demonstrates how interpretations within Wordsworth’s poems can serve as a model and rationale for our contemporary interpretations. We note one omission from our Wordsworth section, which testifies complexly to the current situation in studies of the poet. We offer no essay on the “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” which may be Wordsworth’s most extensively discussed major lyric. The reasons for this are varied. In many cases significant work on the great Ode has become so heavily contextualized that it has outgrown the confines of a book like this one. The intertextual, dialogical analyses of the Ode’s engagements with Coleridge’s and other work found in Lucy Newlyn’s _Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Language of Allusion_ (1986), Paul Magnuson’s _Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue_ (1988), and Gene W. Ruoff’s _Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Making of the Major Lyrics, 1802–1804_ (1989) are not readily extractable. In _Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry_ (1989), Alan Bewell stresses Wordsworth’s indebtedness to eighteenth-century anthropological speculations for his depiction of the child as philosopher. Jeffrey C. Robinson’s _Radical Literary Education: A Classroom Experiment with Wordsworth’s “Ode”_ (1987) is a substantial and interesting monograph and encircles the poem from a variety of perspectives. Helen Vendler’s “Lionel Trilling and the Immortality Ode” (1978), which takes off from Trilling’s celebrated and influential essay of fifty years ago is long and densely argued, and does not represent the redirections we illustrate in this book. Other distinguished commentaries, which any student of the Ode should consult, are by scholars represented elsewhere in this book. See Jerome Christensen’s “ ‘Thoughts That Do Often Lie Too Deep for Tears’: Toward a Radical Concept of Lyrical Drama” (1981); Geoffrey H. Hartman’s “ ‘Timely Utterance’ Once More,” in _Rhetoric and Form: Deconstruction at Yale_ (1985); relevant chapters in Frances Ferguson’s _Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit_ (1977); Marjorie Levinson’s _Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems: Four Essays_ (1986); and Peter J. Manning’s _Reading Romantics: Text and Context_ (1990).

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KENNETH R. JOHNSTON

The Politics of “Tintern Abbey”

Although Kenneth R. Johnston’s most substantial contributions to Wordsworthian studies are his comprehensive analyses of the various stages in the composition of the poet’s unfinished masterwork in _Wordsworth and The Recluse_ (1984), and although he would not describe himself as a new historicist, his important essay on “Tintern Abbey” dramatizes most of the characteristics of romantic new historicism. He is concerned here, as elsewhere, with how contexts affect texts, both in their presence and (in the case of “Tintern Abbey”) by their absence. The concern extends to how texts work within contexts—how a poem appearing in the anonymous _Lyrical Ballads_ of 1798, for example, differs from the same poem appearing in the 1800 edition of _Lyrical Ballads_, which emphasizes in its preface poetry’s social relations.

One new-historicist tendency missing from Johnston’s piece is deference to Frankfurt school Marxism, emphasized by Marjorie Levinson in her “New Historicism: Back to the Future” (1989). New historicists begin from the oldest tradition of Wordsworthian criticism, dating back to the poet’s own day—the accusation of “anti-climax,” denunciation of the change in both poetic skill and political morality in the poet’s later years, this falling off attributed to his “betrayal” of his early interlinking of more progressive poetic and political principles.

New historicists, however, give this established tradition two special twists. First, political ideology for them supercedes all else. For new historicists, Wordsworth’s principal and almost exclusive concern was the French Revolution, with his agonized apostasy from his original sympathies being the determinative event of his career. When in 1774, for example, Karl Kroeber, credited Wordsworth with being driven by an ecological vision, he observed that such a vision had definite political implications, that from its origins in the seventeenth-century landscape representation had been a politicized mode. But for the new historicists references to the natural world are primarily a screen for more fundamental ideological motivations, which, repressed, shape all other impulses and interests. Hence the importance of “displacement,” currently our criticism’s most fashionable term. As Johnston argues, “Tintern Abbey” is “already political,” and because it is “one of the most powerfully depoliticized poems in the language” it is necessarily “a uniquely political one.”

The most controversial aspect of this popular approach is its emphasis on the silences of a text. Thus Marjorie Levinson, in her


There is the slight oddity of displacement between verbs, looking on nature while hearing that sad music. Is it a recall to duty or a fading echo? And how has he learned to do this? Not the process, but its beginnings and endings (Before and After) are represented most in the poem. The adverbs and adjectives multiply qualifications. Hearing oftentimes—but how often is that? And what kind of music is "still, sad music"? It sounds more like the amando of a Brahms symphony than the allegro of a Romantic one by Beethoven, where we might hear, rather than "still, sad music," the agitated noisy noise of human suffering. Furthermore, why is music so obviously calm as "still, sad music" further qualified as being "not harsh nor grating," especially when, as John Hodgson has excellently observed, "harsh" and "grating" certainly seem appropriate to the human sounds represented elsewhere in the poem: "the din of cities," "the sneers of selfish men," and "greetings where no kindness is?" What is being so carefully protected from harsh grating in a nonetheless necessary process of chastening and subduing? Probably, by way of a preliminary answer, the egoism of the creative artist, fearful of being overborne by other legitimate claims on his genius.

Certainly some of these questions are unfairly loaded, and go too far beyond the text, which after all is what it is, and is not required to supply an exact demonstration of the relation of aesthetic experience—whether landscape viewing or poetry writing (or reading)—to social responsibility and ultimate values. Nonetheless, the poem itself provokes such questions, and if in what follows I seem often to go outside the poem and to imply that Wordsworth is neglecting or sublimating unpleasant associations, it's not to suggest that he like any poet can't write the poem he wants to write, but that he himself has included it with language which simultaneously invites and resists probing, opening up just those areas of concern that it determinedly seeks to elude or contain in more manageable terms. Overall, this dialectical tendency in the social language of "Tintern Abbey" is directly parallel to what is to many readers its most impressive dramatic achievement, its way of making affirmative statements of belief while urging itself along by a constant series of very tentative, not to say negative, qualifications: "If this / Be but a vain belief," "somewhat of a sad perplexity," "Nor perchance. / If I were not thus taught," etc.

The more appropriate question would be to determine how "the still, sad music of humanity" is represented in the poem? A partial answer has already been suggested, in Hodgson's gloss on "harsh" and "grating." But I want to consider Wordsworth's representations of humanity in "Tintern Abbey" from a variety of perspectives: the progress of the text itself, Wordsworth's actual and literary experiences during his Wye tours, the poem's place in Lyrical Ballads and in relation to Wordsworth's contemporaneous work on The Recluse, and in the context of his other learning processes combining nature and humanity between 1793 and 1798.

We hear the "still, sad music of humanity"—i.e., see representations of human beings and human emotions—in two basic variations of a single phenomenon: elision, mutation, or restriction. In the first, descriptive paragraph, human phenomena constitute fully half the description, but are presented in a consistently specialized way that connects them—blurs them, one might say—as undistinguishably as possible into the beautiful surrounding natural landscape. Secondly, in each of the subsequent verse paragraphs, the fulcrum or tone note of human music is heard within a very narrow yet very intense range of notes, which is
generalized, broadened or crescendoed, at the poem's center into "the still, sad music of humanity." In paragraph two, it is "the din of towns and cities" and "hours of weariness—preliminarily generalized into "the heavy and the weary weight" Of all this unintelligible world." In three, it is "the fretful star / Unprofitable, and the fever of the world." In four, it is "still, sad music" itself, very much subordinated to Wordsworth's description of his earlier youthful pleasures in nature and his quasi-metaphysical paeans to it in the present. And in paragraph five it is "evil tongues, / Rash judgments . . . the sneers of selfish men, / . . . greetings where no kindness is, / [and] all / The dreary intercourse of daily life," subsequently generalized to "solitude . . . fear . . . pain . . . grief" (I. 143). Taken all together, these are not very great human evils that go to make up "the still, sad music of humanity," and do not specifically include the tragic associations we inevitably supply to that sonorous phrase, such as poverty, famine, disease, war, or all the irrevocable losses of love and life, irreversible, unmerited, and uncontrollable suffering which are inescapable in the human condition. At the risk of being gratuitous and unfair, we might rather generalize the specific representations of human suffering in "Tintern Abbey" as the lonely feelings of rejection suffered by a sensitive person in the conditions of intense competitive work in urban markets, where gossip, hasty judgement, jealousy, and smooth hypocrisy all contribute to the feverish pace at which one's business fails to go along as profitably as one wishes. Or, to gloss this last set of "Lines" in Lyrical Ballads from the first, the "Lines / Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree," the experiences of human life represented in "Tintern Abbey" sound very much like those of a

youth . . . led by nature into a wild scene
Of lofty hopes, [who] to the world went forth . . .
knowing no desire
Which genius did not hallow; against the taint
Of dissolve tongues, and jealousy, and hate,
And scorn—against all enemies prepared,
All but neglect. The world, for so it thought,
Owed him no service; wherefore he at once
With indignation turned himself away,
And with the food of pride sustained his soul
In solitude.

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THE PICTURESQUE AND THE UNPICTURESQUE AT TINTERN ABBEY

We are all familiar with the rhetoric of interconnectedness in the first paragraph, most fully analyzed by Colin Clarke, by which Wordsworth connects past to present, spirit to matter, man to nature, and other variations of "conne[ing]/ The landscape with the quiet of the sky." Indeed, frequent teaching of the poem produces a sort of occupational hazard in this respect, until its descriptive qualities seem much less representational than diagrammatic, so subtle, varied, and insistently are Wordsworth's buried repetitions and partial oxymorons throughout. Less often remarked is Wordsworth's "unobtrusive" debt to William Gilpin's guidebook, Observations on the River Wye . . . made in the Summer of 1770 (published

1781).4 The debt is most obvious in three particulars of his description: 1) The "orchard tufts" losing themselves "among the woods and copse", 2) the "hedge-rows hardly hedge-rows," and 3) the smoke at the end of the paragraph, of which Gilpin says, "the smoke, issuing from the sides of the hills, and spreading its thin veil over a part of them, beautifully breaks their lines, and unites them with the sky." More generally, Gilpin's cultivation of memory bears close comparison with Wordsworth's; at the twilight conclusion of the Tintern Abbey segment of his tour, he says such moments are "very favorable to imagination," producing "landscapes, perhaps more beautiful, than any, that exist in nature . . . formed from nature . . . treasured up in the memory . . . called into these imaginary creations by some distant resemblances, which strike the eye in the multiplicity of evanished surfaces, that float before it."5

My point in adding Wordsworth's use of Gilpin is not to belabor his indebtedness: doubtless he improves on Gilpin, and being borrowed by Wordsworth is the best thing that ever happened to Gilpin. Rather, I am interested in the use Wordsworth did not make of Gilpin, in light of the fact that his knowledge of Gilpin's guidebook is demonstrably so strong, arguing perhaps for his carrying it with him on the tour (in 1793 or 1798 or both), or having Gilpin's phrases so firmly in mind that he could make unconscious use of them in describing similar scenes. What Wordsworth did not use from Gilpin, except perhaps very obliquely, pertains especially to the second half of the first paragraph—its human or social half. In the last six lines of the paragraph, Wordsworth combines into a pleasant picturesque image two distinctly unpleasing aspects of the landscape around Tintern Abbey, noted by Gilpin and by another contemporary guidebook of 1793 which David Erdman has unearthed: 1) the extensive charcoal manufacturing which produced the smoke about whose source Wordsworth could hardly have been "certain" (as well as the heavily commercial aspect of the river at that point due to shipping traffic), and 2) the pervasive and disturbing presence of beggars, gipsies, and vagabonds in and around the abbey. These are represented by Wordsworth as "vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods," where "vagrant dwellers," besides appearing as a conventional picturesque detail (so too the smoke) also partakes of the oxymoronic quality elsewhere in the paragraph (e.g., "pastoral farms"). In what sense can a "dweller" be a "vagrant"? And what does "houseless" add—or take away—from such a construction? His immediately following surmise, "Of or some Hermit . . . .", removes possibly unsettling associations, since a hermit in his cave is a man at home (albeit a very marginal man, socially speaking). This internally corrective supposition parallels "these hedge-rows" swiftly becoming "hardly hedge-rows, little lines / Of sportive wood run wild." Both of these unattractive associations—industrial smoke and social outcasts—might very well account for Wordsworth's insistently placing his poem "a few miles above Tintern Abbey," a placement that he reminds us of three times before we have finished reading four lines of the poem (by the title, by line 4, and by his footnote to 1. 4).6

As Mary Moorman notes, Tintern Abbey "was a dwelling place of beggars and the wretchedly poor" (M. I. 403). These beggars made a very strong impression on Gilpin, nearly half of the pages he devotes to Tintern Abbey are given over to them, in a sort of unwilling digression. His tone in general is fastidious, not to say menacing, as he recommends one viewing station and criticizes another, reminding us that cultivating the fashion of the picturesque was predominantly an upper-middle class.
conservative pastime, and an eminently non-political or even escapist one. He facetiously proposes, for example, taking a hammer to certain corners of the Abbey to give it a more appropriately ruined appearance. Nonetheless the simple honesty of his clergyman’s intelligence quite breaks through his aestheticizing framework when he come to the beggars, even as he tries to account for them with conventional moral assumptions (this is the same Gilpin whose only complaint against the picturesqueness of Grasmere was that it lacked banditti). “The poverty and wretchedness of the inhabitants were remarkable,” he says; they lived in “little huts, raised among the ruin;” they had “no employment, but begging: as if a place, once devoted to indolence, could never again become the seat of industry” [a Protestant slap at Catholic decadence]. “The whole hamlet” of beggars congregated at the gate, some begging outright, others offering “tours” of the ruin’s most interesting spots. Gilpin and his party followed one of these: “one poor woman [who] could scarce crawl, shuffling along her paissied limbs, and meagre, contracted body.” She leads them to what she says was the “monk’s library,” but “it was her own mansion,” and “all indeed she meant to tell us was the story of her own wretchedness, and all she had to shew us, was her own miserable habitation. We did not expect to be interested; but found we were. I never saw so loathsome a dwelling . . . a cavity between two ruined walls; which streamed with unwholesome dew, . . . not the merest utensil, or furniture of any kind. We were rather surprised, that the wretched creature was still alive; than that she had only lost the use of her limbs.”

I submit that such a powerfully ambiguous passage, standing out markedly from its bland surrounding contexts in Gilpin, and reinforced by direct experience, must have had an enormous impact on Wordsworth, as landscapevieweer, as author of *Lyrical Ballads*, and as prospective author of *The Recluse*, with its philosophical “views of Nature, Man, and Society . . . of considerable utility” (LEY, 212, 214). And I think he went to great lengths—greatly artistic lengths—to prevent such powerful associations and experiences from overbearing his poem, by recasting such beggars as “vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,” and further distancing them into the Hermit at home in his cave, where he belongs, sitting by his fire, alone.

It may be objected that the poem is not set at Tintern Abbey, but a “few miles above it.” Insofar as this is poetically true (even if not literally so), I may only be supplying background contexts to the poem. But we must also recall that, in the words of Wordsworth, Tintern Abbey was the focus of all such tours up the Wye, for Gilpin as well as Wordsworth, and that the Wordsworths were at the abbey every single day of their tour, arriving, departing, passing, or visiting. The point of all such tours was to view ruins in landscape, not just landscape alone—a point underscored by the fact that in Gilpin’s guidebook the ratio of illustrations of ruins to those of landscapes without ruins is three-to-one. Furthermore, though the poem’s original title said “written a few miles above Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth later changed this to “composed,” to take cognizance of the fact that he finished it as he descended into Bristol at the end of their “four or five” day tour. And, just as we all refer to the poem as “Tintern Abbey,” so did Wordsworth and his circle, as evidenced most recently in Beth Darlington’s edition of Wordsworth’s love letters to his wife, where he speaks of “the Tintern Abbey, . . . of all my Poems the one [in which I speak of it] will be the most beloved by me.” There have been various attempts over the years to connect or detach the abbey from the poem, but these have been mostly concerned with reinforcing or downplaying the religious associations it would lend. My point stresses, not its religious associations, but the troubling, painful notes its human, social implications would introduce into “the still, sad music of humanity.”

To return, in conclusion of this point, to Gilpin’s description of the crippled beggar woman, think how many of Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* recapitulate Gilpin’s stance when confronted by her: “all indeed she meant to tell us was the story of her own wretchedness.” Compare the Female Villager: “She ceased, and weeping turned away, / As if because her tale was at an end.” Compare the forsaken Indian woman: “Too soon, my friends, you went away; / For I had many things to say.” And think how much of Wordsworth’s own learning “to look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth” derives from following out the implications of Gilpin’s unwilling expression of surprise: “we did not expect to be interested; but found we were.” Wordsworth composed basically two kinds of poems for *Lyrical Ballads*: “views” or “pictures” of suffering humanity (roughly, his “ballads”) and “lyrics” of meditation upon natural beauty (his five sets of “Lines” in the collection, from those left on the yew-tree seat to those composed above Tintern Abbey). The “views” or ballads of suffering are presented quite barren of commentary or explanation, except for a strong, repeated, but unspecified injunction to thought, as in, “Now think, ye farmers all, I pray, / Of Goody Blake and Harry Gill.” The “Lines,” by contrast, are full of meditation and explanation about the source and meaning of human appreciation of natural beauty, but quite vague and unspecified about its social significance, except for the sense of sharp and even contradictory contrast, as in, “Hive I not reason to lament / What man has made of man” “Tintern Abbey” in a way brings these two discrete modes together, when Wordsworth says he has “learned to look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth.” But, though it admits more of the “still, sad music of humanity” into its meditations, it nevertheless radically downplays it, proportionate to “all that we behold / From this green earth: of all the mighty world / Of eye, and ear.”

This proportion, or disproportion, within “Tintern Abbey,” and between the two kinds of poems Wordsworth contributed to *Lyrical Ballads*, is explicable within the context of the work Wordsworth considered his main task in 1798, writing of *The Recluse*, to which the composition and collection of *Lyrical Ballads* was very much incidental. By the time he composed “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth had written (300) lines of *The Recluse*, consisting mainly of the poems now known as “The Ruined Cottage,” “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” the lines on the Discharged Veteran which conclude Book IV of *The Prelude*, and, probably, “A Night-Piece.” More important, however, is the fact that he had, by July, stopped working on *The Recluse*, and the most powerful reason for his stopping, on the basis of internal interpretation, is precisely his failure to integrate the sufferings of Margaret, the old Cumberland Beggar, and the Discharged Veteran with scenes of natural beauty like those described in “A Night-Piece,” or to satisfactorily establish the connection between landscape viewing and social responsibility which is implicit in the frames around “The Ruined Cottage” and the Discharged Veteran—i.e., the connection between their aesthetic, way-wanderin young narrator and the bleak human figures or stories he unexpectedly meets in the road. Wordsworth’s poems in *Lyrical Ballads* are successful, relative to his failure on *The Recluse*, because they present separate, discrete, freestanding images of human suffering on the one
hand, and meditations upon natural beauty on the other. He had, so far, failed to coordinate such images with such meditations in his masterpiece, The Recluse, and he had to work very carefully in his most ambitious poem in Lyric Ballads lest their failure to relate, to integrate, overcome and break down that poem as well. Hence the modulated chords of "the still, sad music of humanity." Of course, the integration of aesthetic experience to social responsibility is still the largest legacy—or piece of unfinished business—which the Romantic movement has bequeathed to the modern world, and our modern institutionalized academical structures (including scholarly journals) for instruction and research into the nature and meaning of artistic experience have as their major justification, in mass democratic societies, the claim to be doing just that.

FROM POLITICAL LONDON TO PICTURESQUE TINTERN

The presence or absence of beggars in poems was not necessarily a political fact in 1798, however much it may seem so today. It was more of a religious fact, having to do with parish relief rates and poorhouses, which, though not without political implications in a society with an established church, was mainly a local problem, not a national one, and certainly not yet a matter of international political ideologies. But mention of The Recluse does touch upon the widest sort of implications for explaining human suffering, since, with its themes of Man, Nature, and Human Life, it was to have been a means of rescuing the young intellectual radicals of Wordsworth's generation from the selfish cynicism into which they were sinking as a consequence of the failures of the French Revolution.‡ Furthermore, while The Recluse was not exactly an ideological poem, it was certainly a philosophical one, and was, in effect, the habitation and the name of the ideal of a philosophically interpretative, and philosophically interpretable, poem which motivated much of the greatest work of both Wordsworth and Coleridge. Although the idea of such a grandly philosophic masterwork undoubtedly came to Wordsworth from Coleridge, Wordsworth had not been innocent of grand plans before he met Coleridge, and the grandest of these was a project whose scope very much resembles that of The Recluse: his detailed discussions between 1792–95 with his best friend before Coleridge, William Mathews, for a liberal journal of politics and literature, to be called The Philanthropist. Some examination of this project, and some speculation on its possible realizations, will lead us back to the second large aspect I have noted in the re-examination of "the still, sad music of humanity" in "Tintern Abbey": the intense but narrow range of human ills by which it is characterized.

Wordsworth's description of the various departments he wanted to include in The Philanthropist give a good idea both of its ambitious scope and of likely reasons for its failing to appear. It would include 1) general political news and comment, 2) essays on morals and manners and "institutions whether social or political," 3) essays for instruction and amusement, particularly biographical sketches of such libertarian heroes as Milton, Sidney, and Turgot, 4) essays on taste and criticism, and works of imagination and fiction, 5) reviews, 6) "some poetry," selected on a decidedly conservative editorial policy (given Wordsworth's later reputation as an innovator)—no original compositions, to avoid the "trash" investing other journals, and 7) reports of parliamentary debates and selected state papers (LEY 125–26).

Given this enormous load of contents, it is not surprising that Wordsworth's and Mathew's plans for The Philanthropist should fail to materialize, nor to hear Wordsworth say, somewhat grandiloquently, in November, 1794, that "The more nearly we approached the time fitted for action, the more strongly was I persuaded that we should decline the field." But did they entirely abandon it? Even in the letter in which he gives it up, Wordsworth says he is so "emboldened" by Mathews' description of the possibility of finding work on an opposition newspaper "that I am determined to throw myself into that mighty gulf [i.e., London literary journalism] which has swallowed up so many, of talents and attainments infinitely superior to my own." By February of 1795, he was back in London in company with Mathews and several other old Cambridge "friends of liberty," congregating around the temporarily famous figure of William Godwin, author of Political Justice. And on March 16, 1795, appeared in the first issue of an actual journal called The Philanthropist; or Philosophical essays on politics, government, morals and manners, published "by a society of gentlemen." Of this actual Philanthropist, Moorman says it was of "extreme radical opinion [and] ran for six months, when Pitt's 'Gugging Acts' must have killed it. It was scrupulous in style and contained nothing which could have issued from the pen of Wordsworth" (M.I, 290n3).

I am very grateful to Moorman for pointing out the existence of the real Philanthropist, but I must indicate that even her description of it is not quite accurate. It ran for eleven, not six, months (through January 25, 1796), was not extremely radical in opinion (but rather liberal Whiggish, manifesting the "Spirit of 1688" which had been revived to greet the French Revolution and to push for further parliamentary reform in England), and contained many things which could have come from the mind or pen of Wordsworth—if we imagine him working in the special circumstance of a group effort by young liberal university gentlemen publishing a popular journal for the enlightenment of the masses, a group in which he would have been a decidedly junior, apprentice member. This actual Philanthropist was, for the most part, a Godwinian, anti-war, opposition paper. Such sentiments as, "All improvements are slow and progressive," are pure Godwinism. It contained some humpious pro-pragurada verse on contemporary abuses ("Bob Shave the King," against Pitt's tax on wig powder), but the imitations of Juvenal's satires which Wordsworth was writing during this same period (which he was later very eager to hush up) would have done just fine in The Philanthropist. For the most part it mixed lengthy extracts from standard Whig texts (e.g., Trenchard's History of Standing Armies in England) with original essays, the best of which are written in clear, simple, argumentative prose, based on traditional principles of British constitutionalism, and opposing the war with France not on revolutionary "French principles" but on the expeditious grounds of the war's damage to English peace and prosperity because it interfered with free trade and the expansion of the empire—and also because it inflicted hardship on the lower classes. Thus the politics of the actual Philanthropist of 1795–96 very much resemble the politics of the proposed Philanthropist of 1792–94. Although both might have been considered "radical" in the hysterical political climate in London after the declarations of war (mass meetings, extremist plots, Treason Trials, paid government informers), it was certainly not treasonous, nor activist, and could be characterized as "a
very safe little journal," as E.P. Thompson has described another Wordsworth
friend's provincial journal, The Economist, a description which would also fit another of his friend's plans for yet another similar journal, Coleridge's The Watchman of 1796. When Wordsworth and Mathews were discussing the political slant of their proposed Philanthropist, Wordsworth said, "I recol from the bare idea of a revolution," and the actual Philanthropist is not a revolutionary journal, but one aimed precisely at avoiding revolution by advocating economy in public administration and "gradual and constant reform" of profligate ministerial abuses.

Almost all that is known of Wordsworth's whereabouts in London in 1795 is that he was a frequent visitor at Godwin's. They first met at a large tea party on February 27 (M.I.; CEY)—a tea party which, in the hypothesis I am developing, has all the marks of an organizational meeting. There was Godwin, the tutelary genius and celebrity to act as a magnet and inspiration for the large group of ambitious young literary gentlemen three or four years out of college: Wordsworth, Mathews, James Losh (the friend from The Economist), and also the friend who received on of the first notices of The Reclusc, and other ex-Cambridge friends of Wordsworth's, Tweddell, Rainc, Thomas Edwards (who would work with STC on Watchman), Higgins, and French (M.I. 263-64). More important, there were, between Godwin and these young men, three men in particular—William Frend, George Dyer, and Thomas Holcroft—who were all experienced publicists in radical-reformist causes. Frend and Dyer were, moreover, former faculty members or family friends of Wordsworth and others in the younger group, and their presence as managers in a joint enterprise would be very flattering and impressive to their proteges. Frend had been removed from his Cambridge tutelage in 1792 for his conversion to Unitarianism, and from his fellowship in 1793 for writing a political and religious tract of liberal, moderate persuasion: Peace and Union Recommended to the Association Bodies of Republicans and Anti-Republicans (1793). Holcroft was a different kettle of fish, inscrutable and erratic, one of the heroes of the day by virtue of his almost accidental inclusion in the famous Treason Trial of 1794, and, coincidentally, author of a condescendingly cool review of Wordsworth's first two published books, An Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches (1793).

In sum, without going into all the many biographical details that variously link these people together, I hypothesize that the mix looks right for a publishing venture by a society of young, ambitious, and unemployed university gentlemen. And the title, Philanthropist, was in 1795 virtually a Godwinian code-word, the inevitable abstract personification, common to 18th century journals (cf. The Spectator), of Godwin's key noun: Benevolence. I propose that London was too small a town in 1795 for such a group of genteel intellectual philosophic reformers as met at Godwin's house in February not to overlap somehow with the "society of gentlemen" who brought out the first issue of The Philanthropist in March; indeed, it is questionable whether any other group could have published so thoroughly Godwinian a journal. I hypothesize not so much Wordsworth's composition of particular passages in the journal, but his place among the legwork errand boys of the enterprise; gathering the extracts from Trenchard's Standing Arrears or Robinson's Political Catechism, writing up drafts—stimulated by meetings at Godwin's—of current topics, and experiencing the unpleasant sensation of having his drafts heavily edited by his former teacher, Frend, his former schoolteacher's friend, Dyer, and his former reviewer, the "extremely candid" Holcroft (as Lamb later described him). Furthermore, I connect Wordsworth's likely reaction to this experience with his letters to Mathews about their proposed Philanthropist, where he expresses the easiest sort of confidence about achieving a simple, lucid prose style with practice (cf. his actual, cranked prose style in the Letter to the Bishop of Lindaf, 1793), and I contrast this with his hesitations about actual newspaper work as he comes to London, preferring solitary composition of occasional pieces of commentary to covering parliamentary debates, because of "being subject to nervous headaches, which invariably attack me when exposed to a heated atmosphere or to loud noises... with such an excess of pain as to deprive me of all recollection" (LEY 138).

The most specific piece of evidence in The Philanthropist where I would argue for the presence of Wordsworth's hand are two essays—one signed "W."—where the topic is the use of genius or talent in the face of widespread human suffering. The implicit argument—or subtext—of these essays is to draw parallels between England's ignoring its talented young men and its insensitivity to the hunger and homelessness of the rural lower classes, as if to assert, 'If only I could achieve greatness, so could all of humanity.' If not exactly a unique topic of argument, it is nonetheless a highly specialized one. Both of these essays concentrate more on poverty's effect on the human mind than on its bodily ills, as do Wordsworth's "views" of human suffering in Lyrical Ballads, and both extend such effects to the entire character of a nation. As "W." says, "familiarity with this kind of wretchedness has also an injurious effect upon the minds of the higher orders," I anticipate that in "Tintern Abbey" we see some of Wordsworth's efforts to modulate such injurious effects.

Not only does this hypothesis allow us to give a more concrete location to Wordsworth's flirtation with Godwinism in the 1790s (otherwise adequately covered by Harper and Léguise8), it also provides an active, real context for his narrow but intense range of expressions for human evils in "Tintern Abbey": "lonely rooms," "the din of towns and cities," "hours of weariness," "the fretful stir / Unprofitable, and the fever of the world," and, especially, "evil tongues. Rash judgments... the snare of selfish men... greetings where no kindness is... and [all] all / The dreary intercourse of daily life." For this is the kind of emotional context my hypothesis suggests; heated discussions, intense arguments, differences of editorial opinion pressures of deadlines and securing copy, petty pressure and rivalry, oversight by slightly senior former teachers whose success and achievements could not be denied, even as (in Wordsworth's case) the suspicion dawned that he was a much better writer but not a better journalist, the need to find some employment, the eagarness to succeed, all underlaid not only by the heady atmosphere of political liberty unleashed by the French Revolution, but more to the point, the exciting danger of working on an opposition newspaper in wartime, which was underlined by the danger of treason trials—though for such young gentlemen the danger was less of imprisonment or transportation to Botany Bay than the almost equally frightening danger of damaging their individual publishing prospects, and messing up the development of their careers.

"Tintern Abbey" is not the only poem in which Wordsworth generalizes about human evil from a narrow base of negative emotions. I have already cited the "Lines" left on the yew-tree seat. The portions of Book X of the 1805 Preludes dealing with his London experiences of this time ("Dragging all passions... Like culprits to the bar"), could as well describe editorial arguments at Godwin's
house as internal arguments with himself. And in the portion of "Home at Grasmere" composed in 1800—as Book First of Part First of The Recluse—he defends his removal to Grasmere as not the escapist fantasy of a self-indulgent aesthete but as a realistically responsible decision, since human beings in Grasmere are just as bad as human beings elsewhere (i.e., in cities). But we note again the specificity of the evils by which he conveys this: "that everywhere, and everywhere, / What thinking is one to do, and to love where one cannot be free and / live aright." (436-38), in contrast to the poem he intends to write, The Recluse, which will keep "clear . . . of all ill advised ambition and of pride" (884-885). The range of powerful generalization that Wordsworth sustains from this narrow base is all the more important when we consider that the "W" of The Philanthropist, confronting much more directly the mental evils of extreme poverty and deprivation, was inevitably if unwillingly driven to veiled threats of violent revolution: "I foresee, / bear the direct application of these sentiments to our own country: if my premises be true, its prospects cannot be very bright. The state of the lower orders, I am persuaded, marks more than any other circumstance, the state of a country; that of the lower orders here is certainly deplorable. Let us hope that their relief is within the reach of ordinary means; for the application of extraordinary means to remedy the evil, the hardest cannot anticipate without dread. Yours [sincerely], / etc., W." To return to "Tintern Abbey," we may say that insofar as it describes a process of learning "to look on nature not as in the hour of thoughtless youth, but bearing oftentimes the still, sad music of humanity," it is a process very different from the implicit disruption of picturesque context which occurs in Gilpin's guidebook, or the one that is explicit in The Philanthropist. Like "still, sad music," this learning is represented as smooth, continuous, and unbroken, not disruptive, violent, uncertain, or threatening. This is why it must be "nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power to chasten and subdue." Harsh, grating music might break the music of the poem, might cause the poem to break down, and open up the gaps in the fabric of thought, or society, such as those that "W" could only anticipate with dread.

Inevitably, this address to the politics of "Tintern Abbey" sounds critical of Wordsworth, and to a certain degree it is. But not to a fundamental degree: I wish him to have been neither a political journalist nor a revolutionary activist, and his shift of enthusiasm away from the French Revolution is a shift that almost all European intellectuals underwent in greater or lesser degree. Nor am I suggesting that "Tintern Abbey" should somehow be "more" political—that Wordsworth should have more forthrightly included some ruins—human or architectural—in his landscape "a few miles above Tintern Abbey." Rather, I am saying that the poem is already political, that its necessary social fulcrum is everywhere present (if narrowly defined), that the beggars are there, as "vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods," and that this necessary political element opens the poem up to further appreciation if we press appropriately on the language Wordsworth himself provides, aided by information outside the poem. Undeniably, Wordsworth engages in some retrenchment in presenting the mediating social terms of his learning process; we may call this his conscious artistic control or his unconscious psychological sublimation, or a little of both. This is part of the cost of his becoming a poet, and the price of "Tintern Abbey's" being the poem it is: moving without fundamental breaks from the beautiful landscape toward seeing into the life of things, with Nature as "the soul of all my moral being." Indeed, it is part of the triumph of the poem to be able to include as full a representation of this process as it does—in comparison, for example, with Wordsworth's tendency elsewhere in the Lyrical Ballads to divide his poems into powerful narratives of human suffering (that only vaguely imply "thought") and equally powerful meditations about the interrelation of Mind and Nature (that only vaguely refer to "what man has made of man"). I am as impressed by Wordsworth's honesty in allowing the socio-political tensions of his poem to show through as by the parallel rhetorical statement of doubt ("If this be but a vain belief") that organize his final affirmations.

CODA: THE DATE OF "TINTERN ABBEY"

The date of "Tintern Abbey" may bear importantly upon its political sublimations. The standard account is that William and Dorothy left Bristol on July 10 and returned on July 13; the poem being inspired, composed, and completed during most of these four days. However, Wordsworth in later life spoke of a tour "four or five" days (Fenswick Note), and the rate of progress which he and Dorothy would have had to maintain to complete the entire tour (from Bristol past Tintern to Goodrich Castle and back) in four days has been calculated as twenty miles per day, even granting two stretches they covered in the sightseeing boats which placed a lively tourist trade between Ross-on-Wye and the Wye's mouth at Chepstow. This may not seem much to such super-human walkers as the Wordsworths now appear to us lazy, through all four days, it works out to three miles per hour if we assume eight full hours of steady walking, making allowance for time stopped for refreshment, time spent inspecting ruins (the main business of such popular excursions as the Wye tour), and the fact that Dorothy, however energetic, would necessarily have been a genteel young lady hiking in long skirts and non-too-comfortable shoes. Moreover, Wordsworth's description of another walking tour, his summer jaunt across Europe in 1790 with Robert Jones (which also began, coincidentally on July 13; cf. Prelude V.355-57), consistently emphasizes their lightning speed and astonishing rate of progress. Yet my calculation of stages of this journey (from Mark Reed's Chronology of the Middle Years) shows them to have been approximately twenty-five miles per day—essentially the same as the Wye's tour's—covered by two young men aged 20, rather than a brother and sister, aged 28 and 26. My wife and I tested these hypotheses by some "feet on" research in August, 1982, and though satisfied that the Wordsworths could have accomplished the circuit in four days, we are certain that five days would have been more comfortable. (The day preceding, most suspicious scrutiny is the Wordsworth's third day, a 27-mile walk down the whole course of the trip, from Goodrich Castle through Monmouth past Tintern to Chepstow—then back up the river to Tintern to spend the night.) Given Wordsworth's literalism, there is not much reason to doubt that he dated the poem of the day he finished writing it. But there is every reason to suppose he looked at it long and hard the next day (it was at the printers with the rest of Lyrical Ballads by July 18), and, with that same literalism, thanked his Muse it was already finished. But it is intriguing to suppose that the tour took one day longer than we think, and that Wordsworth, in light of other contemporary socio-political associations we can find lurking beneath the
cald surface of its "still, sad music," turned its clock back twenty-four hours, to avoid setting off the powerful buried charges that would be exploded if this locodescriptive meditative landscape poem concluding his new volume of poems, were to have been entitled, "Lines / Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 14, 1798." Though "Tintern Abbey" may never come to be regarded as a political poem, it may well be, in light of these interpretive possibilities, one of the most powerfully denotified poems in the language—and, by that token, a uniquely political one.

ADDENDUM—1993

Since this essay first appeared, several others have been published, to such an extent that one might now refer to "The Tintern Abbey Debate." The issue in the debate is more methodological than interpretative, turning on the kinds of evidence that are admissible when we interpret a historical document in terms of its context. The participants in the debate work from various sets of assumptions—historian, deconstructionist, intertextual, and formalist—to ask how permeable a text is, or can be made, to phenomena (including other texts) that we know lie just outside its margins. What is or should be the effect, for example, of our knowledge that Wordsworth carried William Gilpin's Tour of the Wye Valley with him in 1798? This is a relatively uncontroversial example. The debate has tended to focus more heatedly on socioeconomic and political factors in the Wye Valley and in Wordsworth's career that are not mentioned in "Tintern Abbey," particularly the vagrants living in the ruins and the local iron industry. The most controversial position has been staked out by Marjorie Levinson, "Insight and Oversight: Reading 'Tintern Abbey'," in her Wordsworths Great Period Poems, pp. 4-57. Levinson in effect argues for the poem's maximum permeability, not only to contemporary facts about the Wye Valley but also to the history of its institutions: the communitarian ideal of the Cistercian monastery, for example, relative to Wordsworth's personalistic focus. Most subsequent entries in the debate have tried to qualify Levinson's claims to a greater or lesser degree. But her position received an advanced endorsement (so to speak) from its summarized appearance in Jerome McGann's The Romantic Ideology, pp. 84-88, as an example of the role historicist scholarship can play in exposing the assumptions of a past artistic ideology, especially how that ideology is reproduced in successive generations of critics (McGann would say, "naive") interpretation. Other essays in the debate include, to date: M. H. Abrams, "On Political Readings of Lyrical Ballads" (1990); Robert Brinkley, "Vagrant and Hermit: Milton and the Politics of 'Tintern Abbey'" (1985) and "Our Cheerful Faith: On Wordsworth, Politics, and Milton" (1987); David Bromwich, "The French Revolution and 'Tintern Abbey'" (1991); Mark Edmundson, "The Marquise of Absence: Reading and Misreading in Wordsworthian Criticism" (1992). Taken together, these essays provide an excellent introduction to current theoretical issues in Wordsworthian and Romantic studies, focused around the instance of a well-known text. The present essay, while anticipating Levinson's approach, does not go as far as she does in holding Wordsworth's poem responsible for what it excludes, ignores, or overlooks. But I do assume the interpretive "interest" (to use an ambiguous Wordsworthian word) of much of the same data she cites.

NOTES

1. Carl Wooldridge has recently traced in "Tintern Abbey" a movement from Picturesque to Sublime, stressing its "sublimity of humble human feelings," and comparing its "still, sad music" to the "still, small voice" of God in Old Testament prophecy ("The New Sublimity in 'Tintern Abbey,'" in The Evidence of the Imagination, ed. Keiman, Jaye, & Bennett [1978], pp. 86-100). My conclusions are similar, though in many instances our interpretations of textual details are so different we may be said to have arrived at agreement by opposite routes.

5. In his general valuation of the interpenetration of cultivated and uncultivated land, Wordsworth follows Gilpin: the artist wishes that these [proprietary] limits must be as much concealed as possible . . . that the lands they circumscribe may, approach as near as may be, to nature—that is, that they may be pasturage" (p. 30). Specifically, Wordsworth's "hedge-rows . . . little lines of sportive wood" follow closely Gilpin's discussion of the border shrubs planted by a Mr. Morris at Perdiswell (below Tintern, incidentally): though causing "the most pleasing riot of imagination," such "pulpit" improvements are but "splendid patches, which injure the grandeur, and simplicity of the whole," and their "formal introduction" should be avoided in favor of "wild underwood" (pp. 40-42).
8. "With a sweet internal murmur" (1.4); Wordsworth's note ends with the same phrase as his title: "The river is not affected by tides a few miles above Tintern." There is considerable evidence available to caution us against taking too literally any of Wordsworth's statements in, or about, the poem (see Notes 11 and 21). The Wye ceases to be appreciably affected by tides very close to Tintern, perhaps less than a mile above it; tourist officials cite Tintern as the limit, for convenience.
9. I am grateful to Pamela Woof for this information, obtained during an expert tour of "The Discovery of Lakes," an exhibition of picturesque landscape paintings mounted in the Wordsworth Museum, Grasmere.
11. See Note 8. Geoffrey Little argues that the Wye landscape described in the poem bears more similarity to the areas Wordsworth visited on his first tour in 1793, much further up the valley ("Tintern Abbey" and Llywelyn Farm," TWB, 8 [1977], 80-82).
12. If the tour took four days (see Note 21), they arrived at Tintern on the first day, departed from it on the second, passed by it on the third (returning to spend the night there), and departed from it on the fourth.
15. For an interpretive overview of Wordsworth's work on The Recluse, see my "Wordsworth and The Recluse: The University of Imagination," PMLA, 97 (1982), 60-82.
16. "I wish you would write a poem . . . addressed to those who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind. . . . It would do great good, and might form part of The Recluse"
The Economy of Lyric: The Ruined Cottage

The following selection abstracted from Alan Liu's book, _Wordsworth: The Sense of History_ (1989), displays the interaction of new-historicist thinking with interest in the early versions of Wordsworth's poems. If displacement is taken as a dominating feature of Wordsworth's poetry, a conscientious critic must reconstruct specifically (not abstractly) what does not appear in the poem. And that will carry the critic, as it carries Liu, into detailed historical analyses not merely of the poet's psyche but also of the macropolitical and microeconomic life of his society. Such analyses require the critic to consult whatever version of the text is closest to the historical moment in which the poem took shape rather than a later, "final" form.

Our brief and heavily edited excerpt from Liu's very long and heavily annotated book does no justice to his broadest political discussions, which represent Wordsworth's anxieties at his psychic complicity in the tragic violence of the French Revolution and its principal "totitarian" product, Napoleon. But Liu's treatment of "The Ruined Cottage" not as "a poem of humanity" but as a "capitalization upon inhumanity" illustrates his basic method. This brings together the biographical details of the poet's life at the time of composition with a definition of the social-political-economic forces imposing upon him then. With "The Ruined Cottage" Liu identifies the poet's anxieties about managing the legacy left him by Raisley Calvert as concentrating his awareness of the deleterious effects of industrialization, whose effects on weavers like Robert, whose desertion of his wife is the crux of the tale, is of decisive importance to the poem's shape and tone. Thus for Liu the tragedy of the poem is its demonstration that labor, which had once signified the value of household economy, is being transformed into wage-value, becoming a dehumanizing activity.

Persuasive as Liu's learned presentation is, we must note that its very vigor has recently provoked an impressive counterargument. The charge is that Liu, along with other new historicists such as Levinson and McGann, having lost sight of Wordsworth's primary concern with natural phenomena, distort the fundamental character of the poet's sociopolitical commitments. This case is eloquently presented in Jonathan Bate's