

Abstract

This chapter discusses Gothic history and Gothic selfhood in the writings of the Lake Poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. Wordsworth's 'Michael, A Pastoral Poem' is the central text, and the chapter traces the mixture of traditionalism and 'temporalization' in this 'history / Homely and rude' of family breakdown and generational crisis. I relate the poem to the personal and artistic context of a gradually 'materializing' Gothic 'Plan' (Coleridge's phrase), from *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) to *The Excursion* (1814) and *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1815), and argue that these works reflect the turn from a 'revolutionary architecture' of the Gothic to an influential ethos of 'self-evolving' 'insularity'. The chapter ends with a discussion of 'global' presences in the 'national theodicy' of Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Preserving and erasing lines on China after the loss of his brother John to the Canton trade, Wordsworth replays the historical drama of 'Michael' in personal and global form.

Keywords

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Gothic, ruins, history, tradition, architecture, Englishness, China and the Gothic Revival

Gothic Ruins and Revivals: The Lake Poets' Architecture of the Past

Tom Duggett

The shape of the sheep-fold

Speaking in valediction to his son, the old shepherd in William Wordsworth's 'Michael, A Pastoral Poem', bids him retain as an 'emblem of the life' of his forefathers, and hence as an 'anchor and . . . shield', the plan of a Sheep-fold, the first stone of which the boy now lays.¹ The conspicuously absent and imaginary Sheep-fold ('A work which is not here') forms, in Michael's mind, 'a covenant / . . . between us' (ll. 424–5). His self-imposed duty to complete what his son has symbolically begun is the corollary of the duty imposed upon Luke to redeem for his father his own 'patrimonial fields' (l. 234). But the putatively natural 'covenant' is rapidly denatured when transplanted with Luke into the 'dissolute' world of the city (l. 453). Chosen by Michael as the solution to a financial crisis rather than the sale of any 'portion' (l. 234) of his subsistence farm, the 'covenant' was in fact always as unnatural as what Tom Paine called Edmund Burke's

¹ 'Michael', in William Wordsworth, *The Poems of William Wordsworth, Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis, 3 vols (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, LLP, 2011), 462–75; ll. 414–20.

sacrifice of the substantial good of the present generation to a fetishized patrimony.² Michael sends Luke to one ‘Kinsman’ in order to ‘repair’ the ‘loss’ caused by the old shepherd having been ‘bound / In surety’ for another—his ‘industrious’, now-bankrupt, ‘Brother’s Son’ (ll. 220–5, 257–63). But once removed from anything more than an imaginary connection to his father’s hastily invented patrimonial tradition, Luke ‘slacken[s] in his duty’, gives himself over to ‘evil courses’, and ends in a ‘hiding-place beyond the seas’ (ll. 451–6). And Michael, whose ability to endure this catastrophic loss of posterity depends upon evading the kind of social and historical consciousness that first motivated the sacrifice of his son, works compulsively at the non-building of the palliative emblem of ancestry that is not there (ll. 469–81).³

Michael’s ‘unfinished Sheep-fold’ is a fitting emblem of Wordsworth’s sense of history. As a ruin recovered in verse, the Sheep-fold echoes the recuperative endeavours and acts of ‘commemorative piety’ of eighteenth-century antiquarianism—which took castles, churches, and ruined walls as ‘constituent parts of the nation’s past, which in turn was a formative part of the present’.⁴ But as a fragment forestalled in the act of construction, to which ‘appertains’ a ‘history / Homely and rude’ (ll. 18, 34–5), the unwrought Sheep-fold also registers a crisis within the sense of history more widely. In Reinhart Koselleck’s account, the French Revolution completed

² Tom Paine, *Rights of Man, Common Sense, and Other Political Writings*, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 90–5.

³ See also the reading of ‘Michael’ in Thomas Pfau’s *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790–1840* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 192–230.

⁴ Rosemary Sweet, ‘Gothic Antiquarianism in the Eighteenth Century’, in Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (eds), *The Gothic World* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014), 15–26, 16.

the erosion since the Reformation of the ‘static time’ that could be ‘experienced as tradition’.⁵ The Revolution also marks the emergence of a new ‘unknown’ time, ‘within which and out of which’ the nation state ‘weaves’ itself, ‘trapped within’ an incipiently ruinous ‘temporal structure’ of ‘static mobility’.⁶ For the medieval historian, Sharon Turner, this heaping-up of the historical horizon made all preceding histories ‘dwindle into insignificance’—requiring historians of the future to be ‘more picturesque’ in order to be ‘more comprehensive’, ‘exhibit[ing] great operations’ by bringing ‘events together more in their connected masses’.⁷ As Nicholas Halmi notes, ‘the temporalization of history and the aestheticization of ruins’ were at once ‘opposed in theory’ and ‘compatible in fact’.⁸ A sense of historical foreshortening and acceleration becomes visible in architectural images such as Joseph Gandy’s ‘Imagined view of the Bank of England in ruins’ (1830) and Charles Cockerell’s architectonic *capriccio*, ‘The Professor’s Dream’ (1848; Figure 9.1).⁹

⁵ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, tr. Kenneth Tribe (Cambridge, MA: Columbia University Press, 1979, tr. 2004), 22.

⁶ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 20, 22.

⁷ Sharon Turner, *The History of England During the Middle Ages*. 2nd edition, 5 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1825), i, pp. xi–xii.

⁸ Nicholas Halmi, ‘Ruins without a Past’, *Essays in Romanticism*, 18 (2011): 7–27, 14.

⁹ Gandy’s ‘Imagined view’ is reproduced in Iain McCalman (ed.), *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 268–9. There is a neat summary of Cockerell’s ‘Dream’ in a report on the 1849 Royal Academy Exhibition in *The Builder*: ‘Mr. Cockerell, R.A., has a very remarkable drawing, called “The Professor’s Dream”, and which is a synopsis of the principal architectural monuments of ancient and modern times, drawn to the same scale, in forms and

[insert figure 9.1 near here]

Meanwhile, writers from Horace Walpole and Constantin-François de Volney to Anna Barbauld and Charles Lamb associated visions of ruin with the feeling of being or of ‘*having been modern*’.¹⁰ In his correspondence of late 1815 with the Sinologist Thomas Manning, Lamb (‘of the India-House, London’) spins a series of ‘improbable romantic fictions’, including the imaginary death of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, leaving ‘behind him more than forty thousand’ unfinished ‘treatises’.¹¹ Lamb envisions London, England, and ‘the whole western world’

dimensions ascertained from the best authorities, and arranged on four terraces—Egyptian, Grecian, Roman, and Mediaeval and Modern; the last of these shows more particularly the comparative heights. The Egyptian temples and propylea [*sic*] form the foreground, including also the sphinx, the Memnon, &c. Then come the Athenian wonders; and the Roman Coliseum, Pantheon, and (once called) Jupiter Sator: the Pisan Tower, the Cathedrals of Cologne, Strasburg, Antwerp; the Brussels Town Hall, &c., represent the mediaeval skill. The Italian domes of the Revival, with St. Paul’s and other of Wren’s works, are crowned by St. Peter’s, and the whole are backed by the dim pyramids, which, as old Fuller says, have outlived their makers’ names. The buildings are brought into combination most artistically, and the result is an extraordinary work.’ *The Builder*, 7 (12 May 1849), 217.

¹⁰ The phrase is Bruno Latour’s, from his resonant remarks on hybridity, purification, modernity, and the ‘Great Divide’ in *We Have Never Been Modern*, tr. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 10–12; my emphasis. See also Halmi, ‘Ruins without a Past’, 8–11.

¹¹ *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 7 vols (London: Methuen & Co., 1905), vi, 480–3. As David Higgins notes, Coleridge’s ‘This Lime-Tree Bower’ was first published in Southey’s *Annual Anthology* under the title ‘THIS LIME-TREE BOWER MY PRISON, / A POEM, / Addressed

accelerating past its own futurity while Manning remains ‘stationary’ in the east: ‘St Paul’s Church is a heap of ruins; the Monument isn’t half so high as you knew it, divers parts being successively taken down which the ravages of time had rendered dangerous . . . all this has taken place while you have been settling whether Ho-hing-tong should be spelt with a — or a —’.¹²

The Sheep-fold in ‘Michael’ is one of a series of semi-ruinous structures in which Wordsworth seeks to retransmit tradition and ‘commemorative piety’ beyond the ‘transnatural’ time of the ‘Epoch of Revolutions’—to ‘enshrine the spirit of the past / For future restoration’, as he puts it in *The Prelude*.¹³ This architectural series stretches from ‘The towers’ ‘split with ruin deep’ of ‘A Gothic Tale’ (1796), to the ‘four naked walls / That star’d upon each other’ of ‘The Ruined Cottage’ and ‘The Pedlar’ (1798–1804, ‘The Pedlar’, ll. 18–19), the lost ‘mansion’ in the landscape of ‘Tintern Abbey’ (1798, l. 141), and the half-fragmentary, half-ruined ‘gothic Church’ of *The Recluse* that was—as Wordsworth put it in the 1840s, modifying the architectural image of *The Excursion* (1814) with the geological language of ‘Malham Cove’ (1819)—a ‘wreck of is and was’, ‘sadder’ still ‘Than noblest objects utterly decayed’.¹⁴ As in Cockerell’s

to CHARLES LAMB, of the India-House, London’. See David Higgins, *Romantic Englishness: Local, National, and Global Selves, 1780–1850* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 51.

¹² *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, vi. 480–3. So far from being stationary, Manning was in fact travelling between Calcutta, Lhasa, and Canton.

¹³ See *The Prelude* (1805), XI, 342–3, in *The Prelude: The Four Texts*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin Books, 1995); and Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 40. The phrase ‘Epoch of Revolutions’ is Barthold Niebuhr’s.

¹⁴ For ‘A Gothic Tale’, see Wordsworth, *The Borderers*, ed. Robert Osborn (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1981), 750–7. For the other poems mentioned here, see *The Poems of*

‘Dream’—where a ‘wilderness of building’ (*Excursion*, II, 871) proliferates within bounds set by immemorial antiquity—so in Wordsworth’s poetry, Gothic structures produce an effect of ‘static mobility’—of historical deepening in place. In his poem on the ‘internal spirit’ of ‘feudal times’, *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1815), Wordsworth evokes the Gothic remains of Bolton Priory—‘mouldering’ on into ‘Eliza’s golden time’, as ‘young and old’ continue to ‘repair’ to the ‘shattered fabric’s heart’ ‘for praise and prayer’.¹⁵ By thus contrasting desuetude and decay, and by choosing ‘common historic records’ over the ‘curious’ ‘particulars’ favoured by creative antiquarians such as Walter Scott, Wordsworth reasserts the claim of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) that the Poet is a traditionalist, ‘an upholder and preserver’ rather than a man of historical science.¹⁶ In comments of 1808 that veer between anxiety and pride in a distinctive

William Wordsworth, Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Wordsworth. For *The Recluse* and *The Excursion*, see Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye, assisted by David Garcia (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), ‘Preface’, 38–41; and see also *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993; Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007), 215–16.

¹⁵ Wordsworth, *The White Doe of Rylstone: or, The Fate of the Nortons*, ed. Kristine Dugas (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), ll. 16–30. See also *Fenwick Notes*, 102–3.

¹⁶ See *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–70), i. 237; James Chandler, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 173; and *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974; Tirril, Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, LLP, 2008), i. 167. On the withholding of Wordsworth’s *White Doe* until 1815,

achievement, Wordsworth pronounces ‘a plague upon’ Scott’s ‘industrious Antiquarianism’ that has threatened to put ‘my fine story to confusion’.¹⁷ Mid-way between James Thomson condemning Gothic builders for their ‘labour’d heavy monuments of shame’, and John Ruskin celebrating the crude work that manifests freedom, Wordsworth offers his Gothic buildings as an imaginative architecture of the past.¹⁸

Wordsworth’s ‘plague upon . . . industrious Antiquarianism’ would also have implicated his Lake District neighbour and friend, Robert Southey. But while Southey was a very different sort of writer—periodical essayist, would-be historiographer royal, and (at least initially) an enthusiastic poet laureate—he was similarly engaged in efforts to transform antiquarianism into new forms of history.¹⁹ Southey affiliated his historical sense to Wordsworth’s in describing his own long-planned *Book of the Church* (1824) as a ‘running commentary’ to *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822), and hoped that they would thus, ‘without any concerted purpose . . . go down to

following the ‘derision’ of Lamb and Hazlitt, and Coleridge’s reservations in 1808, see *The White Doe of Rylstone*, ed. Dugas, 9–31.

¹⁷ *The Middle Years*, i. 237.

¹⁸ See Thomson’s *Liberty* (1735–6), II, 373–6, in *The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908); and John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice, Volume the Second, The Sea-Stories* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1853), 155–72.

¹⁹ See W. A. Speck, *Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), *passim*; and Mark Storey, “‘Bob Southey!—Poet Laureate’: Public and Private in Southey’s Poems of 1816”, in Lynda Pratt (ed.), *Robert Southey and the Contexts of English Romanticism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 87–100.

posterity in company'.²⁰ In his imaginative history cum dialogue with the dead, *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on Society* (1829), Southey made repeated references to 'our great philosophic poet', and there was, 'perhaps, not a page' of that book that he 'did not read [Wordsworth] in MS'.²¹ 'One of Southey's purposes in the *Colloquies* was', as Tim Fulford argues, 'to advance the cause of Wordsworth's past poetry as a discourse that could teach Britons how to live in the present'.²² When planning a second series of *Colloquies* against the Reform Bill in 1830–2, it was Wordsworth—and specifically *not* his earlier collaborator Coleridge—to whom Southey turned for advice.²³ And it was Wordsworth's sense of the importance of the work and 'anxi[ety] for . . . speedy publication' that prompted Southey to take the project to his

²⁰ See Stuart Andrews, 'Wordsworth, Southey, and the English Church', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 44/1 (Winter 2013): 31; and *Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey, 6 vols (London: Longmans, 1849–50), v. 65. Southey had been planning *The Book of the Church* since at least the start of 1812: see Stuart Andrews, *Robert Southey: History, Politics, Religion* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2011), 57.

²¹ See Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More; or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*. 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1829), i. 126, 147; ii. 64, 98, 136; and Lionel Madden (ed.), *Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1972), 334.

²² Tim Fulford, *The Late Poetry of the Lake Poets: Romanticism Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 63.

²³ Robert Southey to John Rickman, 1 May 1831, in *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Kenneth Curry, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), ii. 365–6. 'I will . . . show the whole to Wordsworth, the only consultable person within reach here, at present. S.T.C. is not so: he would travel from Dan to Beersheba in the margin'.

publisher, John Murray.²⁴ Southey was, however, something more than Wordsworth's social mouthpiece or historical interpreter. He claimed to be 'a good poet—but a better historian, & the better for having been accustomed to feel & think as a poet'.²⁵ If Wordsworth's Poet was a global historian of feelings, then Southey was at least an alternative answer to the description.²⁶ He described himself in 1804 as having 'more in hand than Bonaparte or Marquis Wellesley. digesting Gothic law, gleaning moral history from monkish legends & conquering India, or rather Asia, with Alboquerque—filling up the chinks of the day by hunting in Jesuit-Chronicles, & compiling Collectanea Hispanica & Gothica'.²⁷

'Michael' represents an intriguing intersection of Southey and Wordsworth as poets and historians. As Michael Wiley argues, 'Michael' was written in response to Southey having 'appropriated'—if not plagiarized—the themes and images of Wordsworth's unpublished 'The Ruined Cottage' (1797–9), in a poem of the same title included in Southey's *English Eclogues*

²⁴ Robert Southey to John Rickman, 27 June 1831, Huntington Library MS RS592. The second series of *Colloquies* was never published, owing to John Murray's financial difficulties.

²⁵ *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford, Ian Packer. Romantic Circles Electronic Editions, University of Maryland; letter 1024.

²⁶ Wordsworth's Poet 'binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time'. Poetry is 'the history or science of feelings'. See Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, i. 167; and the 'Note to *The Thorn*', in *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 594.

²⁷ *Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, letter 922.

(1799).²⁸ As in Southey's eclogue, and as in early drafts of Wordsworth's own dialogical 'Ruined Cottage', Wordsworth's 'Michael' presents a single 'knowledgeable speaker explaining the historical circumstances of a pile of ruins'; and the later poem compensates the loss of dialogue with an 'amplification' of the ruin motif whereby 'the sheepfold ruins' are doubled by 'Michael's cottage now fully erased from the land'.²⁹ Southey recognized 'Michael' as one of Wordsworth's foremost 'pieces of . . . beauty'.³⁰ But in his own later appropriation of the dialogue form (following Wordsworth's publication of his 'Ruined Cottage' as book I of *The Excursion*, 1814), Southey attempted in the *Colloquies* both to supplement and to surpass Wordsworth's history in ruins. In conversation with the ghost of Sir Thomas More, Southey summons up the spirit of 'Michael'. Sir Thomas quotes Henry VIII on the Reformation and 'an old stone wall':

Henry had too much sagacity not to perceive the consequences which such a book [as Simon Fish's *The Supplication of Beggars* (1529)] was likely to produce, and he said after perusing it, 'If a man should pull down an old stone wall, and begin at

²⁸ Michael Wiley, 'Romantic Amplification: The Way of Plagiarism', *ELH* 75/1 (Spring 2008): 219–40, 221–6.

²⁹ Wiley, 'Romantic Amplification', 225. On the evolution of Wordsworth's 'Ruined Cottage' from 'stark story' to complex dialogue, see James Butler (ed.), *The Ruined Cottage' and 'The Pedlar'* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. xii.

³⁰ Robert Southey to Anna Seward, 4 July 1808, *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, letter 1475.

the bottom, the upper part thereof might chance to fall upon his head'. But he saw also that it tended to serve his immediate purpose.³¹

For Southey's Sir Thomas, this architectural image bespeaks the king's consciousness of historical cause and effect—and testifies to the historical ingrowth consequent (as in 'Michael') on suppressing or evading such knowledge. Elsewhere in the *Colloquies*, Southey invokes 'Michael' still more directly. Another conversation with Sir Thomas turns on the historical origins of commercial society and the medieval 'progress of inclosures'. This exchange comes with an assemblage of anecdotes that includes sheep devouring 'men and fields and houses' in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Hugh Latimer on 'inclosers' turning 'householders and inhabitants' into 'a shepherd and his dog', and an 'odd' early-Stuart text on 'Churches' making 'shepherds cottages'.³² Having thus charged the pastoral figure of the shepherd with historical

³¹ Southey, *Sir Thomas More*, i. 87–8. Simon Fish's *Supplication of Beggars* (1529) attacked the doctrinal edifice of purgatory, focusing on its lack of scriptural authority and the clerical abuse that had turned it into a system of 'pardons for money'. See Richard Rex, 'More and the Heretics: Statesman or Fanatic?', in George M. Logan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 99. Thomas More's response was the *Supplication of Souls* (1529), defending purgatory by what Stephen Greenblatt calls 'strained' exegesis of apocryphal texts, 'oddly' presented as the direct communication of the dead, speaking to the reader from within their purgatorial fires. See *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 137–41. The text of Fish's *Supplication*, followed by 'The Story of M. Symon Fish'—Southey's source here—is included in the staple work of English Protestant identity, John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. 2 vols (London, 1583), ii. 1013–17.

³² Southey, *Sir Thomas More*, i. 77–9.

resonance, as the unwitting cipher of the ‘depopulating system’, Southey then draws a parallel with ‘the extinction of small farms’ ‘in these days’.³³ Southey’s history thus comprehends Wordsworth’s ‘pastoral poem’, articulating the pattern of dispossession and historical blindness that ‘Michael’ realizes only obliquely in the shape of the unfinished Sheep-fold.

Southey historicizing Wordsworth’s ‘Michael’ is a suggestive instance of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s account of historicism taking hold, as ‘romanticism—the revival of the past . . . the cultivation of ancient customs’ motivates ‘the historical research that has slowly, step by step, transformed the intuitive revival into historical knowledge proper’.³⁴ But if Wordsworth’s traditionalism is just, as James Chandler notes, a ‘wrinkle in Gadamer’s story’, it is also clear from the exchange with Scott over *The White Doe* that Wordsworth was deliberately doing something different.³⁵ In August 1808, Wordsworth told Scott that while his *Marmion, A Tale of Flodden Field* (1808) had gained its end, it was not ‘the end which I should wish you to propose to yourself . . . both as to matter and manner’.³⁶ That ‘end’ was not Scott’s ‘outward & social forms’ of past ‘life’ but ‘its internal spirit’.³⁷ Coleridge suggested something similar in his later comment that the history reader who had not learned to honour the ‘self-evolving’, half-submerged ‘ideal’ character of the English Constitution had ‘missed [the] most valuable result’ of his studies, and ‘might . . . as profitably, and far more delightfully have devoted his [time] to

³³ Southey, *Sir Thomas More*, i. 81–6.

³⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 244.

³⁵ James Chandler, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature*, 181.

³⁶ *The Middle Years*. i. 264.

³⁷ *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, 103.

Sir Walter Scott's Novels'.³⁸ The Romantic historicism of the Lake Poets was, on this view, not an ox-bow lake cut off from 'historical knowledge proper', but itself the main stream, carrying a history held not in curiosities but in common. What the comparison with Scott and Southey reveals is that Wordsworth's 'Gothic' poetics involves the gradual 'cultivation'—as opposed to the 'civilized' transcendence—of the forms handed down from tradition.³⁹

In 'Michael', Wordsworth develops an oblique historical form, a 'pastoral poem' that registers without over-writing or allegorizing the socio-political 'trouble' (l. 232) of the 1790s. Various cues in the poem and in Wordsworth's other writings extend the historical frame all the way back to the 1620s, and the gradual (though occasionally violent) consolidation of the 'statesmen' system of 'small estates'.⁴⁰ Wordsworth evokes without expressing the overlapping temporalities and perspectives in play by suspending the story in oral tradition: it is 'the first, / The earliest of those Tales that spake to me / Of Shepherds' (ll. 21–3). He redoubles the effect by using a language of 'plain humanities', shorn of 'poetic' 'hieroglyphics, and enigmas', but subtly

³⁸ Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, ed. John Colmer (London and Princeton: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Princeton University Press, 1976), 96–100.

³⁹ Coleridge develops the distinction between civilization and cultivation in his *Constitution of the Church and State*, 42–3.

⁴⁰ Terry McCormick, 'Wordsworth and Shepherds', in Richard Gravil and Daniel Robinson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of William Wordsworth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 636–41.

‘garnished’ by a pervasive use of the ‘un-’ prefix (‘unhewn’, ‘ungarnish’d’, etc.).⁴¹ Pointing at once to the past and the future, carrying a double sense of reversal and of incomplete accomplishment, the ‘un-’ prefix is the textual ‘remnant’ of Michael’s historical experience of Koselleck’s ‘new unknown time’. As Jane Stabler notes (in a different context), the ‘un-’ prefix embodies Wordsworth’s processes of ‘slow creation’: it allows the poet to revisit a word even as it is ‘wrought in the opposite direction’, with the ‘remnant’ making ‘the process of transformation . . . legible’.⁴² Poised, in Georg Simmel’s phrase on the ruin, ‘[b]etween the not-yet and the no-longer’, the ‘un-’ prefix acts as a textual double for Michael’s Sheep-fold, providing a negative ‘affirmation’ of the peaks ascended by the ‘spirit’ by marking out the persistence of the ‘path’ ‘descend[ing] to its home’.⁴³ For Fiona Stafford, similarly, the ‘privative prefix’ in ‘Michael’ has a slow historicizing effect, gradually specifying ‘the ideal through knowledge of what it is not’.⁴⁴ Wordsworth thus draws out that which lies inchoate and inarticulate in the ‘history / Homely and rude’ (ll. 34–5) of the ‘unfinished Sheep-fold’—making the unconscious conscious, the accidental intentional, and the ballad lyrical.

⁴¹ See Wordsworth, ‘Appendix to the Preface’, in *Prose Works*, i. 188; and Fiona Stafford, ‘Plain Living and Ungarnish’d Stories: Wordsworth and the Survival of Pastoral’, *Review of English Studies*, NS 59/238 (2007): 118–33, 121–3.

⁴² Jane Stabler, ‘Byron and *The Excursion*’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 45/2 (Spring 2014): 137–47, 143.

⁴³ See Georg Simmel, ‘The Ruin’, in ‘Two Essays’, *The Hudson Review*, . 11/3 (Autumn 1958): 371–85, 382.

⁴⁴ Stafford, ‘Plain Living’, 128.

The poem recreates the dynamics of the ‘covenant’ between Michael and Luke, as Wordsworth encloses the rustic ‘Tale’ in imagination, ‘for the sake / Of youthful Poets, who among these Hills / Will be my second Self when I am gone’ (ll. 27, 37–9). But this virtual reproduction is already an act of imaginative reclamation and historical reading. In a pair of roughly contemporary draft passages for ‘Michael’ and *The Prelude*, Wordsworth engages in a vitally metaphorical reflection on how steady attention to old forms unlocks their latent historical content. ‘There is’, he writes in the ‘Michael’ passage,

a shapeless heap of unhewn stones
That lie together, some in heaps and some
In lines that seem to keep themselves alive
In the last dotage of a dying form
At least so seems to a man that stands
In such a lonely place.⁴⁵

In the *Prelude* fragment, Wordsworth writes of the ‘considerate and laborious work’ of ‘slow creation’ that

doth impart to speech
Outline and substance, even till it has given
A function kindred to organic power—

⁴⁵ Wordsworth, *‘Lyrical Ballads’ and Other Poems, 1797–1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 329.

The vital spirit of a perfect form.⁴⁶

Wordsworth's staging of Michael's steadfast act of unremembrance lifts him out of occlusion in the natural landscape, but without subsuming the family tragedy in a higher-level economic analysis. Dorothy Wordsworth suggested a virtual identity between poet and shepherd in describing her brother working 'at the sheepfold', and often 'in vain'.⁴⁷ The 'dying form' of the 'unfinished' Sheep-fold returns, half-historicized and half-humanized, in Wordsworth's slow creation of his lyrical ballad's 'perfect form'.

A Gothic plan

'Michael' marks one stage in the longer development, across Wordsworth's career, of a Gothic myth and a Gothic inner architecture; what Coleridge, speaking of Wordsworth's 'feudal' *White Doe*, called the evanescent 'Plan'—to be withheld from too gross a '*materialization*'—of 'the history in the mind'.⁴⁸ So wide is the span, so high the pinnacle, of this overarching design, that it often recedes from view. It is glimpsed in a poem such as 'Mutability', a sonnet in *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822), in which Wordsworth evokes the persistence of 'the tower sublime / Of yesterday' by reclaiming and repurposing material on the 'touch of time' from 'A Gothic Tale'—

⁴⁶ Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 495.

⁴⁷ See David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 147.

⁴⁸ Coleridge to Wordsworth, 21 May 1808, qtd. in *The White Doe of Rylstone*, ed. Dugas, 15.

composed over twenty years before.⁴⁹ But much closer to the surface of Wordsworth's early poetry is a radical feeling for nature as—in John Thelwall's phrase—'what is fit and true, and can endure the test of reason', and the polar opposite of 'the gaudy, cumbrous fustian' of the 'Gothic customary'.⁵⁰ In such poems as 'The Tables Turned' in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), the impulses of nature teach more 'Than all the sages can'.⁵¹ But Wordsworth also reads in the landscape a 'Gothic' lesson—poised between Edmund Burke's and John Ruskin's senses of the term—about habit and *human* nature. 'For I have learned', Wordsworth says in 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', 'To look on nature . . . hearing oftentimes / The still, sad music of humanity' (ll. 89–92). '[L]ook[ing] . . . hearing', the poet perceives in the ruin-rich landscape 'Things which you cannot see' (l. 68), looking steadily—like 'Armytage', the pedlar of 'The Ruined Cottage' before him—into the human dimension of time.⁵² Wordsworth closes his poem 'on the Wye' by reimagining Armytage's 'strange discipline' of memory as a plan of inner-architecture.⁵³ Through a continual sublation of 'little, nameless, unremembered acts' of unselfconscious being, Wordsworth tells his 'wild-eyed' sister, she may refashion her mind as a

⁴⁹ See Wordsworth, *The Borderers*, 752; and *The Poems of William Wordsworth, Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Wordsworth*, iii. 407–8.

⁵⁰ John Thelwall, *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 405.

⁵¹ *The Poems of William Wordsworth, Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Wordsworth*, i. 366–7.

⁵² Wordsworth, 'The Ruined Cottage' and 'The Pedlar', ed. James A. Butler (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 49.

⁵³ 'The Ruined Cottage' and 'The Pedlar', 256–7 (RC MS. B 43v l. 11).

‘mansion for all lovely forms’, and live on in his absence, haunted everywhere by hope (ll. 35, 120, 140–1).

The Prelude, composed between 1798 and 1805, though not published until 1850, reflects this gradual ‘materialization’ of Wordsworth’s Gothic ‘Plan’ throughout. The two-part poem of 1799 depicts the child-poet, placed in the ‘severe’ and sublime stream of nature’s ‘school’, both inhabiting and inhabited by a landscape of ‘huge and mighty forms that do not live / Like living men’, from ‘naked crags’ and ‘stone walls’ making ‘bleak music’ with the wind, to ruins like Furness Abbey, with its ‘fractured arch’ and ‘nave . . . touched by faint / Internal breezes’ (1799: I, 79–80, 127–8, 62, 364; II, 109–25). Like Byron in *Childe Harold*, Wordsworth transforms the quest romance and the feeling of historical rupture in ruins into the present matter of his song, shifting ‘from previous ages to previous states of mind, from culture to individual and from history to psychology’.⁵⁴ The poet is himself a human version of the Gothic ruins that populate the landscape, a ‘building’ with its ‘props . . . removed’, that stands ‘as if sustained / By its own spirit’ (1799: II, 324–6).

In this early version of Wordsworth’s ‘Poem on the Growth of [his] own Support’, as Coleridge called it, the Gothic imagery sublimates the Wordsworth family tragedy—the early loss of both parents and the dereliction of old John Wordsworth’s employer, Lord Lonsdale.⁵⁵ Lonsdale’s refusal to repay outstanding debts of almost £5,000 to the Wordsworth children left

⁵⁴ Ralph Pite, ‘Introduction’, in Timothy Saunders, Charles Martindale, Ralph Pite, and Mathilde Skoie (eds), *Romans and Romantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

⁵⁵ *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71), iv. 572–6.

them literally ‘destitute, and as we might / Trooping together’ (1805: II, 259–60).⁵⁶ As Dorothy reflected in February 1793, ‘We in the same moment lost a father, a mother, a home, we have been equally deprived of our patrimony by the cruel Hand of lordly Tyranny’.⁵⁷ But as Wordsworth reworked *The Prelude* into a five- and then a thirteen-book form, including explicit treatment of the French Revolution, he increasingly read the ruin as a historical palimpsest and a paradigm of ‘strong / Confusion’ (1805: VI, 247–8). In book V, Wordsworth further internalizes the taste for buildings ‘formed in ruins’ in the culture of sensibility.⁵⁸ The boy of Winander, like the ‘fractured’, ‘shattered’ remains of Furness and Bolton, ‘Has carried far into his heart the voice’ of an inhuman nature (V, 408). The boy is the limit-case for Wordsworth’s vision of the ‘real chil[d]’: ‘not too wise, / Too learned, or too good, but wanton, fresh’, with a little world woven from ‘books and nature’, and with only such ‘Knowledge’ as quickens from inborn ‘power’ (V, 436–49). But better the boy’s too-rapid ruin, Wordsworth suggests, than the ‘hollow . . . life of lies’ (V, 350) provided for by Benthamite systems of education. A child raised to programmatic study is, indeed, ‘no child, / But a dwarf man’, who dwindles even as he ‘grow[s] wiser every day’, pounded ‘Within the pifold of his own conceit’ (V, 294–5, 342, 361–2). The

⁵⁶ See McCormick, ‘Wordsworth and Shepherds’, 630–1; and Tim Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 170–1.

⁵⁷ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787–1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 88.

⁵⁸ See Inger Sigrun Brodey, *Ruined by Design: Shaping Novels and Gardens in the Culture of Sensibility* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 76.

‘real child’ is to the ‘dwarf man’ as Ruskin’s clumsy ‘old Venetian’ is to his ‘engine-turned’ modern-day English operative: rough, dull, incapable, failing, but hiding ‘transfiguration behind and within’.⁵⁹

The Wordsworthian child, keeping ‘the mind / Deep in its fountain’ (Byron, *Childe Harold*, III, 69), is Coleridge’s ‘dormant’, ‘insular’, ‘self-evolving’ Constitution in miniature.⁶⁰ But in *The Prelude*, as in the ‘Intimations’ Ode, Wordsworth transforms the ‘immemorial’ view of English nationhood that Coleridge took on from the ‘Gothic historiography’ going back to Edward Coke in the 1600s, as he locates the ‘soul’s immensity’ in a time before education, and claims for his story of true ‘nature yet remembered’ the status of a ‘history’ that, ‘in the words of reason deeply weighed— / Hath no beginning’ (1805: II, 369, 237–8).⁶¹ Reflecting on the Revolution in France, Burke had boasted that his feeling for the ‘Gothic’ ‘ground-work’ of Britain in ‘monkish’ institutions like the universities was ‘so worked into my mind’ that he could not ‘distinguish’ the structures of his own thoughts from those of others who came before him.⁶² But Wordsworth had, as Coleridge put it, absorbed and redirected the shock of the Revolution,

⁵⁹ Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, ii. 162.

⁶⁰ Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, ed. John Colmer (London and Princeton: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Princeton University Press, 1976), 95–7.

⁶¹ See R. J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest, Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688–1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3–12, 92; Sean Silver, ‘The Politics of Gothic Historiography, 1660–1800’, in Byron and Townshend, *The Gothic World*, 3–14; and Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, 21–31.

⁶² Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. 2nd edn (London: J. Dodsley, 1790), 147.

rebuilding lost ‘Hope’ at home into a ‘dread watch-tower of man’s absolute self’, transforming history into prophecy.⁶³ In the language of Wordsworth’s ‘Ode’ and of his 1809 prose tract, *The Convention of Cintra*, Burke’s mental ‘buildings’ ‘bind too closely to something inward,—to the present and the past’, ‘[w]hereas the vigour of the human soul is from without and from futurity’, in the mental architecture of ‘worlds not realized’.⁶⁴ What Wordsworth proposes in *The Prelude* is therefore a far more ‘revolutionary architecture’ of the Gothic, which—to adapt John Ruskin’s terms—admits no ‘executive inferiority . . . at all’.⁶⁵ In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth presents his own story as little less than a national theodicy: Gothic England is redeemed from history in the growth of a poet’s mind.

Coleridge articulated this ‘Gothic’ achievement in ‘To William Wordsworth’, his poetic response to Wordsworth reading the whole 1805 *Prelude* aloud in the dying days of 1806. Coleridge’s Gothic ideal, as he later described it in relation to the British constitution and the

⁶³ Coleridge, ‘To William Wordsworth’, in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Major Works*, ed. H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 125–28, ll. 2–3, 38–40.

⁶⁴ See *The Convention of Cintra* in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, i. 323. Stephen Gill suggests a reading of Wordsworth’s ‘Ode. Intimations of Immortality’ as a poem of political imagination. The poem was first published in 1807 as plain ‘Ode’, and it was only through a gradual process of reframing—with a footnote in *The Excursion* (1814) and a retitling in *Poems* (1815)—that Wordsworth managed subsequently to ‘impose a transcendental interpretation’. Opening with the line, ‘There was a time when’, and linked via ‘Elegiac Stanzas’ to ‘Lines’ on the ‘Power’ and the ‘passing’ of Charles James Fox, the 1807 ‘Ode’ originally ‘beckoned to who knows what exercise of nostalgia’. See Gill, *Wordsworth’s Revisitings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35–6.

⁶⁵ Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, ii. 158.

English language, was a ‘structure . . . complete in each part’ that preserves ‘the rights and interests of the individual in conjunction with those of the whole’.⁶⁶ Wordsworth was already the incarnation of this organic ideal: Coleridge had prophesied in January 1804 that a simple song of ‘Wordsworth . . . himself’, a ‘Faithful transcript’ of his ‘habitual Feelings & Modes of seeing and hearing’, could not help but be the world’s ‘first & finest philosophical Poem’.⁶⁷ *The Prelude* confirmed the prediction. A ‘prophetic’ ‘lay / More than historic’, of ‘high and passionate thoughts / To their own music chanted’, the poem installs Wordsworth ‘in the choir / Of ever-enduring men’ (ll. 2–3, 46–7, 49–50). More than a ‘Gothic instrument’ defining the ‘choir’ (in Coleridge’s later phrase for the church organ), Wordsworth’s poem resembles an entire Gothic cathedral, an ‘architecture’ of ‘self-annihilation’ that also embodies a self-evolving ‘plan’ in which ‘endless complexity and variety are united into one whole’.⁶⁸ Wordsworth’s ‘lay’ rushes Coleridge out of selfish mourning at the ‘grave’ of his own ‘genius’, and he emerges from the poem rising in profound obeisance, reborn in a ‘Gothic’ form between Burke’s ‘proud submission’ and Ruskin’s aspiring reverence: ‘my being blended in one thought / (Thought was it? Or aspiration? Or resolve?) / . . . And when I rose, I found myself in prayer’ (ll. 70–5, 102–12).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Coleridge, *Lectures 1808–1819: On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2 vols (London and Princeton: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Princeton University Press, 1987), ii. 231.

⁶⁷ *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ii. 1034.

⁶⁸ Coleridge, *Lectures: On Literature*, ii. 60.

⁶⁹ See Burke, *Reflections*, 113; Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, ii. 164.

Wordsworth's Gothic 'Plan' materialized still further in *The Excursion* (1814). The Preface introduces the poem as only 'part' of a larger 'philosophical poem', *The Recluse*. The associations of this overarching title, along with Wordsworth's references to retirement, an inward 'review', and a solitude oriented towards 'Society', all suggest a modern-day monasticism. This suggestion becomes explicit as Wordsworth figures *The Recluse* as a fragmentary Gothic edifice, awaiting a reader able to decode the accretive 'system' of its architecture:

[*The Prelude* and *The Excursion*] have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the Anti-chapel has to the body of a gothic Church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor Pieces . . . have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little Cells, Oratories, and sepulchral Recesses ordinarily included in those Edifices . . . It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system: it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself.⁷⁰

The whole poem reinvents the Gothic historiographical pattern of Thomson's *Liberty*, whereby Britain rises 'from Celtic night / To present grandeur' (IV, 624–5). All four of the principal characters are historically transitive. The Solitary is a priest turned Jacobin, now living like an anchorite in a cell, who cultivates Coleridgean poses of historical 'abstraction', and extols the contemplative 'life where hope and memory are as one' (*Excursion*, II, 676–7, V, 207–15, III,

⁷⁰ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, 38–9.

407).⁷¹ The Pastor is less an evangelist than a local historian and functionary of Coleridge's 'national Church'. The Poet, instantly distinguished from Wordsworth the mountaineer by his 'languid feet' 'toiling' across a common (I, 21–2), seems much less a Poet than a poet laureate as he hails 'the State of England' and the 'Crown by Freedom shaped' (VI, 1–6). And the main character in the early books, the Wanderer ('Armytage' from 'The Ruined Cottage'), is doubly obsolescent as a pedlar and an oral poet who lacks 'the accomplishment of Verse' (I, 84). The 'something . . . dramatic form' of the poem also adumbrates medievalism. The focus of interest shifts from the 'rounded' character of the Wanderer (I, 849) to the 'pointed' figure ('changeable to infinity') of the Solitary (VIII, 439).⁷² Their 'argument' about what the Solitary calls our 'sad dependance upon time' (IV, 424) moves through various types of historical sensibility towards a 'medievalist' structure of feeling. Private myth, 'antiquarian humour' (III, 138), religious syncretism, and graveyard poetry are progressively superseded from books I to VI. Reflections on an Elizabethan knight left stranded by the long withdrawing roar of chivalry then lead on to a Pugin-esque contrast between a 'many-windowed' modern factory and a 'Conventual Church'

⁷¹ In *The Friend*, Coleridge represents himself as immersed in the '*old Faith*' that is '*modern Heresy*', 'upholding some Principles both of Taste and Philosophy, adopted by the great Men of Europe from the Middle of the fifteenth till towards the Close of the seventeenth Century'. See *The Friend*, ed. Barbara Rooke, 2 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), ii. 17.

⁷² Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, ii. 175. See also Richard Gravil, 'Is *The Excursion* a "Metrical Novel?"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 42/2 (2011): 144–52; and my 'The Dramatic End of *The Excursion*', in '*The Excursion: A Bicentenary Celebration*', a special issue of *The Wordsworth Circle*, ed. Tom Duggett and Jacob Risinger, 45/2 (Spring 2014): 157–61.

‘of old’ (VII, 933–97, 1030–72; VIII, 36–83, 152–97). The poem concludes with a series of ‘Gothic’ vignettes, in which Britain ‘cast[s] off / Her swarms’; Parliament’s ‘venerable Halls’ realize Edward VI’s vision of the Reformation; and a faculty for imagining ‘The thing that hath been as the thing that is’ produces a vision of ancient British druidism and wicker-men, shockingly superimposed upon a cultivated English landscape (IX, 379–80, 401–18, 679–716).

But if *The Excursion* thus anticipates Ruskin on ‘medievalism’ as social life in ‘Gothic form’, much of its audience, including Coleridge and the younger Romantics, received the poem as a backward step, a work more untimely than ‘prophetic’.⁷³ William Hazlitt suggested that the poem was a ‘gothic Church’ only because it harked back to the wilful obscurantism of the *Ancien Régime*. It ‘affects a system without having any intelligible clue to one’, and resembles nothing so much as a poetical cathedral of Cologne: ‘like one of those stupendous but half-finished structures which have been suffered to moulder into decay, because the cost and labour attending them exceeded their use or beauty’.⁷⁴ The ‘characters’ in *The Excursion* were not so much psychologically plausible individuals as versions of Wordsworth, refractions of the ‘intense’ (‘self-annihilating’, ‘Gothic’) character that ‘swallows up every thing’: ‘the dialogues . . . are soliloquies of the same character . . . The recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in

⁷³ See Ruskin, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting, Delivered at Edinburgh, in November 1853*

(London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1854), 21, 193; and Linda H. Peterson, ‘Sage Writing’, in Herbert F. Tucker (ed.), *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 405–6.

⁷⁴ See William Hazlitt, *Selected Writings*, ed. John Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 353; and *The Examiner*, 21 Aug. 1814, 541.

one poet'.⁷⁵ The potential of those parallel 'soliloquies of the same character' for a critical archaeology of the 'Gothic' subject had ended, for Hazlitt, in nothing more than a self-indulgent 'intellectual egotism'.

Coleridge similarly 'censured' *The Excursion*, 'comparatively' with the (then-unpublished) *Prelude*, as showing an 'undue predilection for the *dramatic* form'.⁷⁶ In effect, *The Excursion* fulfilled Coleridge's worst fears about a 'materialization of the Plan' subverting the true-Gothic 'history in the mind' that he still hoped—despite his estrangement from Wordsworth since 1810—would constitute *The Recluse*. Wordsworth had reduced the 'wholly imaginative' 'character' of the pedlar from 'The Ruined Cottage' to the status of a mere 'talker in the dialogue', more 'Methodist parson' than Gothic bard.⁷⁷ In the language of Coleridge's *Constitution of the Church and State* (1830), Wordsworth had thus lost sight of the 'due proportion of the *potential* (latent, dormant) to the *actual* Power'. Exchanging the rough majesty of *The Prelude* for the 'little urbanities' of dialogue in *The Excursion* was equivalent, for Coleridge, to England sacrificing 'the insular privilege of a self-evolving Constitution', progressive in proportion as it 'remain[ed] in the Idea, unevolved', for a state as 'improgressive' as Venice or China, where 'power' was ossified in proportion as it was fully 'awake and . . .

⁷⁵ *The Examiner*, 21 Aug. 1814, 542.

⁷⁶ See Seamus Perry, 'Coleridge's Disappointment in *The Excursion*', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 45/2 (Spring 2014): 147–51; and Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (London and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), ii. 135.

⁷⁷ Coleridge, *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols (London and Princeton: Routledge, Princeton University Press, 1990), i. 306–7.

operative' in 'rigid' 'forms'.⁷⁸ For Coleridge, Wordsworth's poetry had departed from its 'historic' and 'prophetic' character at the point when it had ceased to be 'insular' and oblique. Writing in *Tait's Magazine* in 1845, De Quincey concurred: 'Not . . . in *The Excursion* must we look for that reversionary influence which awaits Wordsworth with posterity'.⁷⁹ Wordsworth's 'whole college of philosophy' was guilty of 'childish impatience', of failing to perceive the 'long swells setting in from the French Revolution', which 'has not, even yet, come into full action'. By contrast, Wordsworth's early poetry was one of '*palingenesis*': 'oblique forms', 'ruined lodges', and 'forgotten mansions', giving glimpses of a far future 'even now on the road'.

But as Coleridge half-recognizes in his comment on the 'imaginative' decline of the Wanderer, *The Excursion* retains an 'insular' and 'oblique' 'Gothic' character in another sense—

⁷⁸ See Coleridge, *Table Talk*, i. 307; Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, 85–103; and, for Coleridge comparing Wordsworth's 'mental bombast' to 'the immense empire of China improgressive for thirty centuries', see Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ii. 137. While this looks on the face of it like standard 'orientalist' denigration of China, Coleridge's account of the constitution as a magnet, polarized between the forces of 'permanence' and 'progression', suggests a more specialized meaning for 'improgressive'. The term may give a Romantic-historicist twist to Adam Smith's account of the Qing empire as 'stationary'—meaning, as Giovanni Arrighi claims, not 'stagnant' but 'optimized', fit for its own purposes, already arrived at the end of history. See Coleridge, *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, 23–31; Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2007); and Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18–19.

⁷⁹ Thomas De Quincey, 'On Wordsworth's Poetry', in David Bromwich (ed.), *Romantic Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 149–71.

in the (distinctly Coleridgean) shape of the Solitary.⁸⁰ For much of the poem, the Solitary's true-Gothic identity is obscured as the other characters attempt to 'correct' him by 'heaping up . . . exempla in the medieval manner'.⁸¹ But the Solitary's telling of his own life-story in book III concludes with a passage of poetry that—like Coleridge's 'To William Wordsworth'—takes up and transforms Wordsworth's own articulations of his Gothic myth in 'Tintern Abbey' and *The Prelude*. In the parallel passage at *Prelude*, IV, 247–64, Wordsworth figures memory as visual mastery. 'Incumbent o'er the surface of past time', he engages in a 'sweet[ly]' impeded struggle to 'part / The shadow from the substance', the surface from the 'deeps' of his memory. The Solitary rehumanizes and universalizes the figure: all of 'human Life' is a 'mountain Brook / In some still passage of its course' (III, 994, 976–7). There is real imaginative risk in this image. In book V of *The Prelude*, still waters signified stagnation, as with the mis-taught 'dwarf man' and 'the dimpling cistern of his heart' (1805, V, 295, 345). But in an exemplary act of 'Gothic' rereading, the Solitary understands the 'still passage' in terms of the 'inland murmur' and 'still . . . music' of 'Tintern Abbey'. '[S]eeing and hearing' in the 'habitual . . . Mode' that Coleridge identified with Wordsworth's own true-Gothic identity, the Solitary at the 'Brook' hears 'a roar or murmur', and sees,

Within the depths of its capacious breast,

Inverted trees, and rocks, and azure sky;

⁸⁰ For the suggestion that Coleridge was Wordsworth's model for the Solitary, see Nicholas Roe,

Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 27.

⁸¹ Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 319.

And, on its glassy surface, specks of foam,
And conglobated bubbles undissolved,
Numerous as stars; that, by their onward lapse,
Betray to sight the motion of the stream,

... and make known

Through what perplexing labyrinths, abrupt
Precipitations, and untoward straits,
The earth-born wanderer has passed . . .

(III, 978–91)

The Solitary here models a more historical mode of memory, a sort of reading against the grain of time, in which superficial traces ‘betray’ unknowable internal complications, and impediments to pure knowledge prompt imaginative insight. Overreaching the poet of *The Prelude* who ‘would enshrine the spirit of the past / For future restoration’ (XI, 339–42), Wordsworth’s Coleridgean character Solitary articulates the transumptive sense of the Gothic Revival that a better spirit lies in waiting, inchoate and immanent, in the external forms of a reinvented tradition.

Wordsworth’s *Excursion* thus plants, in the winter snows of Romanticism, the snowdrops of the Victorian medievalist self. Wordsworth pioneers an inward Gothic architecture with the diffident suggestion that *The Recluse* ‘may . . . be found’ to resemble a ‘gothic Church’. But by

the 1850s, this ‘advance . . . made by the soul of the poet’ is secure.⁸² For John Ruskin, there is no doubt that ‘[t]here will be found something more than usually interesting in tracing out this grey, shadowy, many-pinnacled image of the Gothic spirit within us’.⁸³ Nor is there—any longer—any doubt of the reader perceiving the inward ‘fellowship’ of this Gothic ‘image’ with ‘our Northern hearts’.

Insular history

From a global perspective, of course, Ruskin’s account of the northern-hearted Gothic subject only begs the question. The ‘insular’ Gothic ideal, as I have traced it in Coleridge and De Quincey on Wordsworth, seems to be at odds with scholarship that finds the fountains of Romanticism and the Gothic in intercultural exchanges with the Continent, and with the still more ‘distant peoples’ (in Southey’s phrase) of Asia.⁸⁴ But in this final section, I’d like to focus on an episode, gathered from the scholarship of Romantic-period ‘globalism’, that suggests how

⁸² See Wordsworth’s ‘Essay, Supplementary to the Preface’, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* (1974), iii. 82.

⁸³ Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, ii. 152–3.

⁸⁴ See Robert Southey, *Letters from England: by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella*. 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, & Orme, 1808), ii. 46; and for a concise introduction to the field of the ‘global’ Romantic and Gothic, see Evan Gottlieb’s ‘Recovering Romantic Globalism’, in his *Romantic Globalism: British Literature and Modern World Order, 1750–1830* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2014), 1–16. David Higgins considers at length the sort of ‘local’ presence of the ‘global’ that I am sketching here in his *Romantic Englishness* (2014).

such ‘insular’ and global concepts of the Gothic may coexist or combine. Jerome McGann notes the enabling paradox of historical study that only a ‘completely . . . localized’ art accrues sufficient ‘difference’ to ‘speak to alien cultures’.⁸⁵ But if this in itself suggests the ‘global’ significance of an ‘insular’ Gothicism, I would suggest that the peculiarly historical character of Wordsworth’s poetry lies in the way its ‘oblique forms’ continually register origins and ends altogether elsewhere, and thus preserve it from any kind of easy historical ‘transcendence’.

In representing Michael’s compulsive ‘work unfinished’ at the Sheep-fold, Wordsworth gestures towards a new, still almost unthinkable sense of simultaneity with ‘lost’ loved ones—not in the grave but ‘beyond the seas’ (ll. 481, 456). Wordsworth leaves Luke’s overseas ‘hiding place’ unspecified. In the Romantic imagination, however, a foreign bourne from which it was scarcely possible to return generally meant East Asia, and particularly China. From Thomas Percy to Coleridge, China was an important ‘foil’ for the early Gothic Revival. Percy’s antiquarian studies of China were instrumental in defining the literary nationalism, the non-classical aesthetics, and the progressive evaluation of language change in his ‘Gothic’ *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765).⁸⁶ In notes prepared for the 1793 ‘Macartney’ embassy to the

⁸⁵ Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. 2nd edn (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 1–3.

⁸⁶ See David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9–10, 154–82; Eun Kyung Min, ‘Thomas Percy’s Chinese Miscellanies and the Reliques of Ancient English Poetry’ (1965), *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 43/3 (2010): 307–24; and Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 26–44. On Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’ as a Chinese poem, see also Peter J. Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 143–213.

Qing court, Joseph Banks articulated the widespread view of China—fostered by Percy and by William ‘Orientalist’ Jones—as a quasi-medieval civilization that had failed to become modern, lacking a (medievalist) feeling for ruins and for ‘Gothic’ hybrids of all kinds.⁸⁷ For Banks, China was the ‘high Pitch[ed]’ ‘Ruin of a state of Civilization’, merely possessed in the present by the Qing, but appealing to the British as superior to anything hitherto achieved in Europe.⁸⁸

Differences over commerce and cultural hybridity fed notions of historical divergence. The idea of a world-historical clash between ‘dynamic and modern Britain’ and ‘stationary’ China found emblematic expression in the 1793 episode of the Qing court showing curiosity about British men-of-war, but neglecting such high-tech ‘works of art’ as the *Weltsmaschine*, a German-made cosmological clock specially covered in *chinoiserie*.⁸⁹ Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’ (1797–1816) arguably refracts this context, with its ‘Gothic’ poet inwardly transforming into a ‘symphony’ with ‘flashing eyes’, a ‘dread’ type of the British *zeitgeist*-made-machine, transcending Chinese

⁸⁷ See George Steinmetz’s summary of this ‘European’ view of China in *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 393–5.

⁸⁸ See *The Letters of Sir Joseph Banks: A Selection, 1768–1820*, ed. Neil Chambers (London: Imperial College Press, 2000), 140–1.

⁸⁹ See Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 3, 128–51. For intriguingly different images of the *Weltsmaschine*, see the Romantic Circles Gallery, ‘The Chronometer and Planetarium System’ (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/gallery/chronometer-and-planetarium-system>), and Philipp Matthäus Hahn, ‘Große astronomische Welt-Maschine—Cod.math.qt.48’ (c. 1770–1779) in the Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart (<http://digital.wlb-stuttgart.de/purl/bsz39104530X>).

cultural categories to ‘build . . . in air’ with ‘music loud and long’.⁹⁰ There is a similar sense of divergence in Charles Lamb’s 1815 letters to Thomas Manning at Canton. Lamb suggests that his ‘improbable romantic fictions’ of London in ruins follow inevitably from being in ‘correspondence with the uttermost parts of the earth’.⁹¹ His joke about the ‘spelling’ of ‘Ho-hing-tong’ (discussed earlier) leads on to a vision of Manning returning ‘like a Struldbug [*sic*] into a world where . . . all your opinions will be out of date, your jokes obsolete . . . as wit of the last age’.⁹² The very title of De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), meanwhile, plays on the cognitive ‘shudder’ of connecting England and the (supposed) ‘modes of life’ in China.⁹³ In telling his dreams, De Quincey counterposes ‘Chinese’ visions of being ‘buried, for a thousand years . . . in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids’ with a

⁹⁰ I draw here on Nick Groom’s persuasive reading of the ‘symphony’ in ‘Kubla Khan’ as a variant of the hurdy-gurdy, the droning ‘automatic harp’ of the ballad singer. Groom’s papers on the topic include: ‘Kubla Khan’s Automatic Harp: Ambient Noise in Late-18th Century and Romantic Poetry’, University of Sheffield, 11 Feb. 2010, and ‘Strange Music from Beyond the Wall of Sleep: Aeolian Harps, Seashells, and the Pagan Lyre’, at the 36th Wordsworth Summer Conference, Grasmere, Aug. 2007.

⁹¹ See *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, vi. 483.

⁹² See *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, vi. 481.

⁹³ See Barry Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Charlottesville, VA, and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 25–6: ‘De Quincey’s adoption of the adjective “English” was undoubtedly meant in part to preempt the implicit “Oriental” that would otherwise be attached to “Opium-Eater”’.

dream-architecture inspired by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Piranesi's fantasies of Rome, of 'endless growth and self-reproduction' in 'vast Gothic halls'.⁹⁴

If De Quincey's dream-architecture recalls the 'wilderness of building' in *The Excursion* (II, 871), and if Lamb's linkage of catachresis and historical consciousness recalls the 'plain humanities' replacing 'hieroglyphics' in 'Michael', there is a still closer correspondence between Wordsworth's poetry and China in the shape of his brother, John Wordsworth, captain of the Canton trader, the *Earl of Abergavenny*. The Wordsworths invested heavily—both financially and emotionally—in John's voyages. And as Peter Kitson has shown, this outbound investment returns with strange force, as China 'erupts' into 'that most canonically Romantic poem about the formation of the Romantic self', *The Prelude*.⁹⁵

The Chinese 'eruption' happens twice. In one version of the poem, from 1818/20, Wordsworth introduces China into book V as a new context for the miseducated 'dwarf man'. The child prodigy is now 'Monstrous as China's vegetable Dwarfs', and resembles an English 'Oak' in 'living miniature', the product of a system 'Of human care industriously perverse / Here to advance the work and there retard'.⁹⁶ Wordsworth also adds a trace to the 1805 text of book VIII, where the 'Paradise' of the English Lakes enters into comparison with 'Gehol's famous Gardens', 'Beyond that mighty Wall, not fabulous' of China (VIII, 119–58). Gehol's interjoining

⁹⁴ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Robert Morrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 69–73.

⁹⁵ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 198.

⁹⁶ See *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark Reed, 2 vols (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), ii. 84; book V, ll. 331–9.

‘scenes’ of ‘shady dells’ and ‘eastern monasteries’ exemplify a landscape architecture of ‘ever growing change’ (VIII, 129–43). But Wordsworth prefers the ‘Paradise / Where I was rear’d’, as a human landscape: not ‘composed’ by ‘patient’ ‘myriads’ for an imperial ‘dynasty’, but cultivated with ‘Fellow’ feeling by ‘Man free, man working for himself’ (VIII, 146–58). Here beauty—like knowledge in book V (l. 450)—is ‘not purchased with the loss of power’. A ‘roam’ in Gehol’s gardens ‘Would leave behind a dance of images’ that might ‘break in upon . . . sleep for weeks’ (VIII, 163–5). But even in that brief interspace, the ‘common haunts of the green earth’—existing beyond and beneath the artifice of landscape gardening—are ‘fastening on the heart / Insensibly’, ‘So that we love, not knowing that we love, / And feel, not knowing whence our feeling comes’ (VIII, 166–72).

Wordsworth’s source for both of these ‘Chinese’ passages appears to be John Barrow’s *Travels in China* (1804), a quasi-ethnographic account of the country based on first-hand experience during the ‘failed’ Macartney embassy of 1793. Wordsworth likely read Barrow’s book (possibly in Southey’s review copy) around the time he composed the lines in book VIII, by October 1804.⁹⁷ Extracts then went into the Wordsworth’s commonplace book (DC MS 26) for future use.⁹⁸ Wordsworth’s late addition to book V is in keeping with Barrow’s account of a

⁹⁷ See Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth’s Reading, 1800–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 12–13; Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 196–7; and John Barrow, *Travels in China: Containing Descriptions, Observations, and Comparisons, Made and Collected in the Course of a Short Residence at the Imperial Palace of Yuen-Min-Yuen, and on a Subsequent Journey Through the Country from Peking to Canton* (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1804), 126–37, 259–63.

⁹⁸ Wu, *Wordsworth’s Reading*, 13.

system of ‘dry study’ that replicates knowledge but with ‘no meaning’.⁹⁹ The evocation of Gehol in book VIII similarly comes straight out of the *Travels*, corresponding closely to the description given on pages 127–34 of Barrow’s book.¹⁰⁰ But the common origin of the two passages belies the contrast in their textual status. The passage on Gehol, from 1804, is present with variations in all subsequent versions of *The Prelude*. The 1818/20 addition to book V, on the other hand, is expunged from the final text. After the lines on ‘the dimpling cistern of his heart’, only a context-less stump survives: ‘For this unnatural growth the trainer blame, / Pity the tree’ (1850: V, 328–9).

Wordsworth’s reasons for adding and then subtracting China from book V are unknown. But *The Prelude* was a poem that ‘lived in manuscript’, continually revalidated between 1805 and 1850 through ‘compulsive rewriting’.¹⁰¹ The ‘vegetable’ and ‘industrious’ terms of the 1818/20 addition suggest Wordsworth removing it in the spirit of Burke’s constant constitutional gardener, taking ‘care not to inoculate any cyon alien to the nature of the original plant’.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Barrow, *Travels in China*, 259–63.

¹⁰⁰ See Wu, *Wordsworth’s Reading*, 13; and *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, i. 214.

¹⁰¹ See Kenneth Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 818; see also Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth’s Revisitings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13–20, 139.

¹⁰² See Burke, *Reflections*, 45. Wordsworth developed Burke’s metaphor in his 1809 pamphlet on *The Convention of Cintra*, warning the Spanish patriots not to be ‘indiscriminately afraid of new things . . . Young scions of polity must be engrafted on the time-worn trunk: a new fortress must be reared upon the ancient and living rock of justice’. See *The Convention of Cintra* in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, i. 376.

Wordsworth's poetry of self-evolving 'internal spirit' again reasserts itself against 'industrious antiquarianism'.¹⁰³ But if this only sharpens the contrast with the hardier material on 'Gehol's . . . gardens', Kitson intimates an explanation both global and 'insular' in the death, en route to China, of John Wordsworth, in February 1805. Wordsworth conferred finished form on the poem 'on . . . [his] own Support' in May 1805, just three months after John's ship went down, taking to the sea floor some £200,000 of goods and silver, and leaving the Wordsworths exposed to huge potential liabilities.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ This 'insular' turn in the revision of book V may, however, also have a 'global' register. Andrew Warren reads the 'Arab Quixote' dream at the start of book V in terms of an incipiently global perspective, with the 'Oriental Manuscript' no longer representing, as for the Augustans, merely 'a fortuitous route to allegory', but rather (quoting Andrew Piper) a 'complex calculus of the local and the global'. See Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 30. Merging the global presence of China into the already 'complex calculus' of book V may have seemed to Wordsworth after 1820 to complicate beyond comprehension what he already feared in 1805 was a 'scarcely' 'obvious' 'drift' (1805, V, 290–1). The background 'argument' of the book on 'Books' and education runs, as I read it, from an 'Arab Quixote' allegory recalling Southey's *Thalaba* on 'Oriental' immemorialism, 'waste', and 'ornament', to a (modern, European) nightmare of machine-education, and on to an implicitly contrasting 'Gothic' vision of 'There was a Boy'—where the Coleridgean Gothic ideal of a 'structure complete in each part' materializes briefly, only to perish as premature. Barrow's account of Chinese 'industry perverse' might have seemed in 1818/20 to make a neat link between the first and second parts of this 'argument' about education. But on subsequent reflection, the dwarf tree figure may have seemed to pre-empt or subvert any claim for the completeness-in-each-part of the *Gothic* child.

¹⁰⁴ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 190–1.

But the ‘feeling . . . loss’, as ‘Elegiac Stanzas’ calls it, runs deeper still. Bound up somewhere in the near-quarter-million loss, and John Wordsworth’s total investment of around £20,000, was a £3,000 advance on the Lonsdale debt, which the family had invested in John’s unsuccessful voyage to Canton of 1803–4.¹⁰⁵ John Wordsworth seems to have understood his Chinese voyages, with their huge potential for profit (through private trading in opium), as a way of repairing the family ruin. As William put it in his correspondence, ventriloquizing his brother’s voice: ‘He [i.e. John] encouraged me to persist in the plan of life which I had adopted; I will work for you, and you shall attempt to do something for the world. Could I but see you with a green field of your own and a Cow and two or three other little comforts, I shall be happy’.¹⁰⁶

The *Prelude* passage comparing the English Lakes and Gehol’s gardens maps intriguingly onto the difference between John’s vision of a rural English idyll, invisibly sustained by (partially illicit) Chinese commerce, and the account Wordsworth found in Barrow’s *Travels* of the imperial spectacle at Gehol. Barrow inserts the account of the British ambassador, George, Lord Macartney, who describes finding ‘before me’, ‘at my feet’, ‘everything . . . as on an illuminated map; palaces, pagodas, towns, villages, farm-houses, plains, and vallies . . . and meadows covered with cattle’.¹⁰⁷ The distressing effect of this similarity in dissimilarity is uncannily exact. As Kitson suggests, Wordsworth reading Macartney in Barrow would almost certainly have noticed a further comparison between the scene at Gehol and the ‘noble’ and

¹⁰⁵ See Kenneth Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth*, 584; and Peter Kitson, ‘The Wordsworths, Opium, and China’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 43/1 (Winter 2012): 2–12, 4.

¹⁰⁶ *The Early Years*, 563.

¹⁰⁷ Barrow, *Travels in China*, 132–3.

‘diverse’ grounds of Lowther Hall in Westmorland—a place which, Macartney notes in passing, he ‘knew . . . many years ago’.¹⁰⁸ Macartney’s airy reference to past pleasures summons up the Wordsworth family tragedy. John Wordsworth senior had been law agent and land steward to James Lowther, Lord Lonsdale.¹⁰⁹ The British ambassador to China, meanwhile, ‘knew’ the Lowther estate because Lonsdale was his brother-in-law, and because he (Macartney) was returned as MP for Cockermouth in the 1768 general election—the beneficiary of bribes and other expenses advanced in the Lowther interest by none other than John Wordsworth senior, and never repaid.¹¹⁰ In 1805, long after Lowther’s heir had made restitution to the adult Wordsworth children with an overpayment of £8,500, they were still ‘fighting against a sense of their dispossession’.¹¹¹ In a letter of 7 August, Dorothy reflected with a feeling of loss never old on Lonsdale having restored ‘in a whim’ the ruin (‘buried’, ‘choked’, ‘intermingled’) of the ‘home’ by the Derwent that they had ‘lost’ when their father died, ‘one and twenty years ago’.¹¹²

And therefore, perhaps, the far-fetched reference to ‘Gehol’s famous Gardens’ remains, unchanged in its substantial lineaments, within Wordsworth’s ‘insular’ English poem. Wordsworth importing Macartney’s vision of China into *The Prelude* was also making a repayment, with interest, of the lordly ambassador’s global export of the Lakeland stewardship of his father, John Wordsworth senior. The story of William and his brother John sealing their

¹⁰⁸ Barrow, *Travels in China*, 134.

¹⁰⁹ McCormick, ‘Wordsworth and Shepherds’, 631.

¹¹⁰ See Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 208; and McCormick, ‘Wordsworth and Shepherds’, 631.

¹¹¹ Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority*, 170–1.

¹¹² *The Early Years*, 616.

own ‘covenant’ by laying ‘the foundation stone of a little fishing hut’ may (or may not) be a ‘fantasy’ back-projected from Wordsworth’s ‘pastoral poem’.¹¹³ But Wordsworth could hardly have failed to notice, through all his years of toil at the complete but continually unfinished *Prelude*, that the loss of John Wordsworth *junior* to the China trade was in effect the tragedy of ‘Michael’—and with it the whole Romantic spirit of a traumatically reinvented tradition—reinscribed within the very fabric of his own family, and written in the ultimately unspellable hieroglyphics of global commerce.

Suggested reading

Brodey, Inger Sigrun, *Ruined by Design: Shaping Novels and Gardens in the Culture of Sensibility* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).

Fulford, Tim, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

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Porter, David, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹¹³ Richard Matlak, *Deep Distresses: William Wordsworth, John Wordsworth, Sir George Beaumont, 1800–1808* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 51–5, 177n.

Warren, Andrew, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).