (11-12). So to further our argument, what unites Wordsworth’s speaker with Milton and the great dead men, is not only the shared sense of national pride and glory, but also, the language. Pride and language go hand in hand.

The beginning of this chapter mentioned Anderson’s theory of print-capitalism and the idea that printing in a vernacular language fills a space between international Latin and local dialects, which contributes to the awareness of nation. The world Wordsworth’s speaker creates is an ‘imagined

²¹³ William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London: J.M. Dent & Co; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co), p. 139.

²¹⁴ *The Defence of Poesy*, p. 52.

community', in which the English language and national pride provide the connections.

On the whole, the national concern and the prophetic in 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' are mutually illuminating, complementary and co-dependent. For Wordsworth, it is his perception of the role of the poet that links these two elements—national and prophetic—together. The poet expresses his national concern in ways prophetic and critical: condemning contemporary moral decay; pleading to God for protection; taking pride in his nation for its superiority and ancient glory; and invoking visionary companies. These are entangled with various issues: liberty, freedom, shared language and the instructive role of poetry and poets. Poetry and poets are to teach us 'manners, virtue, freedom, power' (Sonnets 14, 8). In the following chapters, what those manners and virtue are will be discussed and demonstrated by *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1815) and *Peter Bell* (1819).

Chapter 6

The Apotheosis of the Animal, History and Morality:

The White Doe of Rylstone Encoded in the Prophetic

The prophetic in Wordsworth became forthright and controversial in *The White Doe of Rylstone* and *Peter Bell*. Both poems were kept unpublished for several years after being written: *The White Doe* was started in 1807, but not published until 1815; *Peter Bell* was started in 1798, and published in 1819. Both poems are not much discussed today. In fact, compared to other poems in the Wordsworth oeuvre, *The White Doe* and *Peter Bell* are given far less attention by critics than by the poet. As can be traced in the letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, the poet's publishing scheme in the second half of the 1810s revolved around three poems, *The White Doe* (1815), *Peter Bell* (1819), and *Benjamin the Waggoner* (1819). They are all very interesting poems, giving Wordsworth a more complex profile: he is the man who not only wrote the refreshing *Lyrical Ballads*, or the sublime *The Prelude*, or the philosophical *Immortality Ode*, but who also wrote poems which were criticised, dismissed, and even scorned, poems like *Peter Bell*. However much these poems are overlooked, they mattered to the poet. Studying these poems can contribute to the reconstruction of the poet at work.

To start with, *The White Doe* and *Peter Bell* are similar in several respects. Prophetic figures and images run through the two poems, primarily the immortalised white doe in the former, and the omniscient narrator in the latter. Both poems put animals into a prominent place, and both are infiltrated with moral concerns. They are the pragmatic Wordsworth in his prime.

6.1. Introduction

The White Doe of Rylstone is a poem about the tangled relationship of history, human suffering and duty, enclosed in the telling of 'The Fate of the Nortons'. The real Nortons were a noble Catholic family in Yorkshire. They were also active participants in the 1569 rising of the North. Led by two Earls, Thomas Percy, Earl of Northumberland, and Charles Neville, Earl of Westmorland, the rising of the North was a rebellion against Queen Elizabeth. According to Wordsworth's note, Percy and Neville planned a marriage between Mary Queen of Scots and the Duke of Norfolk, for the benefit of a stable and secure Scotland. The plan was disfavoured by Queen Elizabeth, and soon it turned into a rebellion, resulting in the death of thousands of people. Richard Norton and his sons were among the rebels. After the rebellion failed, the Norton family was crushed. Richard Norton, with two of his eight sons including Francis featured in the poem, fled, became fugitives and died in poverty. Another son, Christopher, was tried and hanged along with Richard Norton's brother Thomas Norton.

Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone* is based on a local tradition recorded by Thomas Dunham Whitaker (1759–1821) in his *The History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven* (1805). A white doe travels from Rylstone to the Abbey around the Dissolution time each year, attends the church service and wanders back. Wordsworth speaks of why he associates the doe with the Nortons in his note to the poem.

Rylstone was the property and residence of the Nortons, distinguished in that ill-advised and unfortunate insurrection, which led me to connect with this tradition the principal circumstances of their fate.²¹⁵

The poet, having seen the beautiful valley around Bolton Abbey in July 1807, decided to write a poem

²¹⁵ *The White Doe of Rylstone*, p. 150.

about it. Due to several unsuccessful attempts to publish the poem and Wordsworth's own wish not to publish for money, *The White Doe* remained as a manuscript until 1815. In one of the letters to Dorothy, Wordsworth writes: 'I do not think it likely I shall publish it all indeed I am so thoroughly disgusted with the wretched and stupid public.'²¹⁶

The White Doe is formed of seven cantos, featuring Emily, the daughter, as the central character. Her brother Francis, before departing for the rising, asks her not to wait for his return. Emily, being left at home and anxious for her father and brothers' return, maintains hope and exhibits patience. When the news comes that Francis is dead, Emily is devastated by sorrow. Then she sees the white doe, has an epiphany and finds consolation. She survives.

D. D Devlin in *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Epitaphs* (1980) observes the subtle connections between Wordsworth's epitaph writing and Coleridge's idea of how poetry should be written. After quoting Coleridge's claim in *Biographia Literaria* that the poem 'reveals itself in the balance of reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities'²¹⁷, Devlin goes further to assert that Wordsworth 'especially in the *Essays upon Epitaphs*, saw such reconciliation of opposites as the aim and purpose of his poetry'.²¹⁸ According to Devlin, *The White Doe* is a good example of Wordsworth's epitaph writing, and the 'reconciliation of opposites' is achieved by the doe, a symbol of memory.²¹⁹

In the introduction to the Cornell edition of *The White Doe*, editor Kristine Dugas provides a similar interpretation: the doe stands for nature as well as for 'the imaginative associations of the past which the human mind projects upon it'.²²⁰ In accepting the doe, Emily 'accepts the power of the

²¹⁶ SL, p. 11.

²¹⁷ D. D. Devlin, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Epitaphs* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980), p. 109.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

²¹⁹ Devlin, p. 128.

²²⁰ *The White Doe of Rylstone*, p. 42.

meditative imagination as well as the limitations the world imposes and the consolations it offers.’²²¹

Dugas then goes forward to assert that Wordsworth’s treatment of the doe bears a resemblance to Catholic transubstantiation, in which, ‘a thing is and stands for a spiritual reality’.²²²

Both Devlin and Dugas talk about the doe as a symbol associated with memory and the past, but this thesis would question such a claim and draw attention to the function of the doe as a prophetic presence: first, the doe transcends time, as it not only represents memory and the past, but also speaks to the present and future—it witnesses the past, is elevated into a prophetic role towards the end of the poem, linking past, present and future altogether; second, the doe acts as a framing device, unifying the poem. The narrative of the poem unfolds within this framework and dwells upon human sufferings and virtues in times of loss—mainly, what is exhibited in Emily—patience, hope, and endurance; third, by writing about the historical Catholic rising, the rising of the North, *The White Doe* addresses it the contemporary ‘Catholic Question’—Catholic Emancipation. Therefore, it is more than a story of the Norton family. It is a prophetic writing for the British nation and its people.

6.2. ‘Daughter of the Eternal Prime!’: the Prophetic Doe as a Framing Device

As a framing device, the doe appears on five occasions throughout the poem. Its first appearance marks the beginning of the narrative. As white as a lily in June, it carries on the legend and mystery, invoking different stories about its pilgrimage every year. The poem then focuses on one of the versions and presumably the oldest—the story of the doe and Emily in the Catholic rising of the north in the late sixteenth century. The second time the doe appears is when Francis and Emily are parting in the garden;

²²¹ *The White Doe of Rylstone*, p. 42.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

the third time when the doe accompanies Emily while she embroiders the banner of the rising; the fourth when Emily, while missing her brother, has a vision of her mother and her blessed childhood; the fifth when Emily is grieving over Francis' death and reunites with the doe. Through this reunion, Emily has an epiphany in which she sees history embedded in the silent animal's eyes. That is the moment when she is finally able to reconcile herself to the fact that she has lost Francis.

The five appearances of the doe facilitate the narrative. Each appearance of the doe signifies a change of Emily's mind, and pushes the story forward.

Emily does not start as a martyr-like figure, but simply a quiet one not without reservations about the rising. She gains strength as her thoughts change and evolve. This is often overlooked and even dismissed. Contemporary criticism of the poem largely focuses on the lack of action. For instance, the October issue of *Quarterly Review* in 1815 accuses the poem of broken narratives and lack of denouement.

As a mere narrative, it does not possess much interest; the story is told, as it were, in scraps; a few prominent scenes are selected, and the circumstances which connect them left pretty much to the reader's imagination; and after all, instead of a denouement, we have merely the explanation of a certain strange phenomenon which had puzzled rather than interested our curiosity.²²³

Wordsworth foresaw this problem before the publication of the poem. In a 1808 letter to Coleridge, he offers three reasons why the poem can never be popular: 'the main catastrophe was not a material but an intellectual one'; 'some of the principle objects and agents...produced their influence and effects not by powers naturally inherent in them, but such as they were endued with by the imagination of the

²²³ W. R. Lyall, 'Poems by William Wordsworth; including Lyrical Ballads, and the Miscellaneous Pieces of the Author, with additional Poems, a New Preface, and a Supplementary Essay. In two Vols', *Quarterly Review*, 14.27 (Oct 1815), 201-225 (pp. 210-211).

human minds on whom they operated'; and finally, 'the principle of action in all characters...was imaginative'.²²⁴ Many years after the publication of *The White Doe* and the criticism of its lack of action, Wordsworth, in *The Fenwick Notes* (dictated in 1843), admits that the poem is not about explicit action and denouement, but it focuses on the spiritual and intellectual aspects. 'Everything that is attempted by the principle personages in "The White Doe" fails, so far as its object is external and substantial. So far as it is moral & spiritual it succeeds.'²²⁵

This section will argue, along with Wordsworth's self-defence, that the action of the poem is not action in a tangible form, but action happening in the human mind—the changing states of Emily's mind. These changes present an example of how a human being could and should react faced with death and loss. The white doe, by accompanying her throughout the journey, carries the message on, and serves as a reminder not only of Emily's story, but also of human virtues in adversity.

Emily's participation in the rebellion begins with embroidering the banner. In the historical rising of the North, the banner used is the banner of 'Pilgrimage of Grace' showing Christ's five wounds, on both hands, both feet and the side. In the poem, preserving the banner is taken as a symbol of defending the lost Catholic faith. The father's last wish is that his son can hang the banner over Bolton Priory where the rebellion starts. By obeying his father's order to embroider the banner, Emily shows obedience, despite of her doubts: 'She did in passiveness obey,/ But her Faith leaned another way.' (876-877) The doe is at her side, and she speaks 'Sad words to that mute Animal,/ The White Doe, in the hawthorn brake;' (881-882) Later on, the instruction from her brother asking her not to retain hope imposes on her another duty, which is to wait, but not to act. It is here that Francis gives a prophecy. It functions as a thread holding the narrative together as a whole. It is also simple and straightforward.

²²⁴ MY, I, p. 222.

²²⁵ *The Fenwick Notes*, p. 33.

—O Sister, I could prophesy!
 The time is come that rings the knell
 Of all we loved, and loved so well;—
 Hope nothing.....
for we
 Are doomed to perish utterly:
 (531-537)

‘We’ refer to people who throw themselves into the war against the Queen’s powerful army. Francis is well aware that this is a battle they are destined to lose. He goes on to address the mortality of life, declaring that all things in nature are doomed to decay

The blast will sweep us all away,
 One desolation, one decay!
 And even this creature!...
 (558-560)

The prophecy that all life has to perish is banal, common and repeated over time and across cultures. There is not much new about it, but what is new is that Francis, upon finishing, directs our attention to ‘this creature’ a few steps away, the white doe. This is the first time we see the doe in the same scene with Emily. It foreshadows the beginning of her long suffering.

The second time the doe appears along with Emily occurs in Canto Fourth. It is a tranquil night after Francis’ departure. The bright moon lights the small valley. Emily is in the garden where she and Francis used to walk. Seeing the yew-tree under which they spend their last night together and knowing that fate would not be kind to him, ‘The thought-bewildered Emily’(1015) is in melancholy and anxiety. Then the doe appears.

The same fair Creature which was nigh
 Feeding in tranquillity,
 When Francis uttered to the Maid
 His last words in the yew-tree shade; —
 (975-978)

The doe approaches Emily, seeking attention and encouragement. The unhappy maid ignores the creature first. The fragrance of the gentle breeze from 'late-flowering woodbine' (1026) brings back her childhood memories. She starts to recall her mother who teaches her wisdom beyond her years. Overwhelmed by the happiness, Emily experiences a vision, '...a presence bright/ Returned to her...' (1037-1038), a bright saint teaching a child 'To worship in simplicity/ The invisible God, and take for guide/ The faith reformed and purified.' (1042-1044) The bright presence Emily feels is probably stimulated by the appearance of the white doe. In the opening canto, the white doe is depicted as pure white, 'White she is as lily of June,/ and beauteous as the silver moon' (61-62). In the scene in which Francis is giving his prophecy, the doe is referred to as 'Fair Creature, and more white than snow!' (563) The beguiled Emily is lost in her thoughts. The presence of the angelic white doe with her meekness triggers a loving and tender emotion, similar to maternal love, which leads Emily to the vision of the Saint 'Who with mild looks and language mild/ Instructed here her darling Child' (1039-1040).

A certain kind of mystery around the doe is suggested here: the doe seems to possess such a power that its presence allows Emily to travel back in time. This supernatural power of the doe is further enhanced at its next appearance during Emily's grieving at the end of Canto Sixth. Having heard the old man's account of the battle, Emily summons her courage to go to see the grave for herself.

She reached the grave, and with her breast

Upon the ground received the rest,—
 The consummation, the whole ruth
 And sorrow of this final truth!
 (1565-1568)

The 'final truth' is: Francis is dead. The prophecy he foretells that every living thing is doomed to perish is turning into truth. Emily is devastated and immerses herself in utter sorrow. 'The mighty sorrow has been borne,/ And she is thoroughly forlorn:' (1640-1641) Like the female vagrant who is consumed by the longing for her husband's return, Emily wanders and wanders, and finally finds a nook under the oak tree and rest. The poet then compares Emily to a flower astray from her own kind that will live and die alone. An oak tree has a much longer span, and is taken as a symbol of wisdom in many cultures. The picture of a long-living oak tree in contrast to the listless Emily highlights the insignificance of transient mortal life. Just when she is meditating in sadness, a troop of deer appear, one of which stops to look into Emily's eyes. She is convinced that this doe is the very own doe she is with on the night of Francis' departure and when she experiences the vision of her childhood in the garden.

For she hath ventured now to read
 Of time, and place, and thought, and deed,
 Endless history that lies
 In her silent Follower's eyes!
 (1733-1736)

She finds in the doe the consolation that eases her sorrow. This white animal accompanies her from the very beginning when Francis' prophecy is uttered till now when she tastes the bitter sorrow of losing her dear brother.

The sense of mystery surrounding the doe makes it a supernatural presence. The doe is usually

depicted as meek and pure creature in many cultures. It is associated with the faery realm and divine messengers in Celtic culture. The white doe in Native American culture has a specific meaning, as a sign for change and the becoming of a new world.

In the poem itself, the fact that Emily has a vision of her childhood in the presence of the doe and she sees the history in the doe's eyes seem to suggest that the doe breaks the linearity of time and the confinement of place. In the doe past and present merge. 'Time, and place, and thought, and deed' come together. The doe records all, and knows all. It is immortalised and uplifted to a timeless existence. 'Thou, thou art not a Child of Time,/ But Daughter of the Eternal Prime!' (1928-1929)

To see how the doe is intended to be raised to such a high position, we may refer to Wordsworth's own account in a letter to Francis Wrangham in January, 1816. 'It [*The White Doe*] starts from a high point of imagination, and comes round through various wanderings of that faculty to a still higher: nothing less than the Apotheosis of the Animal, who gives the first of the two titles to the Poem.'²²⁶ The 'Apotheosis of the Animal' is finally achieved and made obvious when the poem finishes.

6.3. The Moral Dilemma: 'Her duty is to stand and wait;'

As a framing device, the doe helps to unfold the story of the Norton family, and throughout the story, a certain moral message is coded. Wordsworth creates an ideal behavioural model in times of adversity. Emily is his model. To quote the poet himself, Emily is 'to be honoured and loved for what she *endures*, and the manner in which she endures it'.²²⁷ The motif of endurance suggesting that *The White Doe* favours stoicism is misleading. This thesis argues that in order to understand the poem better, we need

²²⁶ MY, II, p. 276.

²²⁷ MY, I, p. 222.

to ask why Emily or we need to endure. Wordsworth presents us with a moral dilemma: when one's heart conflicts with one's duty, which should one choose? The poet, whether consciously or unconsciously, presents this dilemma and engages with moral philosophy in a Kantian way.

The discussion of moral philosophy underwent a significant change at the end of the eighteenth century, from virtue ethics in Aristotle to duty ethics in Kant. Aristotle argues that happiness depends on the cultivation of virtue. Virtue, for Aristotle, not only relies on the nature of the act, but also is related to the individual's 'firm and unchanging'²²⁸ character. But Kant, at the end of the eighteenth century, puts emphasis not on character, but on duty. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant lays out the framework of his moral philosophy by examining the principles a person acts on, and the motivations behind them. Through analysing those motivations, we are able to tell what makes people morally good, which induces what actions are morally good, hence, a moral law is established. To start with, there are three motivations behind our actions, first, we act out of duty; second, we act out of immediate inclination, which means we want to act and we enjoy the action itself; third, we are impelled to through another inclination, which means such action is a means to a further end. One can only act according to his principle, or maxim. Kant's observation is: 'act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law'.²²⁹

Whether Wordsworth read Kant is difficult to answer. Duncan Wu suggests that Wordsworth may have learned about the German philosopher from Coleridge during the latter's intermittent residence at Allan Bank, 1809-1810.²³⁰ It's also difficult to judge if there is any direct influence that Kant has

²²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Terence Irwin (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), p. 40.

²²⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 31.

²³⁰ Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1800-1815*, Volume 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 261.

on Wordsworth, but nevertheless, there seem to be some similarities in ideas and phrasing,²³¹ as seen in *The White Doe*.

What concerns Kant, as the title of the book suggest, is the metaphysics of moral philosophy, but what concerns Wordsworth, is the application of moral philosophy. Duty, to Wordsworth, has major functions: it governs desire; it offers guidance. This idea of duty is addressed with enthusiasm in 'Ode to Duty' (written in 1805, published in 1807).

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
O Duty! if that name thou love,
Who art a Light to guide, a Rod
To check the erring and reprove;
(1-4)²³²

In both Emily and Francis, the tension between their desire or 'immediate inclination', and their duty is constant. Duty, in such a confrontation, serves as the determinant. Emily obeys her father and embroiders the banner though 'her faith leans other way' (877). She also obeys Francis and does not follow him and their father, but the thought is always on her mind.

Then from within the embowered retreat
Where she had found a grateful seat
Perturbed she issues. —She will go;
Herself will follow to the war,
And clasp her Father's knees; —ah, no!
She meets the insuperable bar,
The injunction by her Brother laid;
His parting charge—but ill obeyed!
That interdicted all debate,
All prayer for this cause or for that;
All efforts that would turn aside

²³¹ Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1800-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.261-262.

²³² *Poems, in Two Volumes*, p. 104.

The headstrong current of their fate:
Her duty is to stand and wait;
(1058-1070)

This is an echo of Milton in his sonnet 'On His Blindness'. Milton was worried about his deteriorating eyesight, and subsequently being useless. He asks God: 'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?' (7).²³³ To this, patience answers: 'They also serve who only stand and wait.' (14) Similar to Milton, Emily has to wait. It is her duty, despite her inclination.

Compared to Emily, Francis's struggle between immediate inclination and duty is more dramatic. He is reluctant to join the rebels at first, but as the oldest son of the family, he chooses to fulfil his filial duty, and follows his father. He is well aware that such action will lead to death. A sense of predestination is apparent in the storyline. Despite his struggle, Francis is subdued finally to the power of the prophecy he gives. The prophecy is not only descriptive interpreting the cycle of life and death, but prescriptive as well. It has to be fulfilled. Francis asks Emily on the night of his departure to '...be worthy of the grace/ Of God, and fill thy destined place' (588-589), and it is time for him to fill his destined place. But when death is indeed approaching, his first inclination is to preserve his life. Francis flees. Then comes the crucial moment when he becomes conscious of what he has done and finds the banner.

Remembering his own prophecy
Of utter desolation, made
To Emily in the yew-tree shade:
He sighed, submitting to the power
That might of that prophetic hour.
(1443-1447)

²³³ L. Valentine, ed. *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (London and New York: Frederick Warne and Co, 1901), p. 513.

It is his duty to fulfil the promise, and Francis does so. He is found with the banner and killed.

There seems to be a recurring pattern in *The White Doe*: the characters are presented with a dilemma, between desire and duty, then they experience a moment of truth—the vision in Emily’s case and the moment of remembering in Francis’ case. Finally duty wins. The pattern of ‘problem—epiphany—interference of duty’ resembles that in what Wordsworth identifies as ‘spots of time’.

There are in our existence spots of time,
 That with distinct preeminence retain
 A renovating Virtue, whence, depress’d
 By false opinion and contentious thought,
 Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
 In trivial occupations, and the round
 Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
 Are nourish’d and invisibly repair’d,
 A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
 That penetrates, enables us to mount,
 When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
 This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
 Among those passages of life in which
 We have had deepest feeling that the mind
 Is lord and master, and that outward sense
 Is but the obedient servant of her will.
 (*The Prelude*, 1805, Book XI, 258-273)²³⁴

If examined with a moral interest, the ‘spot of time’ quite revealingly resembles what the poet describes in ‘Ode to Duty’. At moments when we are ‘...depressed/ By false opinion and contentious thought’, there is a ‘renovating virtue’ ‘That penetrates, enables us to mount,/ When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen’. In the cases of Emily and Francis, the renovating virtue is their sense of duty, of choosing the maxim which they believe is duty, is moral law.

²³⁴ *The Prelude*, p. 301.

The 'spot of time' Francis experiences also strongly resembles Wordsworth's own as recorded in *The Prelude*. When illustrating 'spots of time', Wordsworth chooses his thirteen year old self leaving for home for Christmas on a stormy day as an example:

Feverish, and tired, and restless, I went forth
 Into the fields, impatient for the sight
 Of those two Horses which should bear us home,
 (Book XI, 347-349)

This is indeed a sad journey towards home, as Wordsworth was to lose his father and become an orphan. In retrospect, the poet sees the death of his father as punishment for his impatience and feverishness. He utters a stoic submissive awe 'To God, who thus corrected my desires' (375).

Francis in the poem finding himself with the banner in hand serves as the thirteen year old boy's counterpart. He is about to flee and abandon his duty when he remembers the prophecy made to Emily with the doe at their side. Having quickly corrected himself, 'He sighed, submitting to the power,/ That might of that prophetic hour.' (1446-1447) 'That prophetic hour' refers to the moment when he tells the prophecy to Emily, which is another spot of time whose power serves as the governing force over Francis' desires.

There are at least three such 'prophetic hour' in the poem, namely, when Emily is experiencing a vision in the garden, when she re-encounters the doe in the church yard, and when Francis is contemplating his prophecy and decides to accomplish the mission. Emily's experience of the vision nourishes and strengthens her mind, urging her to cast her despair away. The reunion with the doe after her painful loss functions as a restoring force through which Emily experiences a catharsis. Wordsworth in *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810) asserts that encountering death helps to foster a strong

sympathy and love, which cannot get any stronger after knowing death. 'It is to me inconceivable that the sympathies of love towards each other, which grow with our growth, could ever attain any new strength, or even preserve the old, after we had received from the outward senses the impression of death.'²³⁵ The reunion with the doe occurs at this moment when Emily's sorrow reaches a high point, after encountering her brother's death and that of many others. Two forces, the love fostered after encountering death, and the condolence found from the doe, are united to transform this moment of reunion into a moment of truth, in which Emily finds her peace of mind. She joins 'The Wharfedale Peasants in their prayers' (1882). At last, her soul rises '...to God from whom it came' (1887), and her 'mortal frame' (1888) is buried in the Rylstone Church, finally fulfilling the prophesy her brother utters.

6.4. 'Ambitious and Discontented Men': the Discordant Qualities and the Catholic Question

The significance of the doe with its Apotheosis is open to interpretations. Everyone in the poem can respond to the doe, and comes up with various interpretations. In the church congregation scene at the beginning of the poem, a mother tells her son about the doe's pilgrimage; the old sire links the doe to Lady Aäliza's mourning soul; the young scholar addresses the doe as 'the gracious Fairy' faithful to the 'Shepherd Lord' (270-271). Two facts, the doe functioning as an assemblage of 'Endless history' (1735), and many people having their own version of what the doe really is, remind the reader that there is no singular History, but histories as perceived by individuals.

Similar to the churchgoers who have their own versions of the doe, Wordsworth, in writing *The White Doe* offers his own account of history. It starts from Francis's prophecy within the poem, then

²³⁵ *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, Volume 2, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 51.

goes beyond to address a larger social issue of Catholic emancipation, challenging the way history and religion are perceived. Wordsworth exerts his imaginative power to utilize the historical rising in the North, recreates the characters, and adds prophetic elements into it, such as the supernatural presence of the doe. All of these serve his purpose to interpret history as happened in the past and history as is happening now. Therefore, the poem itself is also his vision, his prophecy. To see how Wordsworth utilizes the past to interpret the present, it is necessary to look into the social context of the event told in the poem and of the time when the poem was written.

The rising of the North took place in the English Reformation, one of the most turbulent periods in English history. Following the 1534 breach between Henry VIII and the Roman Catholic Church, various forms of persecution were imposed on the English Catholic believers. Many monasteries, priories and convents were demolished. The Catholics were not allowed to own property, join the army, or enter universities.

Reactions to the persecutions varied. Many departed to Scotland or the continent, many remained silent, and many stood up and fought against the persecutions. The poor and illiterate did not experience fundamental changes in the way they practiced their religion. An ordinary man could still attend church services on Sunday and return home. The most powerful among the literates, mainly aristocracy and bishops, were relatively quiet about the breach. Few bishops showed resistance. One possible reason was the fact that the king was not upsetting fundamentals of the religion. However, among other classes of the literate, including landed gentry and clergymen, there was a violent reaction against the breach. Several hundreds of clergymen chose to flee to either Scotland or Europe, some of whom were in the hope of returning to England when Catholic belief was restored. Meanwhile, there were demonstrations on a large scale and suppressed by government troops. Four major

demonstrations suppressed by military force were the one in Lincolnshire, and in Yorkshire and Lancashire, in 1536, in Norfolk in 1537, and in Yorkshire again in 1541.²³⁶ There were also recusants like Thomas More who refused to comply with the breach and the establishment of the Protestant church. More insisted that the breach by the King violated the legal framework of society, for it should be the clergy and the clerical authority that decide on church issues, not the King and his parliament. More was tried and beheaded in 1535.

Like More, many other recusants were persecuted and imprisoned. There was also violent resistance among the landed gentry. The rising in the North in 1569 is one example. The Percy family prospered during Queen Mary's reign by enjoying government favours, but were left out in the cold after the Reformation. At the same time, they were in touch with the Duke of Norfolk and a small group of exile English Catholic clergymen whose purpose was to overthrow the Protestant government. Historian J. C. H. Aveling speculates on the true reason of this rising: it is hard to tell whether Thomas Percy only intended to put some pressure on the government to gain favour, or wished to achieve more; as for the religious aspect, Percy's interest was unclear. He might be asking for more tolerance for Latin Masses in private chapels rather than replacing Elizabethan government by the Catholic Mary.²³⁷

Wordsworth, in *The White Doe* utilizes this historical event, but the situation in which he composed the poem was very different. The late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was remarkable in the history of English and Irish Catholicism. Three Relief Acts were passed, respectively in 1778, 1782 and 1791, allowing the Catholics to own property, join the army, and have Catholic schools and bishops.²³⁸ Meanwhile, the 1791 Relief Act gave the Catholics voting rights. A further Relief act was announced in 1829 removing substantial restrictions on Roman Catholics. This is a

²³⁶ J. C. H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1976), p.31

²³⁷ Ibid., pp. 45-46.

²³⁸ Ibid., pp.329-334.

symbolic success after centuries of struggle, generally known as Catholic Emancipation. This rewarded the efforts of the Irish politicians such as Henry Grattan and later Daniel O'Connell. When Wordsworth began to compose *The White Doe* in 1807, the Irish Catholic question was discussed vehemently in political circles. Never before in the past two and a half centuries had Catholics got so near to Emancipation. After the failure of his 1805 petition, Grattan made a serious attempt in 1808, convinced that the Catholic Church was prepared to accept a royal veto on the appointment of Irish Catholic bishops by the Pope. In May, 1808, he proposed a motion of emancipation in the House of Commons.

Although the motion was defeated by 281 votes to 128, Grattan's lobby certainly complicated the debate on the Irish Question. There were many clergymen who sympathized with Irish Catholic Emancipation. Wordsworth's long-term friend Francis Wrangham was one of them. Their correspondence around 1810 was preoccupied with discussions of religious issues, in which Wordsworth expressed explicitly his opposition to the Catholic Emancipation. In the letter on 3 December, 1808, Wordsworth declares 'I also do not go along with you in your sentiments respecting the Catholic question. I confess I am not prepared to see the Catholic religion as the established church of England.'²³⁹ In the letter dated 27 March, 1811, as much as Wordsworth would like to agree with Wrangham on the idea of distributing the Bible, he could not agree on the Catholic Question. 'You return to the Catholic Question. I am decidedly of opinion that no further concessions should be made.'²⁴⁰

As a poet who had always been concerned about humanity, Wordsworth's objection to the Catholic Emancipation seems quite odd. The reason of his objection, as he puts in the same letter, is

²³⁹ MY, I, p. 278.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 472.

that he fears the politicians may use the Catholic Question as a cover to put pressure on parliament. 'The Catholic Emancipation is a mere pretext of ambitious and discontented men.'²⁴¹ The 'ambitious and discontented men' may refer to O'Connell who was famous for organizing mass gatherings and giving speeches at those gatherings, or they may refer to liberal Protestants acting in an open-minded way to propose a Relief Act for Irish Catholics, men like Grattan. Grattan, as mentioned previously, dedicated himself to the Catholic enterprise. He was particularly active and well respected in those years. But his endeavour was not appreciated by Wordsworth. Grattan made his speech about the petitions on May 3, 1819, and was narrowly defeated. His motion was denied only by 2 votes (241 to 243). Five days later, in his letter to Viscount Lowther, Wordsworth writes 'What a rhapsody is Grattan's speech as reported in the Courier! Is he prepared for a Catholic Sovereign on the British throne?'²⁴²

Indeed, the fear of Catholic religion taking over is another important reason for Wordsworth's objection to the Catholic Question. If Catholic Relief is guaranteed, there is strong possibility that the movement will move forward, and eventually leads to the establishment of a Catholic Church in England. 'If they are to have these requests accorded, how can they be refused (consistently) the further prayer, of being constituted upon the same plea, the established Church?'²⁴³ For Wordsworth, the possibility of the reestablishment of Catholic Church matters as the Anglican Church, compared to the old Catholic Church, has been 'improved in modern times; grown mild and tolerant.'²⁴⁴ To look for proof, one must not be misguided by a few liberal minded politicians, but see the effects of that religion on its believers. 'But to know the real character of a religion we must observe its effects on the *great*

²⁴¹ MY, I, p. 472. Letter dated 27 March, 1811.

²⁴² MY, II, p. 540.

²⁴³ MY, I, P. 313.

²⁴⁴ MY, II, p. 540.

body of the People among whom it prevails.’²⁴⁵

With all of these factors in mind, readers will find that *The White Doe* is exactly where to see the real character of the Catholic religion as demonstrated by the action of the Nortons. The poem was accused by Coleridge of not focusing enough on the protagonist Emily. In the letter on 21 May, Coleridge claims that ‘3/4ths of the Work is everything rather than Emily, then, the last almost a separate (&doubtless most exquisite Poem) wholly of Emily.’²⁴⁶ Coleridge’s observation is to the point, but his criticism is not quite convincing. If put in the social context in which the poem was written, the poem can be seen as not about Emily and her female patience as the poet claims, but rather a poem about the struggle of a set of characters, about how religious endeavour moulds, drives, and changes people, and about how opposite or discordant qualities of characters and events find reconciliation and balance. Wordsworth may have shown his detestation for the Catholic question explicitly in his letters, but in *The White Doe*, the Catholic question is tackled with far more complexity.

The most prominent and determined Norton in *The White Doe* is the father whose real name in history is Richard Norton, but Wordsworth seems to avoid mentioning his name. It only occurs once when Norton, in assembling his army, addresses his son Richard by saying ‘Thou, Richard, bear’st thy father’s name’ (407). The resistance to naming Norton also shows the poet’s intention of portraying Norton as an archetype and a representative of the Catholic defenders. His stubbornness, zeal and obstinacy in the rising were shared among the rebels as well as politicians who devoted themselves to the Catholic Question at Wordsworth’s own time. In *The White Doe*, Norton demonstrates even more enthusiasm than the two Earls. On hearing the possibility of the rising, Norton organizes his army, commands Emily to embroider the banner, and sets off to meet Earl of Northumberland. Raising the

²⁴⁵ MY, II, p. 540.

²⁴⁶ CLC, III, p. 108.

banner is worth noticing, because Wordsworth makes a significant change to his ballad source *The Rising of the North* in Percy's *Reliques* by suggesting that it is Norton who urges Earl of Northumberland to raise the banner and declare the rising, whereas in the original ballad, it is the Earl who sends for Norton to comply with him.

Commend me to that gentlemàn,
And beare this letter here fro mee;
And say that earnestly I praye,
He will ryde in my companie.
(*The Rising in the North*, 37-40)²⁴⁷

The change undoubtedly enhances Norton's image as the ambitious Catholic defender. His overly zealous devotion to the rising is shown again later when the royal army goes up north to oppress the rising. Norton grows impatient on hearing the rumour that the Earls, in fear, decide to wait for back-up from Lord Dacre. He seeks the army leader and gives a rather elegant speech justifying their course as the war 'against the untrue' in the hope of pushing the leader to enter war instead of waiting in vain.

Less would not at our need be due
To us, who war against the Untrue; —
The delegates of Heaven we rise,
Convoked the impious to chastise;
We, we the sanctities of old
Would re-establish and uphold." —
(840-845)

For Norton, the rising is not about his fear of being punished by the Earls as Wordsworth's note suggests. His true intention is to re-establish the old religion, to restore the glory of the altar and the

²⁴⁷ Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, Volume I, ed. by Henry B. Wheatley, F.S.A. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1966), p. 269.

shrine. The altar is mentioned several times in the poem, representing the old Catholic belief forced to be replaced by the Protestant religion. Henry VIII's breach from the Roman Catholic Church was a landmark in both political and religious spheres. As far as religion was concerned, the newly established Protestant Church put the emphasis on Holy Scripture as the only source of authority, and referred to itself as the religion of the brain, objecting to the mysterious and superstitious Catholic rituals. The use of images, shrines, and altars was subsequently forbidden. The Ten Articles in 1536 and two sets of Injunctions in 1536 and 1538 were the first attempts to enforce conformity by denouncing the Catholic rituals, worship of saints, monumental buildings such as monasteries. A number of monasteries, priories, and convents were demolished between 1536 and 1541 as a legal process, Tintern Abbey being one of them. However, Bolton Abbey survived the dissolution. Later, the Thirty-Nine Articles in 1563 (a milestone in the English Reformation) officially set the creed for the Anglican Church. Article XXII made it clear that the Roman Catholic worship of images and relics, and the invocation of the saints, were 'repugnant to the Word of God'.²⁴⁸ Article XXVIII renamed the mass as the Lord's Supper, denying Transubstantiation as without biblical foundation. The significance of the altar during the consecration of bread and wine in communion services was therefore undermined or even denied.

Norton's first invocation of the altar takes place when he tries to convince the Earls that the rise is a necessary action.

To you a suffering State complains,
And ye must raise her from the dust.
With wishes of still bolder scope

²⁴⁸ 'Of Purgatory. The Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping, and Adoration, as well of Images, as of Reliques, and also invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the word of God.' Article XXII, *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, Explained with an Introduction by Edgar C. S. Gibson, D.D. (London: Methuen & Co., 1898), p. 537.

On you we look, with dearest hope,
 Even for our Altars, —for the prize,
 In Heaven, of life that never dies;
 For the old and holy Church we mourn,
 And must in joy to her return.
 (654-661)

The altar is furthermore glorified with a poetic aura in Norton's speech to Francis when in prison.

“The darksome Altars would have blazed
 “Like stars when clouds are rolled away;
 (1281-1282)

The altar reminds Norton of the old days and the lost tradition. He aims to restore the altar and to re-establish the old faith. ‘The voice restored, the eye of truth/ Re-opened that inspired my youth;’ (1286-1288) Norton would rather stay and live in the illusions of the past than accept the change. He is prepared to see the consequences of the rising. The image of an altar is associated with pre-Christian ancient rituals of sacrifice. In a way, the Norton brothers who follow their father to the war, the prophet Francis with both foresight and cowardice, and the obedient sufferer Emily all become victims of their father's endeavour, and therefore, are sacrificial lambs on the altar.

Norton is a tyrannical father, but certainly not a flat character. The ‘discordant qualities’ complicate him as a character. In figure, Norton is a dignified old sire.

Proud was the field of Sons and Sire,
 Of him the most; and, sooth to say,
 No shape of Man in all the array
 So graced the sunshine of that day:
 The monumental pomp of age
 Was with this goodly Personage;
 (740-745)

His devotion to the restoration of the old faith, were it for another justified course, would have been seen as great merit. Indeed, admiration is attached to the bravery, loyalty, the filial and brotherly bond among the Nortons and his followers. At the end of Canto Fifth, their bravery facing death is sung to Emily by the old man.

They rose—embraces none were given—
 They stood like trees when earth and heaven
 Are calm; they knew each other's worth,
 And reverently the Band went forth.

 Together died, a happy death!
 (1334-1355)

The strength which the Nortons relied on is a mixture of their belief in the course and the filial bond between father and son.

Other discordant qualities are shown in Francis and Emily. Francis is perhaps the only sober man in the poem. As far as he can see, there is no need to cling to the old religion as

A just and gracious queen have we,
 A pure religion, and the claim
 Of peace on our humanity.
 (387-389)

Despite his foresight and good reason, Francis lacks loyalty and strength. Duncan Wu suggests that in the 1808 version, Wordsworth depicts Francis as the traitor who surrenders his family to the government troops.²⁴⁹ In the published 1815 version, Francis, although not a traitor, nearly becomes

²⁴⁹ Duncan Wu, 'Editing Wordsworth's Fragments', *Essays in Criticism*, 54 (January 2004), 1-17.

one when he flees with the banner.

Emily's inner struggle between obeying her father and her brother against her own wish constitutes her discordant qualities which are later harmonized by her action of becoming a conformist. With the company and help of the doe, Emily experiences a crucial moment when hearing the bell of Rylstone toll. It is a soft spring day and she is wandering through the abandoned field when the bell of Rylstone tolls, as if playing the Sabbath music 'God us aid' (1781). The sound brings back Emily's childhood memories of reading inscriptions of her grandfather's name on the bell. Years pass and with the sad change of their family fortune, Emily responds differently to the tolling of the bell. Instead of remembering the Sabbath music, she thinks of actual prayer. 'God us aid', she prays. 'And all the Hills were glad to bear/ Their part in this effectual prayer.' (1794-1795) A new strength is gained. On hearing the death of Francis, Emily is subjected to '...a holy,/Though stern and rigorous, melancholy!' (1615-1616), but now, as she is 'Sustained by memory of the past/And strength of Reason...' (1643-1645), her rigorous melancholy becomes 'Mild, delicious melancholy...' (1777). She then joins 'The Wharfdale peasants in their prayers' (1882). The meek lady, the last Norton, is finally conforming to the same religion as the commoners.

The discordant qualities in the father, Francis, and Emily complicate the outlook of the rising. The focus shifts from a religious conflict to its participants. Wordsworth adapted the original ballad in Percy's *Reliques* by adding actions and discordance to make the characters not just names and figures in history, but living human beings who fell prey to religious disputes. This humanitarian approach is in accordance with Wordsworth's opposition to the Catholic question by seeing it as 'a mere pretext of ambitious and discontented men.'²⁵⁰ To the poet, as far as religion is concerned, whether it is

²⁵⁰ MY, I, p. 472.

Catholic or Anglican does not matter, simply because a vast majority of people are not very religious. In a letter to Wrangham on June 5th, 1808, Wordsworth describes a typical day of a farmer: he spends the most of the day working in the field, or engaging in the chores he finds in the barn or the house. Then there is supper, after which he goes to bed. On Sabbath day, he goes to Church. Coming back home, he may read a few pages of the Bible, or pay a little visit to his neighbours, or receive them in his house. This kind of life ‘will be looked upon with little complacency by many religious persons, from its bearing no impression of their particular modes of faith and from its want of fervent Piety and habitual Godliness’, yet it is ‘peaceable’.²⁵¹ This kind of unsophisticated life also makes Wordsworth incline to believe that Catholic Emancipation is a mere political dispute manipulated by the politicians, which probably will have no effect on how ordinary people practise religion. The Catholic Emancipation itself may not have much impact on people’s everyday life, but if it progresses and becomes aggressive under the manipulation of those politicians, it brings instability and more harm: ‘what is to become of the poor Church and people of England’?²⁵²

In the end, *The White Doe* is not a simple poem. The controversy surrounding action versus mind, the discordant qualities of the characters and the complicated religious and political issues problematize the poem and create tension. What brings the tension into reconciliation is the doe whose everlasting presence embodies, transcends and merges time and history. It is a prophetic existence, whose legend inspires the poet. *The White Doe of Rylstone* is his vision, through which he explores complicated matters such as moral duty, virtue, and religion. It is the truth in words ‘with sacred wisdom fraught’ (18).

²⁵¹ MY, I, p. 247.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 313.

Chapter 7

Peter Bell: A Moral Persuasion Gone Wrong

7.1. The Controversy

Among all of Wordsworth's poems, *Peter Bell*, drafted in 1798 and published on 22 April, 1819, is the most controversial and problematic. The poem tells a redemption story about a lawless potter named Peter Bell who has a merciless heart and a dozen wives. Trying to steal an ass he comes across when lost at night in Swaledale, Peter Bell finds a drowned body, which turns out to be the master of the ass. Mixed feelings of fear and awe seize Peter Bell, compelling him to drag the body out of the water and accompany the ass back to its owner's home to deliver the grievous news. Several things are encountered during this journey which serve as a transforming force on Peter Bell, including the image of the blood stain, the illusion of hearing a boy's cry who has lost his father (the master of the ass), the highland girl Peter tricks into marrying and deserts, and the Methodist Minister's prayer. Peter Bell, a superstitious man, experiences fear and remorse. The climax lies in his encounter with the drowned man's widow, which shows his drastic change from a lawless man into someone capable of showing sympathy and tenderness. Ten months later, he is transformed into a good man.

Evidence shows that Wordsworth considered *Peter Bell* as his major work, and that he was particularly fond of the third book, in which Peter Bell gains redemption. William Hazlitt's account of Wordsworth reading *Peter Bell* confirms the poet's satisfaction at this work as 'he announces the fate of his hero in prophetic tones'.²⁵³ John E. Jordan, editor of the Cornell edition, gives a detailed account

²⁵³ William Hazlitt, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Volume 9, Uncollected Essays*, ed. by Duncun Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), pp. 95-110 (p. 107).

of six manuscripts versions and five published versions, suggesting that Wordsworth had put great effort into this poem.

However, the reception of *Peter Bell* never quite met the poet's expectations. Sarcastic parodies and harsh criticism bombarded the poet. Two of the best known parodies of the poem were respectively by John Hamilton Reynolds and Shelley. Even before the actual publication of the poem, Reynolds had already published a parody *Peter Bell, A Lyrical Ballad* a week earlier. In the preface to the poem, Reynolds draws a portrait of the self-conceited speaker, targeting Wordsworth and the Wordsworthian subject and theme: 'out of sparrow's eggs I have hatched great truths, and with sexton's barrows have I wheeled into human hearts, piles of the weightiest philosophy.'²⁵⁴ Reynolds' parody was despised by the *Theatrical Inquisitor and Monthly Mirror* in June 1819 as 'coarse and ungente'.²⁵⁵ Compared to Reynolds whose satire is mainly on Wordsworthian themes, Shelley's parody *Peter Bell the Third*, composed in October 1819 but remained unpublished until 1839, mocks the specific them of redemption in Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*. The response to Shelley's parody, according to Stephen C Behrendt's account, 'has historically ranged from disappointment to distaste'.²⁵⁶

There is undoubtedly a sarcastic tone permeated through the parodies, but the most direct and vehement criticism on *Peter Bell* came from contemporary reviews. Reviews in favour of *Peter Bell* were greatly outnumbered by those which were critical and harsh. Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867) claims that 'Wordsworth has set himself back ten years by the publication of this unfortunate work'.²⁵⁷ Leigh Hunt refers to *Peter Bell* as Mr. Wordsworth's 'didactic little horror'²⁵⁸. Harsher criticism can

²⁵⁴ *Romantic Parodies, 1797-1831*, ed. by David A. Kent and Dale R. Ewen (Cranbury, London and Ontario: Associated University Press, 1992), p. 174.

²⁵⁵ Woof, p. 668.

²⁵⁶ Stephen C. Behrendt, '“Peter Bell the Third”: Contempt and Poetic Transfiguration', in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed., Timothy Webb, Alan Alan Mendel Weinberg (Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 101-118 (p. 101).

²⁵⁷ Woof, p. 655.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 651.

be found in H. St John's review, in which he considers the poem as 'the most ridiculous attempt at poetry ever aspired to, were it even by one of mediocre talents'.²⁵⁹ However, none of them was as severe as the following one in *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*. 'Of all Mr. Wordsworth's poems, this is decidedly the worst; it possesses all the faults of the lake school, without any of its beauties.'²⁶⁰

To draw out certain similarities among the reviews, those criticisms targeted two aspects of *Peter Bell*, its subject matter and language, exactly what Wordsworth was known for as the poet who wrote *Lyrical Ballads*. Critics were not pleased to read about a mysterious donkey. They considered it as a degeneration of the poet's taste. Byron's sarcastic tone is easily detectable in his letter to Coleridge referring to Wordsworth as 'the bard who soars to eulogise an ass'²⁶¹. *The Theatrical Inquisitor, or, Monthly Mirror* in June 1819 points out a bizarre scene in *Peter Bell* as an example of its defects, in which the ass turns around and grins at Peter Bell, while Peter Bell grins back. 'We are least likely to feel any degree of sympathy, and this we think a vital defect.'²⁶²

A poem centring on an ass seemed to be unusual, crude or even in bad taste for Wordsworth's contemporary readers. There were a few who defended him, but not without reservations. Charles Lamb in his letter dated 26 April, 1819, writes '*Peter Bell* (not the mock one) is excellent. For its matter, I mean. I cannot say that the style of it quiet satisfies me. It is too lyrical.'²⁶³ Indeed, critics railed at the style in which Wordsworth delivers *Peter Bell* as another major defect. The playful tone in the 'Prologue' does not seem to fit in: an unsigned review in the *Literary Gazette*, 12 June 1819 claims 'if Swift's definition of a good style be correct, this composition of Mr. Wordsworth is not only indifferent poetry, but bad language.'²⁶⁴ The *European Magazine* in June 1819 also points out that

²⁵⁹ Woof, p. 689.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 668.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 692.

²⁶² Ibid., p. 668.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 641.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 717.

‘the subject is not so well adapted for Mr. Wordsworth’s talents as those which he generally selects, nor is the execution more happy than the subject, —they are both fitter for a nursery song, than to assist in establishing the author in the station among the first poets of the country.’²⁶⁵

Wordsworth himself, to some extent, had foreseen the hostile reviews. Sir George Beaumont read *Peter Bell* before its publication. He also painted Peter Bell, and he talked about having an engraving. Wordsworth, in reply, bitterly comments on the poem: ‘...remember that no Poem of mine will ever be popular; and I am afraid that the sale of Peter would not carry the expense of the Engraving, and that the Poem in the estimation of the public would be a weight upon the Print’²⁶⁶. In preparing for the publication of *Peter Bell*, Wordsworth perhaps predicted the commonly perceived defects the poem might have, and he did a significant amount of work revising it. But as the Cornell editor John E. Jordan concludes, there are no fundamental changes to the structure or theme of the poem. Wordsworth worked particularly on the characterization of Peter Bell, and the elevation of the tone. Across these revisions, the poet’s developing style can be observed: from the style in *Lyrical Ballad* in his early years to the manner and mode of his late career.

However, the revisions did not necessarily help *Peter Bell* to gain favour among readers. Drafted in 1798, the poem shares many qualities of *Lyrical Ballads*. The subject matter of the poem follows Wordsworth’s idea of rustic language depicting rustic scenes and characters. It offers a fresh approach to poetry. One may remember William Hazlitt’s impression when hearing Wordsworth reading his poetry. ‘The sense of a new style and a new spirit in poetry came over me. It had to me something of the effect that arises from the turning up of the fresh soil, or of the first welcome breath of Spring’.²⁶⁷ The later Wordsworth, to some extent, returned to traditional poetic forms and subject matter, writing

²⁶⁵ Woof, p. 722.

²⁶⁶ MY, I, p. 194.

²⁶⁷ William Hazlitt, ‘My First Acquaintance with Poets (1823)’, p. 104.

odes and sonnets. *Peter Bell* would work well alongside *Lyrical Ballads*, but in order to elevate the tone, Wordsworth attempted to revise it using the kind of diction appropriate for a formal ode. This naturally enough results in awkwardness. The composed manner in *Peter Bell* as published in 1819 simply did not work. The reading text of MSS 2 and 3 (1799) provided by the Cornell *Peter Bell* is livelier in manner and smoother in rhythm with a slightly satirical tone. It may not be a great poem, but it certainly is more enjoyable than the *Peter Bell* of 1819.

Why did Wordsworth go to great lengths to revise *Peter Bell* and try to fit the poem into the manner that is inherently contradictory to itself? The fact that Wordsworth's writing style evolves with age is certainly one of the reasons, but another reason is perhaps that *Peter Bell* is never meant to be an ordinary figure, and *Peter Bell* the poem never a simple one. In Wordsworth's scheme, the poem is designed to be the story of a fallen hero, someone like Robin Hood. He defends the poem in a later sonnet called 'On the Detraction Which Followed the Publication of a Certain Poem' published in the 1820 *Miscellaneous Poems*.

A Book came forth of late called, 'Peter Bell;'
Not negligent the style; —the matter?—good
As taught that song records of Robin Hood;
(1-3)²⁶⁸

The title suggests *Peter Bell* to be a tale, but what differentiates it from an ordinary folk tale is prophetic elements incorporated into the poem, mainly in two aspects: first, *Peter Bell*'s story is told by an aspirational minstrel-like speaker who mourns for and attempts to bring back the prophetic tradition; second, the primary focus of the poem is to convey a moral lesson to its audience inside and

²⁶⁸ William Wordsworth, *Shorter Poems, 1807-1820*, ed. by Carl H. Ketcham (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 282.

outside the text.

7.2. 'There was a time': the Prophet-like Speaker

Wordsworth starts the poem by justifying his subject matter and theme, particularly, why Peter Bell's tale is set in England. The opening of 'Prologue' is about the speaker's boat journey up to the heavens, where the constellations are seen: 'The Crab—the Scorpion—and the Bull—' (36).²⁶⁹ 'The towns in Saturn are ill-built' (41) and 'Swift Mercury resounds with mirth' (46). The speaker's concern is to return to earth, specifically England. The boat tries to persuade the speaker to travel with it to faraway lands, such as snowy Siberia, burning Africa and the realm of fairyland. Having learnt the speaker has no other intention than going back to England, the boat leaves in a scornful mood.

Critics have suggested that the boat symbolises 'the faculty of imagination',²⁷⁰ but Wordsworth may use the boat to refer to a literary tradition and fashion from which he learned and from which he breaks away.

Together, the speaker and the boat travel among the stars, but there is a discrepancy of destination between the boat and the speaker. The cosmos fascinated generations of poets like Dante and Milton, both of whom Wordsworth learned by heart. In choosing to return to the earth, Wordsworth, through the speaker, expresses an urge to break away from the tradition. The boat also lures the speaker to go to the Siberian snows, burning Africa, and Fairy land. The three places represent a literary fashion of

²⁶⁹ *Peter Bell*, p. 47. The text used in this chapter is the poem's first published edition in 1819. This thesis focuses primarily on poems either written or started in the golden decade, which makes MSS 2 and 3 seeming to be a natural choice in terms of text. However, two reasons prompt the thesis to choose the published 1819 version over the manuscripts: first, there are no significant changes of the character or story; second, the focus in this chapter is on readership, both on Wordsworth's mind and in reality. Because the 1819 version is published, it presents the poem in the way that Wordsworth wants to present in front of his reader, thus, a more suitable text for our discussion.

²⁷⁰ Woof, p. 706.

depicting the exotic. The long eighteenth century saw the proliferation of travel writings depicting the foreign and the exotic. When the grand tour came into fashion, the account of individual travellers flourished across disciplines and genres, but the speaker, despite of the temptations to go to foreign lands, firmly stated his will to stay in his own country.

A similarity can be drawn between the speaker's urge to return to his home country and the biblical prophets' concern about homeland (as discussed in Chapter 1 and 5). The speaker's concern echoes with the poet's very own in his dedication to Southey. Wordsworth writes about the revision process: 'During the long interval, pains have been taken at different times to make the production less unworthy of a favourable reception; or, rather, to fit it for filling permanently a station, however humble, in the Literature of my Country.'²⁷¹ To fit into and even create a national literature is the poet's life-long project. Thus the speaker returns to his home country, with an almost missionary zeal. He expresses the nostalgic feeling towards a lost prophetic tradition and he, subsequently, feels the prophetic calling.

There was a time when all mankind
 Did listen with a faith sincere
 To tuneful tongues in mystery vers'd;
 Then Poets fearlessly rehears'd
 The wonders of a wild career.
 (126-130)

These lines reminds readers of the opening of 'Immortality Ode' (published in *Poems, in Two Volumes*, 1807)

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,

²⁷¹ Peter Bell, p. 41.

The Earth, and every common sight,
 To me did seem
 Apparell'd in celestial light,
 The glory and the freshness of a dream.
 It is not now as it has been of yore; —
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,
 By night or day,
 The things which I have seen I now can see no more.
 (1-9)²⁷²

The 'Ode', apart from the nostalgic feelings towards the past, is also about the poet's self-doubt and hesitations: whether he has lost the prophetic vision and poetic power, which confirms what has been discussed in Chapter 1: the doubt and emotional tension along with prophetic aspirations in *The Prelude*. But in *Peter Bell*, the prophet-like speaker is slightly more optimistic and firmer than the one in 'the Ode'. 'The tuneful tongues in mystery vers'd' may easily be associated with the Delphic Oracle and the mad prophetess, who conveyed divine messages in poetic form. But things changed in the speaker's time, to whom, this is a 'sleepy world' (131). It needs awakening. His ambition is to embark on a prophetic mission with a 'sympathetic heart' and 'a soul of power' (144-145). *Peter Bell* is told in such spirit in an attempt to wake this 'sleepy world', and by doing so, to restore the prophetic tradition. Meanwhile, the tale, as the Delphic prophecies, has a strong moral concern.

7.3. 'Became a good and honest man': An Attempt at Moral Persuasion

Alan Bewell in *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment* (1989) offers a detailed analysis of *Peter Bell* in the religious context. Some of his main arguments are: by evoking the Methodist preacher, Wordsworth is trying to demonstrate how language and words can have a transformative force on the

²⁷² *Poems, in Two Volumes*, p. 271.

human mind; the poem is an allegory of the origin of religion, of how religion grows out of violence, fear and ignorance. By comparing Peter Bell to David and Balaam in the Bible, Bewell argues that the poem is a 'secularized Easter narrative, a gospel story, which leads Peter to a specific Wordsworthian conception of resurrection'.²⁷³ Bewell also notices that the character Peter Bell with his thirty years or more as 'a wild and woodland rover' (217) can be linked to Christ, who also spent thirty years before being baptized and starting on his mission of preaching and healing. The fact Peter Bell rides on the ass on his journey towards the drowned man's cottage is commonly believed to be an allusion to Christ who rode an ass into Jerusalem. Furthermore, Bewell establishes a textual link between *Peter Bell* and scripture in claiming that Part One and Two of the poem functions as the Old Testament myth, while Part Three has a Christian orientation.

By establishing a link between Peter Bell's story and the biblical narrative, Bewell somewhat defends and elevates the poem. For Bewell, Part Three has specific meaning associated with Christianity. Wordsworth himself values this part. He thought it to be 'interesting'. 'He [Peter Bell] has risen in my esteem. Heaven knows there was need. The third part I think *interesting*, a praise which I give myself with more pleasure as I know that in general I can lay little claim to it.'²⁷⁴ What is indeed interesting is that Part Three steers *Peter Bell* into a morally instructive tale. Peter Bell is superstitious. After maltreating the ass, he experiences 'guilty fear' (152) and hallucinations, suspects that a certain spirit is on the move. Seeing the widow weeping strikes him even further till he can't bear this anymore. The guilt, fear, love and sorrow he witnesses finally transform him into a good man.

And Peter Bell, till that night
Had been the wildest of his clan,

²⁷³ Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 133.

²⁷⁴ EY, p. 256.

Forsook his crime, respected his folly,
 And after ten months' melancholy,
 Became a good and honest man.
 (1181-1185)

As Ian Balfour observes, the significance of biblical prophecy lies not in the telling of the future, but in the prophets' interpretations, through which warnings are given. The essence of prophecy is persuasion.

The prophecy is a promise but not necessarily a promise of the fulfilment of its declared content: It does not necessarily mean what it says. In J. L. Austin's terms, Jonah is preoccupied with the constative content of the prophetic word, whereas God is ultimately more concerned with its perlocutionary force, its power to persuade.²⁷⁵

The moral concern in Wordsworth's poetry is one of the cornerstones of his fame and success during the Victorian times. Stephen Gill pictures a 'conservative-radical, the humanitarian and morally concerned Wordsworth'²⁷⁶ in the Victorians' eyes. Gill in *Wordsworth and the Victorians* mainly explores the last twenty five years of Wordsworth's career, but it has to be pointed out that the poet's moral concern had already been a principle of his poetic creation right from the start. As early as in 1794, Wordsworth was enthusiastic about starting a periodical, together with his friend William Matthews. The correspondence between them in 1794 was preoccupied with the discussion of this project, from which Wordsworth's lifelong belief in poetry as instruction was explicitly expressed. In the letter to Matthews on 8 June, 1794, Wordsworth provides a provisional title for the periodical as *The Philanthropist a Monthly Miscellany*²⁷⁷. As for its contents, he proposes that the first part should be filled with political writing, followed by essays on moral issues, both of which aim at providing

²⁷⁵ Balfour, p. 130.

²⁷⁶ Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 3.

²⁷⁷ EY, p. 125.

instruction. The next part is for amusement, which should contain literary criticism, poetry or other literary creation. ‘But I should principally wish our attention to be fixed upon life and manners, and to make our publication a vehicle of sound and exalted Morality.’²⁷⁸ The plan was never carried out, probably due to the financial pressure. Neither of them had enough money to support its publication. Nevertheless, Wordsworth continued to take writing as a ‘vehicle of sound and exalted Morality’²⁷⁹ and carried out the project on his own. *Peter Bell* drafted five years later is a product of the plan discussed in the 1794 correspondences.

Moral persuasion lies at the core of *Peter Bell*, particularly in Part Three, in which Peter Bell goes on a long journey to the drowned man’s cottage. He experiences fear when he sees the blood from the ass, and when he hears the cry from the boy who comes to look for his missing father. He sheds tears when passing the chapel and hearing the Methodist cries ‘Repent!’. He witnesses the widow’s cry of despair and feels ‘that man’s heart is a holy thing’ (1122). It is more than a physical journey. It is a psychological one. Peter Bell has been taught to feel. He is a specimen. By demonstrating his moral evolution, the poem reasserts the possibility of good as something can be attained. Good in *Peter Bell* includes, among other things, gentility: being able to feel, and being able to treat people and things with good will.

Such demonstration got Wordsworth and *Peter Bell* into trouble. The poem’s contemporary readers were not prepared to see low subject matter such as an ass to be able to suffer and feel, and thus worth our sympathy and respect. The ass is meant to invoke sympathy, but backfires, as shown by the horrendous reviews discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

This friction between the poet and the critics is actually more interesting than just the critics being

²⁷⁸ EY, p. 119.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 119.

unsympathetic to the writer. It reflects the border and limits of poetical practice. Michael O'Neill observes that Romantic poetry 'lays radically altered emphasis on poetry as a way of knowing. In poems of the period, it is evident that poetry becomes the, at times uneasy, rival of philosophy, theology, and science.'²⁸⁰ The uneasy status of poetry as a rival of philosophy is apparent in the reception of *Peter Bell*.

Animals in the eighteenth century interested the philosophers. The debate on the status of animal compared to human being was rather rigorous. As Michael Bradie observes:

At the beginning of the century the question was whether or not animals had souls. As the relevance of having a soul declined, it was replaced by questions about intellectual capacities of animals. At the end of the century. The utilitarian tradition redefined the relevant conceptual base as the capacity to suffer.²⁸¹

Quite a number of philosophical enquires were made on the relationship between human being and animals. Bishop Butler (Joseph Butler, 1692–1752) argues for human supremacy based on his observation that reason distinguishes man from animals: '...reason gives us the advantage and superiority over them [the brutes], and thus man is the acknowledged governing animal upon the earth.'²⁸² Adam Ferguson echoes Butler in claiming that man's dominion over animals attributes to the power of our minds rather than the muscular strength. The early Utilitarian Francis Hutcheson attempts to justify man's act of using inferior animals by arguing that the necessary use of the animal can be balanced by the gain in human happiness. A similar view is expressed in Shaftesbury who sees nature as an organic whole in which the sufferings of the few are required to ensure the proper function

²⁸⁰ Michael O'Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. xxiii.

²⁸¹ Michael Bradie, 'The Moral Status of Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy', in *Biology and the Foundations of Ethics*, ed. by Jane Maienschein, Michael Ruse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 32-51.

²⁸² Joseph Butler, 'Of the Moral Government of God', in *The Works of Joseph Butler, LL.D.: Late Lord Bishop of Durham*, preface by Samuel Hallifax (Boston: published by Hilliard and Brown, 1827), pp. 97-120 (p. 110).

of the whole. It was agreed that animals were capable of some sort of suffering, and then the debate moved to questioning whether animals have the ability to reflect and be a moral agent. Ferguson argues that the absence of linguistic ability in animals is the key to their inability to reflect. This inability leads to the claim that animals lack conscience and thus cannot be moral agents. Such was the mainstream thinking on the issue.

While the eighteenth century philosophers were discussing the capability of suffering in animals and their intellectual capabilities, literature was experiencing ‘an age of sensibility’.²⁸³ There was also a tendency of writing compassionately on animals, a phenomenon rightly observed by David Perkins in *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (2003), in which he gives examples such as William Cowper, John Clare and Charles Lamb, among others.²⁸⁴

But nevertheless, the literary critics were strong-discontented to read about the capacity of this particular ass in *Peter Bell* to suffer from its master’s death. Wordsworth was not uneasy when adding human qualities such as loyalty and compassion to the ass, but the critics were. They seemed to be out of tune with their philosopher counterparts. In fact, the assumption that non-human or non-living objects have feelings was sometimes considered a faux pas. John Ruskin’s (1819-1900) definition of ‘Pathetic Fallacy’ is an example.

I want to examine the nature of the other error, that which the mind admits when affected strongly by emotion. Thus, for instance, in Alton Locke, —

“They rowed her in across the rolling foam —
The cruel, crawling foam.”

The foam is not cruel, neither does it crawl. The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in which the reason is unhinged by grief. All violent feelings have the same effect. They produce in us a falseness in all our

²⁸³ Northrop Frye in his 1956 article ‘Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility’ defines the Romantic age as an age of sensibility. ‘Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility’, in *Northrop Frye’s Writings on the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Volume 17, ed. by Imre Salusinszky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 7-15.

²⁸⁴ David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the “Pathetic fallacy”²⁸⁵

Pathetic Fallacy, for Ruskin, is an error. He condemns the more extreme forms of attributing human characteristics to non-human objects. But the less extreme romantic tendency to attribute human characteristics to animals, perhaps equally fallacious, is not uncommon. However, the animals are usually nobler, are more delightful than an ass, such as the nightingale in Keats’ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, the steed in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, or the white doe in Wordsworth’s very own *The White Doe of Rylstone*. The ass in *Peter Bell* fails to appeal, but Wordsworth is at least coherent in his poetic practises. The depiction of the ass echoes with two things: first, the ‘apotheosis of the animal’ he proposes when discussing *The White Doe* (See previous chapter); second, the narrative pattern which attaches supernatural quality to natural objects before generating a moral lesson from it, as in *Lyrical Ballads*. But why do *Lyrical Ballads*, although controversial, survive and continue to be read today, while *Peter Bell* is still largely ignored? This contrast reflects a long lasting problem in Wordsworth’s writing and publishing, which is the discrepancies between the intended reader, implied reader and actual reader. *Peter Bell* fuses and magnifies that problem: the poet misjudged his readership which is mainly middle class readers who are unlikely to gain pleasure from reading about an ass.

7.4. ‘We’ve waited anxiously and long’: the Missing Narratees and the Ideal Reader

Much has been discussed in reader-response theory about various types of readers. The intended reader is the targeted reader whom the writer has in mind when writing. The ideal relationship between the

²⁸⁵ John Ruskin, ‘Of the Pathetic Fallacy’, in *Modern Painters*, Vol 3 (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 56. Cornhill, 1856), p. 160.

writer and the intended reader is described by Booth: ‘The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader, he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement.’²⁸⁶ The intended reader is fictional, created by the writer and highly subjective. Close to the intended reader but not necessarily overlapping is the implied reader, discussed extensively by Wolfgang Iser. Compared to the intended reader who largely exists in the writer’s mind, the implied reader is an actual presence whose existence is suggested by the ideology, value or language of the text itself. Both the intended and the implied reader are fictional, while the real reader is simply the actual reader whom the text reaches.

The relationships between Wordsworth’s intended reader, implied reader and real reader when it comes to *Peter Bell* are problematic. One may as well take Wordsworth’s poetic manifesto in the ‘Preface’ to *Lyrical Ballads* as the basic principle of writing *Peter Bell* (because *Peter Bell* was drafted in 1798, roughly around the same time period of *Lyrical Ballads*, and no significant change was made from the draft to the first published edition of the poem). Wordsworth made an effort to elaborate on and justified himself in choosing rustic life as the subject matter, concentrating on the feelings conveyed, and on not using strict metrical language. In doing so, he does not intend to cater to the reader’s taste, but rather, he asks his reader to appreciate the poet’s efforts. He also asks readers to judge according to their own feelings and not to be blinded by the general public taste. ‘I have one request to make of my Reader, which is, that in judging these poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of others.’²⁸⁷ These criteria are startlingly demanding. They suggest both a high level of individual literary competence

²⁸⁶ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd edition (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 138.

²⁸⁷ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 759.

and a willingness to be his informed reader. In *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (1975), Culler points out that the competent reader will not only understand a poem, but also make sense of the poem by engaging in a set of the literary conventions and making associations to product the meaning of the text. The competent reader is also an ideal reader.

The question is not what actual readers happen to do but what an ideal reader must know implicitly in order to read and interpret works in ways which we consider acceptable in accordance with the institution of literature.²⁸⁸

In a word, Wordsworth's ideal reader has to possess the faculty of imagination to understand the feelings expressed in his poetry. Meanwhile, such a reading act requires the reader to be an informed one in Stanley Fish's terms, 'who does everything within his power to make himself informed'.²⁸⁹

The implied reader in *Peter Bell*, however, is not in total agreement with Wordsworth's picture of his intended reader. The first group of implied readers include the audience or narratees who are present in the poem and to whom the tale is told. They are a group of nine, and vary in gender, class and profession. Interestingly enough, the narratees are not fully introduced. The MSS 2 and 3 suggest five narrates: the squire, his young and beautiful daughter Bess with Harry the church warden, the wife of Parson Swan, and the speaker's friend Stephen Otter. In the published first edition, Harry and Mrs Swan are dropped. Wordsworth adds the Vicar and his wife onto the list, but the number remains five, out of nine stated in the poem. Four narratees are missing, and if one groups all the mentioned narratees in these versions altogether, the number will be seven, and still two are missing. A detailed

²⁸⁸ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002, first published in 1975), p. 144.

²⁸⁹ Stanley Fish, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', in *Reader-response Criticism: from Formalism to Post-structuralism*, ed., Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 70-100 (p. 87).

look into the present narratees shows that they come from different walks of life, each representing a specific group of reader. The Squire and the Vicar belong to the middle class readers who play a significant role in the expansion of readership in late eighteenth century; Bess (and Mrs. Swan in MSS 2 and 3) represents the female readership newly emerged; the image of Stephen Otter is probably drawn upon from the poet's intimate circle, male friends and family members who have the intellectual capacity to understand the tale and offer support.

So the question is, what do we make of the missing narratees? Without them, there is an opening in the audience group. This invites readers to engage themselves in the text, to be the missing narratees, and to collaborate with the poem in order to generate the meaning of the text. The missing narratees are Wordsworth's intended readers, who, he hopes, are able to feel and exercise their imagination. Ideally, they are the 'informed reader'.

The real readership of *Peter Bell*, however, did not quite meet Wordsworth's expectations. The late eighteenth century was a time of rapid change. Barbara Benedict's account offers what reading in the late eighteenth century was like.²⁹⁰ The cheap print and circulating libraries enabled literary works to reach a larger audience, including middle-class female readers (which Bess in *Peter Bell* represents). The demand in the reading market then drove the book trade into a money making business. Along with the flourishing publishing business there came a new authorship. A growing number of writers began to view themselves as professionals (about the professionalization of writers, see the discussion of knowledge economy in Chapter 2 of the thesis). However, because publishing was becoming more of a business, publishers were more interested in printing books that would be profitable, which according to Lucy Newlyn, caused anxiety among the writers. Newlyn offers several reasons resulting

²⁹⁰ Barbara M. Benedict, 'Readers, Writers, Reviewers, and the Professionalization of Literature', in *Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1730-1840*, ed., Thomas Keymer, Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 3-23.

in authorial anxieties, chiefly, the popularity of the type of literature not necessarily tailored for the taste of the sophisticated and learned reader; the rise of critics along with periodical criticism; the sense of losing one's literary identity in the excessive multiplication of literature; and the threat from foreign literature invading the national culture.²⁹¹

In Newlyn's interpretation, an anxiety about reception exists throughout Wordsworth's career. 'Wordsworth's abiding concern was with finding a worthy audience.'²⁹² He yearned to be popular, but could not help feeling that the public was overall hostile towards his publications, especially towards *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807). Holding a low expectation towards the contemporary critics and the general reading public, Wordsworth disguised his anxiety about reception by expressing a trust in future generations of readers (as discuss in Chapter 3); meanwhile, he would seek approval from an intimate circle of family and friends. His model reader would provide protection against the indifferent or even hostile readers, and usually take the form of a family member, often female companions.²⁹³

Newlyn's account can certainly be applied to *Peter Bell*, in which the five narratees meet the criteria. Among the narratees, there is Bess, the female supportive reader, and there is Stephen Otter, the speaker's good friend. The Vicar and Squire seem harmless, warm hearted and non-confrontational. All of them are keen in hearing the tale the speaker has to tell.

'O, here he is!' cried little Bess—
She saw me at the garden door,
'We've waited anxiously and long,'
They cried, and all around me throng,
Full nine of them, or more!
(Prologue, 181-185)

²⁹¹ Lucy Newlyn, 'The Sense of An Audience', in *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 3-48.

²⁹² Newlyn, p. 95.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 127.

Apart from seeking support from his intimate circle suggested by Newlyn, the missing narratees demonstrate that Wordsworth does seek to reach out to a wider audience. The blank left by the missing narratees needs to be filled by the informed reader who can understand feelings reflected in the poet's works and be willing to do everything in his power to make sense of the poem.

Wordsworth is being idealistic, not only because the informed reader is hard to find (this perhaps is the dream of every writer), but also because the poet himself goes beyond convention too much to be understood and appreciated. The act of writing and reading involves a discourse community in which certain conventions, system of rules, constraints and beliefs are shared by the reader and the writer. To some extent, the poet has to follow certain conventions. 'He cannot simply assign meaning but must make possible, for himself and for others, the production of meaning.'²⁹⁴

Undoubtedly the ass has low cultural status and a seemingly unlikely poetic subject to be given serious attention. Early references to the animal are mainly in the Scripture and neutral, but it became increasingly a laughingstock associated with stupidity and ignorance. There are quite a number of jokes about the ass in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (first published in 1600). In *Don Quixote* (1605), the comic hero obsessed with chivalry adopts a pseudo name Don Quixote and rides on a hopeless horse while his companion rides on an ass. Wordsworth himself was well aware that his subject matter may not necessarily belong to the category of the commonly appreciated. Here is his confession about his unusual subjects in the Preface:

I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, sometimes from diseased

²⁹⁴ Culler, p. 135.

impulses I may have written upon unworthy subjects;²⁹⁵

However innovative Wordsworth feels about writing unworthy subjects, he still depends on the literary convention for his poems to generate meanings. The literary convention, as it progresses,²⁹⁶ is that the ass is associated with stupidity, coarse and low cultural status. Readers cannot appreciate it in the way they appreciate the *Faerie Queene* with its knights mounted on noble steeds. Wordsworth's uncompromising poetics of writing about low subject matter backfired in this case.

Peter Bell is an ambitious work. It is situated in the poet's grand scheme of moral persuasion. Such scheme is closely linked with his aspiration of being a prophetic poet, to be able to instruct, to teach, and to persuade.

Drafted 9 years apart (*The White Doe of Rylstone* in 1807, and *Peter Bell* in 1798), *The White Doe* and *Peter Bell* both explore the moral philosophy of what is essential to being human, with the help of prophetic elements. In *The White Doe*, the doe serves as a prophetic existence, facilitating the poem in navigating the plot, whereas in *Peter Bell*, the story is told by a zealous aspirational speaker who seeks to restore the prophetic tradition. Moral lessons are involved in both poems, but the effects varies: *Peter Bell* was nearly completely dismissed by its contemporary critics; *The White Doe*, although subjected to less harsh criticism, came across as lacking in action, while in fact, its action lies in the confrontation and reconciliation between duty and inclination. Perhaps Wordsworth could only hope the two poems will resonate in his posterity. *Peter Bell* is a moral persuasion gone wrong, but nevertheless, contributes to build the Wordsworth as we know him today.

²⁹⁵ *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 757.

²⁹⁶ The biblical sources shows that Christ rode on an ass upon entry onto Jerusalem, but as time progresses, the ass in literature has increasingly become an object of ridicule. The OED explains that 'the ass has, since the time of the Greeks, figured in fables and proverbs as the type of clumsiness, ignorance, and stupidity... (Chiefly since 1500; the early references to the animal being mostly Scriptural, with no depreciatory associations.)'

Conclusion

This thesis has been about Wordsworth's self-fashioning as a poet, especially in his early career. In that process, the prophetic plays an essential role: it functions as a mode of poetic and personal identity and a mode of writing. The first part of the thesis explored the intricacies of adopting the prophetic as a method to combat the poet's anxieties: anxiety of influence, and anxiety about reception, in and beyond his time. The second part of the thesis investigated three key aspects of the prophetic in Wordsworth: prophetic utterance on the issues of history, national concern, and morality, discussed respectively in chapters on *Lyrical Ballads* (Chapter 4), 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' (Chapter 5), *White Doe of Rylstone* (Chapter 6) and *Peter Bell* (Chapter 7).

Wordsworth's approach to the prophetic is highly personal. In fashioning himself as a poet of prophetic quality, he adopted an authoritative voice that served his literary ambition, which was to establish himself alongside his precursors and gain recognition in literary history. His efforts paid off. The prophetic not only serves as the poet's mode of writing and mode of self-fashioning, but also plays a very important part in his canonisation. The prophetic quality of his poetry was gradually recognised over time. In relation to Wordsworth's later career, Hazlitt notices that 'his [Wordsworth] Sonnets, indeed, have something of the same high-raised tone and prophetic spirit'.²⁹⁷ In recent decades, through scholarly works such as those of Hartman and Abrams, the prophetic has been seen as a prominent feature of *The Prelude* and *The Prospectus*, but as the Introduction suggests, it becomes perhaps too prominent to be acknowledged as something fundamental rather than decorative to

²⁹⁷ William Hazlitt, *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt, Volume 7, Liber Amoris, The Spirit of the Age*, ed. by Duncan Wu (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), p. 166.

Wordsworth's poetry writing and poetic career.

The prophetic in Wordsworth is complex. Before the thesis concludes, there are two more points that needs to be clarified: the question of futurity and the elusiveness of the self.

Firstly, the prophetic this thesis emphasises, as stated in Introduction, is the power to discern, explain and speak forth the truth. It does not primarily focus on the future. But this does not mean that future has absolutely no place in this complicated matter. In fact, futurity is encoded in the prophetic Wordsworth in a subtle way that is linked closely to the poet's literary ambitions. For instance, in *Lyrical Ballads*, the fear brought by the apocalyptic vision of the rupture in human history is counteracted by the possibility of poetry functioning as the literary heir to human history; in 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty', the concern about the fate of the nation motivates the speaker to speak forth to the nation about its current follies; in *Peter Bell*, Wordsworth's anxiety about his reception by posterity is expressed by the prophet-like speaker addressing an audience not fully known or identified in the poem.

Secondly, the construction of the self is never simple. There is certain elusiveness to it, partly because the self is elusive by definition, in the sense that there are many identities attached to the self. In Wordsworth's case, there is his identity as a poet, as a critic, as a prose writer, and if extended outside his literary career, a philosophical thinker, an activist in early years, and a conservative in later years. Moreover, the self may undergo changes over time. For example, the established later Wordsworth writes more comfortably with a religious tone (as in *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, 1821-1822). Despite the elusive nature of the self, the prophetic still stands out as an essential and fundamental quality in both Wordsworth's poetry and his self-fashioning. To use Wordsworth's very own river metaphor (discussed in Chapter 3), if the self can be seen as the overflowing river with varied widths

and speed at different times and places, then the prophetic is always in the main stream of that river, and possibly the gravitational force that causes the river to flow forward.

There is no doubt about Wordsworth's influence in his posterity, critical (literary critics) and creative (later poets). The prophetic, being an essential quality of Wordsworth, was inherited by authors after him, for instance, poets such as Shelley and Browning, as well as prose writers such as Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin (their efforts to answer the prophetic challenges Wordsworth set up could be subject of another study). Shelley's sonnet 'To Wordsworth' written probably in 1815 contains lines that can well-explain Wordsworth's importance.

Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine
On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar:
Thou hast like to a rock-built refuge stood
Above the blind and battling multitude:
In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
Songs consecrate to truth and liberty, —²⁹⁸

The sonnet ends with Shelley's slight disappointment towards Wordsworth because the latter seem to have changed his poetic subjects. So Shelley, in a moment of what would be termed 'anxiety of influence' by Bloom, threatens to dismiss Wordsworth: 'Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve,/ Thou having been, that thou shouldst cease to be.' (13-14)²⁹⁹ Despite the friction at the end of the sonnet, the sonnet still reveals Wordsworth's image among later poets. What Wordsworth stood for them is like what Milton stood for Wordsworth: a prophet-like figure, whose light shines at night and whose voice weaves 'Songs consecrate to truth and liberty' (14). Two centuries after Wordsworth

²⁹⁸ *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. by Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest (London and New York: Longman, 1989), p. 455.

²⁹⁹ Bloom 'Daemonization or the Counter-sublime' discusses the complexities in the negation or demonization of the precursor. He observes that 'against Wordsworth, Shelley became a strong poet'. The last two lines of the sonnet show Shelley's effort in the negation of Wordsworth. Harold Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 2nd edn (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 104.

wrote the following passage, it is fairly safe to say that he, indeed, has produced some works that endured and are enduring:

That Poets, even as Prophets, each with each
Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
Have each for his peculiar dower a sense
By which he is enabled to perceive
Something unseen before: forgive me, Friend,
If I, the meanest of this Band, had hope
That unto me had also been vouchsafed
An influx, that in some sort I possess'd
A privilege, and that a work of mine,
Proceeding from the depth of untaught things,
Enduring and creative, might become
A power like one of Nature's...
(*The Prelude*, 1805, XII, 298-312)

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