

Winter 2020

## Wordsworth Shapes Himself And Is Reshaped: The River Duddon And The 1820 Miscellaneous Poems

Peter J. Manning  
*SUNY Stony Brook*, [peter.manning@stonybrook.edu](mailto:peter.manning@stonybrook.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/eng-articles>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Peter J. Manning, "Wordsworth Reshapes Himself and Is Reshaped: The River Duddon and the 1820 Miscellaneous Poems," *The Wordsworth Circle*, 51,1 (Winter, 2020), 35-53.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact [mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu](mailto:mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu), [hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu](mailto:hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu).

# WORDSWORTH RESHAPES HIMSELF AND IS RESHAPED: *THE RIVER DUDDON* AND THE 1820 *MISCELLANEOUS POEMS*

PETER J. MANNING, *Stony Brook University, New York*

The four-volume collection of *Miscellaneous Poems* has attracted significant attention from several critics.<sup>1</sup> Yet located between the self-canonicalizing *Poems, Including Lyrical Ballads* of 1815<sup>2</sup> and the more inclusive and further revised six-volume 1836–37 edition of *The Poetical Works* with the frontispiece portrait by H. W. Pickersgill, reprinted in stereotype in 1840, 1841, and 1843, it would be easy to look past the competing strains in Wordsworth's efforts to consolidate anew his reputation in 1820. In what follows I shall be concerned chiefly to parse the tensions arising between three impulses in that project: to establish himself as a national poet, to record his awareness of passing time, and to posit the stability of art beyond time.

Wordsworth's first publication in 1820 was *The River Duddon, A Series of Sonnets: Vaudracour and Julia: and Other Poems. To which is annexed, A Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes, In the North of England*, which appeared in late April. The thirty-three sonnets track the river from its origins "on the confines of Westmorland, Cumberland, and Lancashire," as the introductory statement declares, to its fall into the Irish Sea, staged as the poet's quest for origins: "I seek the birth-place of a native Stream" (I: 9). The sequence proceeds on several levels at once, from morning to evening, from life to death (and eternity), and from past to present, but Wordsworth emphasizes the primacy of the actual topographical by joining to the sonnet series an expanded version of his "Introduction to some Views of the Lakes, by the Reverend Joseph Wilkinson" from 1810, justified by "its having been written in the same spirit which dictated several of the poems, and from a belief that it will tend materially to illustrate

them” (*River Duddon* 214).<sup>3</sup> The sonnets and appended notes occupy sixty-eight pages of the volume; the description of the lakes occupies one hundred and eight. If the topographical prose was intended to furnish a “material” foundation for the values on which Wordsworth sought to build a vision of post-Waterloo England, it nonetheless betrays their precariousness. He repeatedly acknowledges that he has “given a faithful description, the minuteness of which the reader will pardon, of the face of the country as it was, and had been, through centuries, *till within the last fifty years*” (271; italics added). “Such, as I have said,” he reiterates, “was the appearance of things till within these last fifty years” (272), specifying the culprit, as the “practice, by a strange abuse of terms denominated Ornamental Gardening” (272), and then joining to it the “disfigurement which this country has undergone” from buildings inappropriately grand or out of harmony with their mountainous surroundings (279). The fullest description of the ideal landscape he celebrates climaxes: “woods surmounted by rocks utterly bare and naked, which add to the sense of height as if vegetation could not thither be carried, and impress a feeling of duration, power of resistance, and security from change!” (305). Such effects can now be produced only by further change, a shift in “taste” to offset the “change of inhabitants and owners which is rapidly taking place,” the reversal of an existing historical process (306). The volume stakes its vision of England on a recognition of its disappearance even in the region it champions.<sup>4</sup>

The sonnets are followed by a postscript in which Wordsworth acknowledges that they were composed over many years and many visits to the Duddon and stand in a different order from the order of composition. He advances by reshaping the past, and past writing, into new present forms; chronology is transformed into art, but *The River Duddon* is itself dissolved and redistributed in the *Miscellaneous Poems* within the year.

The final sonnet in the sequence, titled “Conclusion,” thus paradoxically becomes a fruitful starting point to consider the competing elements of past and future, change and permanence, that he seeks to reconcile:

I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,  
 As being pass'd away.—Vain sympathies!  
 For, *backward*, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,  
 I see what was, and is, and will abide;  
 Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;  
 The Form remains, the Function never dies;

While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,  
 We Men, who in our morn of youth defied  
 The elements, must vanish;—be it so!  
 Enough, if something from our hands have power           10  
 To live, and act, and serve the future hour;  
 And if, as tow'rd the silent tomb we go,  
 Thro' love, thro' hope, and faith's transcendant dower,  
 We feel that we are greater than we know.<sup>5</sup>

“What was, and is, and will abide” is the poet’s past, vanished in the flow of time that the river symbolizes yet preserved in memory and then rendered permanent in the art of the sequence. Or, as the twenty-first sonnet puts it, “From her unworthy seat, the cloudy stall / Of Time, breaks forth triumphant Memory; / Her glistening tresses bound, yet light and free” (lines 9–11). The history that Wordsworth builds is more than personal: the topography of the river’s course is the ground on which he constructs a narrative spanning from the “Desolation” of the origin (II: 8) to the “hamlets, towers, and towns” (XXXI: 10) that point at once to the actual progress of the river and to a later stage of history. Wordsworth populates the contemporary “mighty forests” with the “gigantic species” of deer “long since extinct” that once inhabited them (II: 10 and n.), and speculates on the “Man who first / In this pellucid Current slaked his thirst” (VIII: 1–3). “Pleased could my verse, a speaking monument / Make to the eyes of men thy features known” (III: 3–4), Wordsworth makes known for his readers an inclusive British history. The seventeenth sonnet, appropriately titled “Return,” evokes “the Danish Raven” (line 2), and a passing eagle is metamorphosed into “the imperial Bird of Rome [who] invokes / Departed ages” (lines 3–4); the Roman “Camp at Hardknot’s height / Whose guardians bent the knee to Jove and Mars” is paired with the nearby ruins of “that mystic Round of Druid frame” (lines 10–12). Nor is it only ancient history that Wordsworth summons; the thirty-first sonnet proposes that Duddon, the northern river of “obscure and uncouth,” even “barbarous” name, at least to the ears of *The Literary Chronicle*,<sup>6</sup> is “In stately mien to sovereign Thames allied, / Spreading his bosom under Kentish downs, / With Commerce freighted or triumphant War” (lines 12–14). If, as Donna Landry has recently proposed, Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” was deliberately “writing against” the topographical tradition epitomized by John Denham’s “Cooper’s Hill,” the Duddon sequence marks a return to it.<sup>7</sup>

These quotations may already have conveyed that the poet of *Lyrical Ballads*, experimenting with “the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes” (1798 *Advertisement*) or “the real language of men” (1800 *Preface*), had become a more traditionally literary poet. The first sonnet begins by recalling “that rocky spring / Bandusia, once responsive to the string / Of the Horatian lyre with babbling flow” (lines 2–4) before Wordsworth proclaims his indifference to “flowers that in perennial blow / Round the moist marge of Persian fountains cling” (lines 5–6). If he “seek[s] the birthplace of a native stream” he is equipped with the conventional tropes of the lyric poet. Among the later poems in the volume is the story of *Dion*, taken from Plutarch, and *Artegal and Elidure*, for which Wordsworth’s headnote advises: “See the Chronicle of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Milton’s History of England.” “In serious truth,” an anonymous critic in the *Monthly Review* noted approvingly:

We view the major portion of the present volume as a practical recantation, as a distinct palinodia, sung in his best style, of all Mr. Wordsworth’s poetical theories, or rather heresies, concerning the identity of prose and verse, &c., &c. He has here proved himself to be endowed with very considerable powers . . . as a poet of the genuine classical stamp; and condescending to return to the established models of taste, he has frequently written in a dignified, elegant, and pathetic manner.<sup>8</sup>

I should here bring together two aspects of the collection, the stylistic and the historical. As the *Monthly Review* suggests, *The River Duddon* pleased readers across the spectrum, including those who had been scornful of “Wordsworthianisms” in the past. In content the sonnets were both local, consonant with Wordsworth’s formerly derided status as “a Lake Poet,” and national. Or, as Brian Bates neatly summarizes the significant work of Benjamin Kim and James Garrett, “the poem articulates Wordsworth’s conception of nationhood through his figurations of the local” (154). Rather than a palinode, the venture seems to me syncretic: what abides is both the traces of history summoned from the landscape by an informed historical intelligence “looking backward,” and the stylistic resources developed over centuries by literary traditions. The attentive reader has the pleasure of recognizing conventions reinvigorated; the tourist and the citizen deepen their connections to their nation. The poet functions to enlarge ownership of the land from actual possession—the claim of the aristocracy that it is the political nation because it owns the land—to

readers who come to possess it through imagination. The local knowledge that Wordsworth possesses *in propria persona* is communicated and shared by the poetry and prose that together make up *The River Duddon* volume. The work opens cultural citizenship, without the threat of *le peuple* who drove the violence of the French Revolution or “the people” who were clamoring for representation in contemporary Britain.

The triumph over Napoleon had brought security of one kind to England, but it was shadowed by demobilized soldiers, bad harvests, and rising political agitation. The year 1817 brought the Pentrich Uprising and the Gagging Acts; 1818 brought the contested Westmorland elections of Brougham against the Lowther interests; 1819 the Westminster election and the success of the Radicals, and still more gravely, Peterloo; 1820 the death of George III. Wordsworth designed *The River Duddon* sequence to recompose his image, and simultaneously to compose a troubled nation.

The welcome given the volume attested its success. We might note, however, the possibility of different readings within the general approval. Ideally, formally conservative critics such as the writer for the *Monthly Review* could join lovers of the picturesque and countrymen who would be at home with such rural occupations as “Sheep Washing,” the title of the twenty-third sonnet. The strains in Wordsworth’s project emerge in his notes to the final sonnet. Wordsworth appends an acknowledgment to the concluding line—“We feel that we are greater than we know”: “And feel that I am happier than I know.’—Milton.” Perhaps the reference is meant to ward off anxieties of being charged with plagiarism; perhaps, as a closing gesture on the last page of the sequence it is a means for Wordsworth to install himself as Milton’s heir. In either case it implies an audience for whom the allusion is familiar; familiar enough that no specific reference need be given. The phrase is from *Paradise Lost*, book VIII, line 282, part of Adam’s narrative of his creation to Raphael. If we grant weight to the allusion, does it then imply that the “we” into which Wordsworth turns Milton’s “I,” we English, have recovered a redeemed equivalent to prelapsarian bliss “Thro’ love, thro’ hope, and faith’s transcendant dower,” a recasting of Scripture’s “And now abideth faith, hope, charity” (1 Cor. 13:13), which also provides the “abide” of the fourth line of the sonnet? Yet just beneath this encouraging note there is one that generates a fracture: “The allusion to the Greek Poet will be obvious to the classical reader.” This allusion comes in line 7: “While *we*, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,” identified by scholars as a variation of the translation Wordsworth made thirty years earlier of the lament for Bion attributed to Moschus:

“But we the great the mighty and the wise.”<sup>9</sup> The note opens the possibility of nonclassical readers: How does the distinction make them feel? That Wordsworth’s poem invites both classical and nonclassical readers? That the nonclassical reader would be inspired to discover the cryptic allusion, not easy when no guidance is given? That only the classical reader is fully a member, to cite Bates citing Benjamin Kim again, of “the brotherhood of men who are properly guided by the love of national independence” (156)?

The glimpse of another difference in the audiences of *The River Duddon* had been opened, symmetrically, in the advertisement at the beginning of the volume: “This Publication, together with ‘The Thanksgiving Ode,’ Jan. 18, 1816, ‘The Tale of Peter Bell,’ and ‘The Waggoner,’ completes the third and last volume of the Author’s Miscellaneous Poems” (*River Duddon*). The backward glance contemplates a reader who had been purchasing Wordsworth’s poems as they appeared, commencing with the two-volume *Poems, Including Lyrical Ballads* of 1815. All are roughly the same size, 22 by 14.5 centimeters, so binding them together with *The River Duddon* would produce a uniform set of three volumes.<sup>10</sup> The advertisement discloses that even as Wordsworth was working on the independent publication of *The River Duddon* he was planning to collect his *Miscellaneous Poems*: the three-volume set was soon replaced by a four-volume set, which appeared in August 1820, four months after the publication of *The River Duddon*, which it includes.

The advertisement to the four-volume *Miscellaneous Poems*, dated July 8, 1820, proleptically assured faithful Wordsworthians tempted by a new publication that they already possessed its contents; newcomers attracted by the favorable reviews *The River Duddon* earned could catch up at a steeply discounted cost.<sup>11</sup> *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner* of the year before had together cost 10 shillings; *The River Duddon* cost 12 shillings; *The Miscellaneous Poems* enabled a purchaser to obtain virtually all of Wordsworth’s output from *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* of 1793 for 32 shillings. (A new edition of *The Excursion* appeared in November 1820, at a third the cost of the original 1814 edition.<sup>12</sup>) The new format was smaller, 18 by 10.5 centimeters, but that was an appeal; Sara Hutchinson described the production as “four nice pocket volumes—far more agreeable to my mind than the last ones.”<sup>13</sup>

The *Miscellaneous Poems* looked backward to earlier work—and forward to a larger audience and an enhanced reputation after devastating critiques, provoked most recently by *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner*. The

collection offered Wordsworth, backed by Longman, who took the risk of fronting the expenses, an opportunity to defy the fall in his standing.<sup>14</sup> He did not simply reprint old material cheaply; while indicating the dates of composition and original publication in the table of contents, he rearranged the work into new configurations that recast the significance of the poems and his own image.

In June 1820 Crabb Robinson found Wordsworth revising *Peter Bell* and recorded in his journal that “[h]e has resolved to make some concessions to public taste,” striking out “[s]everal offensive passages” and “overcoarse expressions”: “I never before saw him so ready to yield to the opinion of others. He is improved not a little by this, in my mind” (Robinson 1: 349).

Considerations of space and a desire to emphasize important through-lines lead me to ignore revisions to individual poems and concentrate on structural effects. For example, Wordsworth had dedicated *The River Duddon* to his brother: “To the Rev. Christopher Wordsworth, D. D.,” but a stanzaic poem to Christopher that had reached the printer too late to be included among the sonnets stands at the head of the sequence in volume 4 of *Miscellaneous Poems*. The dedication alone establishes the ecclesiastical connection, but the poem amplifies the context. It begins with Wordsworth’s intimate account of a traditional Christian custom—“The Minstrels played their Christmas tune / To-night beneath my cottage eaves” (lines 1–2)—and moves from the present event to the wish that Christopher, occupied with “public care” (line 22), “Hadst heard this never-failing rite; / And seen on other faces shine / A true revival of the light; / Which Nature, and these rustic powers, / In simple childhood, spread through ours!” (lines 26–30).<sup>15</sup> Like the twenty-two-page note on the Reverend Robert Walker attached to the Seathwaite Chapel sonnet (XVIII), the opening poem declares its allegiances, fusing family and nature with institutional religion in the communal forms of the Lake District. Richard, in London, must endure “the imperial City’s din” (line 73), but the moral basis of the nation and the empire is furnished by the way of life that the poem celebrates: “Hail, ancient Manners! Sure defence, / Where they survive, of wholesome laws; / . . . / Hail, usages of pristine mould, / And ye, that guard them, Mountains old !” (lines 55–60). The new sequence created by the volume, moreover, insinuates as the reader proceeds the continuity between established religion in 1820 and the “William” of 1798 contemplating nature and elevating “one impulse from a



vernal wood” over books in “Expostulation and Reply” and “The Tables Turned,” and aligns these two poems with “The Character of a Happy Warrior” and the “Ode to Duty” of 1807.

The third volume begins boldly with *The White Doe of Rylstone* of 1815, which Francis Jeffrey famously dismissed as “the very worst poem we ever saw imprinted in a quarto volume,” a format Wordsworth self-righteously or defensively insisted he had chosen to show the world his opinion of it.<sup>16</sup> In *Miscellaneous Poems* it is no longer in the extravagant quarto format; more important, it is bookended with the “Thanksgiving Ode” of 1816. In this frame Emily’s Protestant faith, sympathy with a creature, and the defeat of a rebellion against Elizabeth in 1569 can be seen to exemplify the qualities of English national character that “I griev’d for Buonaparte” of 1801 denies to Napoleon. *The White Doe* instantiates “our peace, our fearful innocence, / And pure religion breathing household laws” (“Written in London, September, 1802”; lines 13–14), the “ancient English dower / of inward happiness,” and the cluster of values Wordsworth summoned in “Milton! Thou should’st be living at this hour” (lines 5–6) and the other patriotic sonnets of 1802, and to which he attributed the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo.<sup>17</sup> The carefully sustained self-fashioning nonetheless generated new problems. In a note to the “Thanksgiving Ode” in 1816, properly “Ode. The Morning of the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving” for the victory at Waterloo, Wordsworth had advised that “This Publication may be considered as a sequel to the Author’s ‘Sonnets, Dedicated to Liberty,’” which the reader will just have read in passing through the volume (*Shorter Poems* 536). James Chandler, in “Wordsworth After Waterloo,” has persuasively argued that the positioning of the “Thanksgiving Ode” deliberately echoes the placing of the Ode “There was a time” at the end of *Poems in Two Volumes* in 1807, and its similarly climactic position as *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* in 1815. The apex of his self-construction as a locally rooted patriot and responsible steward both of the literary tradition and of the English heritage, the 350-plus-line “Thanksgiving Ode” shows Wordsworth performing as national bard. Recalling the Horatian echoes in the first sonnet of the *Duddon* sequence, the poem is introduced by nine lines of untranslated Latin from the eighth poem in book IV of Horace’s *Odes*, a stumbling block to the nonclassical reader, which emphasizes the power of poetry to confer “just rewards.” Wordsworth wrote Southey that “strictly speaking” the poem is not an ode, “but a poem composed or supposed to be composed on the morning of the

thanksgiving [January 18, 1816, marked in the subtitle], uttering the sentiments of an individual upon that occasion. It is a dramatized ejaculation."<sup>18</sup> The pose of spontaneity exposed by the Horatian supplement is further contested by the five-and-a-half-page advertisement, dated March 18, 1816, through which the reader must proceed before reaching the poem itself. It argues passionately that Waterloo was "this great moral triumph . . . the deliverance of Europe" (*Shorter Poems* 178). Wordsworth concedes that the high cost of the war has produced "the present distresses under which this country labours" but affirms "his own belief that these sufferings will be transitory" because "the same national wisdom" displayed in the war "encourage[s] a firm hope that the cup of our wealth will be gradually replenished" (178).

At an early stage of the poem Wordsworth moderates his fervor: "Have we not conquered?—by the vengeful sword?" he asks, replying "Ah no, by dint of Magnanimity" (lines 56–57).<sup>19</sup> Personal fervor leads also to policy proposals: that London should build "a new temple" to celebrate the victors of Waterloo, or if "reverential modesty demand, / That all observance, due to them, be paid / Where their serene progenitors are laid," that "solemn rites" be regularly performed at Westminster Abbey "where their sons' sons, and all posterity, / Unheard by them, their deeds shall celebrate!" (lines 223–59 *passim*). Roughly twenty lines farther on the logic of divine providence leads Wordsworth to apostrophize: "Almighty God! / But thy most dreaded instrument, / In working out a pure intent, / Is Man—arrayed for mutual slaughter,— / Yea, Carnage is thy Daughter" (lines 278–82). Richard Gravil and Philip Shaw have separately shown how widely the question of how to memorialize Waterloo was debated in contemporary Britain; Wordsworth captures with epigrammatic force the painfully contradictory feelings generated by conceiving as national triumph, a sign of God's favor and plan for which one should be grateful, a moment of national bereavement.<sup>20</sup>

Without seeking to resolve this conflict, one may note that reprinting the "Thanksgiving Ode" as the climactic text in the third volume of *Miscellaneous Poems* gave an occasional poem of 1816, not widely read when published, enlarged circulation in 1820 and ensured that it would remain visible in the stereotyped editions through 1843.<sup>21</sup> If the poem captured a moment of turbulence and transferred it into the permanence of art, it reentered the realm of time and change by its republication and succeeding reception. Shelley attacked the phrase in "Peter Bell the Third" by having

Peter invert Wordsworth's address to Almighty God and compose odes to the Devil: "May Carnage and Slaughter, / Thy niece and thy daughter, / May Rapine and Famine, / Thy gorge ever cramming, / Glut thee with living and dead!" (lines 636–40). The satire was written in 1819 and when Shelley's poem was first published in 1839 the phrase still stood.<sup>22</sup> In 1823 Byron positioned his denunciation of the brutality of the Siege of Ismail against Wordsworth's paean to victory: "'Carnage' (so Wordsworth tells you) 'is God's daughter'; / If he speak Truth, she is Christ's sister, and / Just now behaved as in the Holy Land" (*Don Juan*, canto VIII, stanza 9).<sup>23</sup>

In his new collection Wordsworth had sought to free himself from the stigma his early radical poems had generated, epitomized by the 1802 review by Frances Jeffrey that had fixed the Lake Poets as a degenerate school compounded of German and Rousseauvian ideas, linking their affectation of simplicity in style to a debased moral character:

A splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society seems to be at the bottom of all their serious and peculiar sentiments. . . . They are filled with horror and compassion at the sight of poor men spending their blood in the quarrels of princes, and brutifying their sublime capacities in the drudgery of unremitting labour.<sup>24</sup>

Already in the 1815 *Poems* Wordsworth had placed "The Female Vagrant" from the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* and *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* of 1793 into the category of Juvenile Pieces—even though on the title pages of the last two he had blazoned himself as BA of St. John's, Cambridge—and they remained in that category in 1820. If by such editorial maneuvers Wordsworth consolidated his remade image, the corollary is that he also fixed that image as the antithesis of the second generation of Romantics. If he was the poet of a traditional England projected from a rural Anglican community, Byron and Shelley were the expatriates: cosmopolitan, forsaking lakes for ocean, as Byron put it, supporters of Revolution, French or Greek, and inspirations for radicals at home. Nor were Byron and Shelley alone. John Stuart Mill, who had attributed his release from dejection to his "reading Wordsworth for the first time (in the autumn of 1828)," differentiated "the measure of what he had done for me" personally from such nostalgic political extensions as those epitomized by the Duddon sequence (*Autobiography*, pp. 90, 92). In a letter of 1831 he groups Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey as "speculative Tories":

It is an ideal Toryism, an ideal King, Lords, and Commons that they venerate; it is old England as opposed to the new; but it is old England as she might be, not as she is . . . they are duly sensible that it is good for man to be ruled, to submit both his body and his mind to the guidance of a higher intelligence and virtue . . . I cannot help regretting that the men who are best capable of struggling against these narrow views and mischievous heresies should chain themselves, full of life and vigour as they are, to the inanimate corpses of dead political and religious systems, never more to be revived. The same ends require altered means; we have no new principles, but we want new machines constructed on the old principles; those we had before are worn out. Instead of cutting a sage channel for the stream of events, these people would dam it up till it breaks down everything and spreads devastation over a whole region.<sup>25</sup>

It is tempting to think that the figure of the “sage channel for the stream of events” refers obliquely to the Duddon sequence, but it is not warranted by Mill’s text. It nonetheless points to the tensions in Wordsworth’s adoption of the figure of the river as a figure of time, flowing through the stages from “Desolation” (II) and a fantasy of the first man to visit this “dark dell” (VIII: 2) as an “Intruder nurs’d / In hideous usages, and rites accur’d” (lines 6–7) to the “Majestic Duddon” amid Kentish “hamlets, towers, and towns / [. . .] / In stately mien to sovereign Thames allied, / [. . .] / With Commerce freighted or triumphant War” (XXXI: 10–14 *passim*), and the reversal of this progressive narrative in the condemnation of the changes brought in “these last fifty years” (246) in the *Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes* and the need for “power of resistance, and security from change!” (305). When the mistaking of a wind-borne tuft of fern for a wheeling hawk is subjected as flatly to political purpose as it is in “Hint from the Mountains for certain political aspirants,” Nature forfeits its symbolic power.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, though there is no textual evidence that Mill had the “Thanksgiving Ode” in mind, his objections to those who believe “that it is good for man to be ruled, to submit both his body and his mind to the guidance of a higher intelligence and virtue” reads as a retort to the enthusiasm Wordsworth expresses in the advertisement for “availing ourselves of new means of indisputable promise; particularly by applying, in its utmost possible extent, that system of tuition, of which the master-spring is a habit of gradually enlightened subordination” (*Shorter Poems* 179).

We may see in these movements and countermovements the concerns with time figured by the flow of the Duddon, and that the final sonnet of the sequence, "Conclusion," formulates in philosophical terms: "what was, and is, and will abide" (line 4), the passing and the permanent. Wordsworth gains maximum value from the double meanings of "still" in the next line, "Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide" (line 5), but the times were anything but still, and the national history he attempted to construct in the volume is weakened by contradictions in its narrative and fractures in the audience it addresses. Incorporating *The River Duddon* in the 1820 *Miscellaneous Poems* only made even more clear that the shelter of art was itself subject to change, and created new juxtapositions such as that between the sonnet sequence and the "Thanksgiving Ode" that provoked sharp rejoinders. The reappearance of the ode in its original form in subsequent printings, moreover, brought the occasional poem of 1816 into radically different circumstances: "subordination," and Carnage as "God's daughter," however logical the paradox it presents, would have read quite differently, as Mill's letter attests, amid the burnings and demonstrations leading up to the Reform Bill of 1832, and differently again amid the Chartist protests in the Hungry Forties.

I conclude with one aspect of the problem of time that is inseparable from the layout of the 1820 *Miscellaneous Poems*. The inelegant table of contents pages in the 1815 *Poems* present in cramped columns set off by vertical rules both the date of composition of the poems and that of original publication. The 1820 table of contents also marks both the date of composition and that of publication, more generously laid out and without the vertical rules. The subsequent collected editions, of 1827 and 1836, both drop this feature in allegiance to the classificatory system Wordsworth devised for the 1815 *Poems*. In an often-cited letter of 1826 to Henry Crabb Robinson, Wordsworth insisted that arranging poems in the "order of time is the very worst that could be followed; except where determined by the course of public events, or if the subject be merely personal."<sup>27</sup> The exceptions Wordsworth admits bear on the themes of the 1820 edition, in which the relation between "the personal" and "public events" is repeatedly in tension, as in the "Thanksgiving Ode." The reminiscences of R. P. Graves converge: "I remember being surprised by the feeling akin to indignation" Wordsworth manifested at his "wish that his poems were printed in the order of their composition, assigning as reasons . . . the great interest which would attach to observing the progressive development of the poet's thought, and the interpretative value of the light mutually reflected

by poems of the same period” (*Prose Works* 3: 474). Wordsworth repudiated the argument:

He said that such proceeding would indicate on the part of a poet an amount of egotism, placing interest in himself above interest in the subjects treated by him, which could not belong to a true poet caring for the elements of poetry in their right proportion, and designing to bring to bear upon the minds of his readers the best influences at his command in the way best calculated to make them effectual.

The response made Graves “revere him the more both as a man and poet,” yet he “welcomed the concession made by him in consenting to put dates to his poems, while adhering to their classification according to subject or predominant element” (*Prose Works* 3: 474).

Interest in the poet and interest in the subjects treated by him do not form the neat and invidious binary that Wordsworth represents here. The inseparability of the author—“egotism”—from the subject he treats is precisely what drew Mill to Wordsworth:

I found that he too had similar experience to mine; that he also had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way he was now teaching me to find it.  
(*Autobiography* 92)

As the last clause in particular suggests, responsiveness to poetry also depends on the personal engagement of the reader. Mill continues with the passage already quoted: “I long continued to value Wordsworth less according to his intrinsic merits, than by the measure of what he had done for me” (92). The seeming awkwardness of the double marking, arrangement by classification and notation of composition and publication, is productive in two ways. Readers interested in the poet’s development may wish to compare poems of the same period though in different locations of the text (the argument of R. P. Graves) and thus counter the stability of the formal arrangement with temporal sequence, reading through the poems in the order of their own interests and making their own connections. Second, a reader such as Mill primarily interested in the poet’s management of the loss of “the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life” might value the nuanced and intense representation of that sadness without endorsing the “compensation” that Wordsworth himself found for it.

Imagine faithful Wordsworthians coming to the 1820 *Miscellaneous Poems* and seeing works they knew in new frames, or readers coming to Wordsworth for the first time, perhaps attracted by the conveniently sized volumes and their reduced cost. In the second volume they would find as number XLI of the “Poems of Imagination” the “Evening Ode,” the table of contents title for “Evening Ode, composed upon an evening of extraordinary splendor and beauty,” first published in *The River Duddon* volume just months earlier. At the conclusion of the ode a note from Wordsworth would inform the reader that “Allusions to the Ode, entitled ‘Intimations of Immortality,’ at the conclusion of these volumes, pervade the last stanza of the foregoing Poem.” If readers followed the hint, they would find “Ode. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” at the conclusion of volume IV, with its own title page and no indication of date of composition or first publication. “Intimations of Immortality” thus stands both within the collection and without, but the hypothesized reader would inevitably compare and contrast the two reflections on the loss of the gleams of childhood, “full early lost and fruitlessly deplored” (“Evening Ode” 74). Volume IV begins with the Duddon sequence, headed “Published in 1820,” and now opening with the dedicatory poem to his brother Christopher with the poet wishing that he had heard the “expected annual round” of Christmas carolers:

Yet, would that Thou, with me and mine,  
Hadst heard this never-failing rite;  
And seen on other faces shine  
A true revival of the light;  
Which Nature, and these rustic Powers,  
In simple childhood, spread through ours!  
(lines 25–30)

A reader proceeding in this fashion and interested in how the 50-year-old Wordsworth handles the loss of “youthful enjoyment” could well have cherished the poem for its recovery and warm sharing of the joys of “simple childhood,” without following him into the reconstruction of “the inanimate corpses of dead political and religious systems” that Wordsworth seeks to build from it. Dividing interest in the poet’s psychology from his explicit polemic intentions as Mill did enabled him generously to regard Wordsworth even if politically wrongheaded as “full of life and vigour.” For readers then or now motivated by their own uncertainties about aging, the politics of the “Thanksgiving Ode” at the climax of volume III might be

apprehended within a process of anxious examination in which they inevitably took part. Rejecting Wordsworth's political pronouncements there would not diminish the pertinence and welcome wisdom of the "Ode to Lycoris," dated 1817 in the table of contents, and placed within the category of "Poems of Sentiment and Reflection" later in volume IV:

But something whispers to my heart  
That, as we downward tend,  
Lycoris! Life requires an *art*  
To which our souls must bend;  
A skill—to balance and supply,  
And ere the flowing fount be dry,  
As soon it must, a sense to sip,  
Or drink, with no fastidious lip.

(lines 37–44)

With the stylistic heightening of *The River Duddon* volume Wordsworth had successfully moved beyond the derision of early reviewers, but he had also raised opponents with the "Thanksgiving Ode" who defined him powerfully and lastingly. The 1820 *Miscellaneous Poems* and the successive printings and collections perpetuated the offense of referring to Carnage as God's daughter, however reductive the understanding from which it was born, but the wrestling between the changes of time and the aspiration for permanence that pervades the volumes at all levels, formally and thematically, in the individual self and nature and the body politic and the very arrangement of the volumes, exceeds the author's immediate purposes. It is repeated in the actions of readers who proceed temporally through the volumes, guided by the scheme of classification and the dates given, but forming their own connections as they pursue the matters that resonate for them. Wordsworth's self-construction is in turn reconstructed differentially.

The hypothetical active reader takes exaggerated actuality in Matthew Arnold. Arnold published his highly influential selection from Wordsworth's poems in 1879 to rectify what he described in the prefatory essay as a "diminution" of his reputation:<sup>28</sup> "He is not fully recognised at home; he is not recognised at all abroad" (x). Arnold characterized himself as a "Wordsworthian" (he later became president of the Wordsworth Society) who "can read with pleasure and edification . . . even the *Thanksgiving Ode*"—but he did not include it in his selection. Arnold famously attributed the failure to estimate Wordsworth at his true value to "the quantity of



inferior work which now obscures . . . the best poems of Wordsworth,” and he set out “[to] disengage the poems which show his power” (xxv). The means was to reduce a career to a narrative of brief flowering followed by protracted decline:

Wordsworth composed verses during a space of some sixty years; and it is no exaggeration to say that within one single decade of those years, between 1798 and 1808, almost all his really first-rate work was produced. A mass of inferior work remains, work done before and after this golden prime, imbedding the first-rate work and clogging it, obstructing our approach to it, chilling not infrequently, the high-wrought mood with which we leave it. . . . To be recognized far and wide as a great poet . . . Wordsworth needs to be relieved of a great deal of the poetical baggage which now encumbers him. (xii)

The shared sense of decline that drew Mill to Wordsworth is a theme of the poetry rather than a symptom. Among the few poems Arnold included from *The River Duddon* volume—“Dion,” “Ode to Lycoris,” “Sole listener, Duddon,” “Seathwaite Chapel,” “Return, Content!,” “After-Thought,” “To the Rev. Dr. Wordsworth”—some turn on memory and the effects of passing time. What the selection loses, however, is Wordsworth’s sustained if contradictory effort to present himself as a national poet, and to refashion the nation on the basis of the local. Byron and Shelley attack Wordsworth and in so doing acknowledge and perpetuate him as a significant antagonist on matters of national import; Arnold occludes Wordsworth’s engagement with the major issues of the day. The selection reinforces the image he gave of Wordsworth in “Memorial Verses” of almost thirty years earlier: the “soothing voice,” the tender figure who “laid us as we lay at birth / On the cool flowery lap of earth” (lines 48–49), who “will make us feel” (67).<sup>29</sup> Repairing one “diminution” Arnold perpetrated another: a dismissal of such ambitious work as *The River Duddon* volume and the *Miscellaneous Poems* that only scholarship of recent years has begun to reverse.

#### NOTES

1. In addition to the critics cited in the essay, I am indebted to work by Stephen Gill and Jalal Uddin Khan.

2. The most recent and thorough discussion of the enterprise of the 1815 collection is Michael Gamer’s *Romanticism, Self-Canonization, and the Business of Poetry*.

3. Quotations from the “Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes,” as the “Introduction” to Wilkinson’s *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire* was renamed, are taken from the 1820 *River Duddon* volume.

4. The passages that I quote are already present in their essentials in Wordsworth's introduction to *Select Views*; he here updates "forty years" to "fifty years." See the edition at *Romantic Circles*: [https://romantic-circles.org/editions/guide\\_lakes/editions.2015.guide\\_lakes.1810.html](https://romantic-circles.org/editions/guide_lakes/editions.2015.guide_lakes.1810.html). The insistence emphasizes that the project was not simply one of "preserv[ing] the native beauty of this delightful district" (306) but of arresting a development and reconstructing a vanishing past.

5. Quotations from sonnets in *The River Duddon* volume are cited from *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820–1845*, edited by Geoffrey Jackson.

6. *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 2 (July 1820), quoted in Woof 767.

7. Donna Landry, "Poems on Place." Jonathan Bate and Daniel Robinson illuminate the relation of the Duddon sequence to the chorographic and sonnet traditions.

8. *Monthly Review*, October 1820, 93, quoted in Woof 789.

9. See *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820–1845*, 109.

10. Bibliographic information taken from Mark L. Reed. See also Eric C. Walker.

11. Advertisement to *The Miscellaneous Poems of William Wordsworth. In Four Volumes*, vol. 1. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1820).

12. All prices from Owen 101 and St. Clair 662–63.

13. Quoted in Moorman 385.

14. Sales figures show the payoff. Owen 101 reports that the edition of 500 was exhausted by 1826, and after expenses including advertising returned Wordsworth a profit of £96.13.1.

15. Quotations from poems other than sonnets in the *Duddon* volume are taken from *Shorter Poems, 1807–1820*, ed. Carl H. Ketcham.

16. *Edinburgh Review*, 25 (October 1815), quoted in Woof 539.

17. Quotations from *Poems, in Two Volumes and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, edited by Jared Curtis.

18. *Middle Years* 324.

19. Because there are no line numbers in the text in the 1820 volume, I quote from Reading Text 1 in *Shorter Poems, 1807–1820*.

20. See Grivil 2014 and Shaw 2018.

21. St. Clair (662) reports that of the edition of 500, only 163 copies were sold by 1824, and in 1834, 220 copies were remaindered. See also Wu.

22. Text of "Peter Bell the Third" from Shelley, *Complete Poetical Works*, 398. Wu suggests that the late appearance of the poem contributed to Wordsworth's revision in 1845: "But thy most dreaded instrument, / In working out a pure intent, / Is Man—arrayed for mutual slaughter,— / Yea, Carnage is thy Daughter" (lines 279–82) became "But Man is Thy most awful instrument, / In working out a pure intent; / Thou cloth'st the wicked in their dazzling mail, / And for Thy righteous purpose they prevail" (lines 106–9; see *Shorter Poems* 196–200). Wu also demonstrates the role played by Hazlitt, the most consistent adherent to an early radicalism, in drawing attention to the phrase.

23. The seventeen-volume edition of 1832–33 contained Byron's ms. comment on "Carnage is God's Daughter": "[T]his is perhaps as pretty a pedigree for murder as ever was found out by Garter King at Arms.—What would have been said, had any free-spoken people discovered such a lineage?" (16: 216).

24. Review of Robert Southey, *Thalaba*, *Edinburgh Review*, 1 (October 1802), 63–83; the quoted passage is on p. 71.

25. Mill, *Letters* 1: 15–16.

26. This poem from the *Duddon* volume (123–24) appears among Poems of the Fancy in vol. 2 of 1820. The note on the poem in *Shorter Poems* (547) provides the immediate political occasion and reveals the poem as the tendentious repurposing of an image connected with the composition of *Michael* years before. Compare the final sentence of the rich essay by Philip Shaw, “Wordsworth after Peterloo: The Persistence of War in *The River Duddon . . . and Other Poems*”: “More pointedly, when read in 1820, in the months following the culminating event in a lengthy period of political unrest, this purported concluding volume would have been read by some as a re-sacralising of the fount and as a reinscription of nature in the name of the *polis*” (255–56).

27. *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* 444.

28. All quotations from *Poems of Wordsworth chosen and edited by Matthew Arnold*.

29. *Poems* 2: 165–68.

#### WORKS CITED

- Arnold, Matthew. *Poems of Wordsworth chosen and edited by Matthew Arnold*. Macmillan, 1879.
- . *Poems*, 3 vols. Macmillan, 1885.
- Bate, Jonathan. “Inventing Region and Nation: Wordsworth’s Sonnets.” *Writing Region and Nation*, *Swansea Review*, 1994, pp. 2–22.
- Bates, Brian R. *Wordsworth’s Poetic Collections, Supplementary Writing and Parodic Reception*. Pickering & Chatto, 2012.
- Byron, George Gordon Lord. *The works of Lord Byron*, 17 vols. John Murray, 1832–33.
- Chandler, James. “Wordsworth After Waterloo.” *The Age of William Wordsworth: Critical Essays on the Romantic Tradition*, ed. Kenneth R. Johnston and Gene Ruoff. Rutgers UP, 1987, pp. 84–111.
- Gamer, Michael. *Romanticism, Self-Canonization, and the Business of Poetry*. Cambridge UP, 2017.
- Garrett, James. *Wordsworth and the Writing of the Nation*. Ashgate, 2008.
- Gravil, Richard. “A ‘hideous rout’: Wordsworth’s ‘Thanksgiving Ode’ in Context.” *Coleridge Bulletin*, no. 46, Winter 2014, pp. 59–78.
- Kim, Benjamin. “Generating a National Sublime: Wordsworth’s ‘The River Duddon’ and ‘The Guide to the Lakes.’” *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 45, no. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 49–75.
- Landry, Donna. “Poems on Place.” *British Poetry, 1660–1800*, ed. Jack Lynch. Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 335–55.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Letters of John Stuart Mill*, ed. Hugh S. R. Elliott, 2 vols. Longman, 1910.
- . *Autobiography. Essential Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. Max Lerner. Bantam, 1961.
- Moorman, Mary. *William Wordsworth: A Biography. The Later Years, 1803–1850*. Oxford UP, 1965.
- Owen, W. J. B. “Costs, Sales, and Profits of Longman’s Editions of Wordsworth.” *The Library*, no. 12, 1957, pp. 93–107.
- Reed, Mark L. *A Bibliography of William Wordsworth*, 2 vols. Cambridge UP, 2013.
- Robinson, Daniel. “*The River Duddon* and Wordsworth, Sonneteer.” *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth*, ed. Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson. Oxford UP, 2015, pp. 289–308.

- Robinson, Henry Crabb. *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, 2 vols., 3rd ed., ed. Thomas Sadler. Macmillan, 1872.
- Shaw, Philip. "Wordsworth, War and Sacrifice." *Sacrifice and Modern War Literature*, ed. Alex Houen and Jan-Melissa Schramm. Oxford UP, 2018, pp. 20–33.
- . "Wordsworth After Peterloo: The Persistence of War in *The River Duddon . . . and Other Poems*." *Commemorating Peterloo: Violence, Resilience and Claim-Making in the Romantic Era*, ed. Michael Demson and Regina Hewitt. Edinburgh UP, 2019.
- Shelley, Percy. *The Complete Poetical Works of Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson. Clarendon, 1904.
- St. Clair, William. *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*. Oxford UP, 2004.
- Walker, Eric C. "Wordsworth's 'Third Volume' and the Collected Editions, 1815–20." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 80, no. 4, 1986, pp. 437–53.
- Woof, Robert. *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge, 2001.
- Wordsworth, William. *The River Duddon: A Series of Sonnets: Vaudracour And Julia; And Other Poems, To Which Is Annexed A Topographical Description Of The Country Of The Lakes In The North Of England*. Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1820. <https://archive.org/details/riverduddonserieooword/page/n4>.
- . *The Miscellaneous Poems of William Wordsworth. In Four Volumes*. Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1820.
- . *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. A. B. Grosart, 3 vols. Moxon, 1876.
- . *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Middle Years, pt. 2: 1812–1820*, 2nd ed., ed. Ernest De Selincourt; revised by Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill. Clarendon, 1970.
- . *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Later Years, pt. 1: 1821–1828*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt; revised by Alan G. Hill. Clarendon, 1978.
- . *Poems, in Two Volumes and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. Jared Curtis. Cornell UP, 1983.
- . *Shorter Poems, 1807–1820*, ed. Carl H. Ketcham. Cornell UP, 1989.
- . *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Jackson. Cornell UP, 2004.
- Wu, Duncan. "Wordsworthian Carnage." *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 66, no. 3, 2016, pp. 341–59.