

Discussions of Blake's context—of the intellectual and spiritual milieu from which he sprang—must distinguish carefully between the impact of giants like Raphael and Michelangelo and the stream of suggestions that flowed into his fertile mind from innumerable sources, some sympathetic to him, some repugnant. Milton, Dürer, and a very few others contributed words, phrases, images, visual configuration, but, most of all, vision and inspiration, challenge and palpable and inescapable presences. No British artist provides Blake with what he received from these intellectual heroes. But it would be wrong to say that the gifts from Barry, Mortimer, Banks, Fuseli, Flaxman, Stothard, and Romney were inconsiderable. These gifts consisted of more than single motifs or suggestions, which could have been seized upon from any source and made to serve any use pertinent to Blake's purpose. Fuseli provided a Mannerist idiom of striking originality; Banks, a neoclassical energy that approached the intensity of motion we find in Blake at his best; Romney, at least two powerful visual symbols that grew out of Blake's troubled age and sank roots deep in his psyche: (1) the oppressor, the Urizenic anti-man who partakes in the power of the terrible sublime, and (2) the delicate, Thel-like virgin standing on the threshold of experience, now crossing it to prophetic achievement, now withdrawing from it to regressive arrest. From what has been said in this paper one might conclude that Fuseli and the Romney of the hidden drawings were Blake's closest spiritual *confrères*. But it is still too early in the study of Blake and English art to propose a hierarchy of influences or indeed any definitive or final judgment. The most appropriate note to sound in conclusion is a call for further study of Blake in relation to each of his contemporaries and predecessors and to hope for a Panofsky *redivivus* to lead us into the gardens of Romantic iconography.

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*Wordsworth's "Picture
of the Mind"*

Whereas a picture on canvas is usually an all-in-all, an analysable totality in itself, the picture that a poet "paints" in a poem is commonly part of a greater poetic whole. The rest of the poem affects, sometimes determines, what we see in and how we think about the poetic word-picture. Studying poetic pictorialism, then, involves considering pictorial functions: how and why the poet employs pictorial elements in his larger poetic contexts. Fundamental questions should be asked, not simply about qualities of the poet's pictorial imagination, but about the poet's interest in and manipulation of pictures as such. The importance of asking this latter sort of question emerges when one investigates the pictorial impulse in William Wordsworth's poetry, a subject that has attracted increasing attention in recent years.¹

Generally critics can find what they look for in Wordsworth's pictorialism. Those devoted to notions about unity and reconciliation of opposites in Romanticism can contemplate passages like the famous introduction to *Tintern Abbey*:

Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of a more deep seclusion; *and connect*
*The landscape with the quiet of the sky.*²

1. See, for example, Alec King, *Wordsworth and the Artist's Vision* (London, 1966); Russell Noyes, *Wordsworth and the Art of Landscape* (Bloomington, 1968); R. F. Storch, "Wordsworth and Constable," *SIR* 5 (1966): 121-38; Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Landscape Vision* (Madison, 1975).

2. Lines 4-8; italics mine. I have used the 5-volume Ernest de Selincourt and Helen

Such scenes of connection are easily found in Wordsworth. But critics who approach him looking for romantic isolation more than unity can also find what they seek. There is, for example, Wordsworth's solitary leech-gatherer: "In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace / About the weary moors continually, / Wandering about alone and silently."³ While Wordsworth is fond of word-pictures which portray interfusings, he is equally fond of bringing into focus starkly isolated objects:

Nor should I have made mention of this Dell
But for one object which you might pass by,
Might see and notice not. Beside the brook
Appears a stragglng heap of unhewn stones!

[*Michael*, ll. 14–17]

Our ability to find what we will, when what we will may be quite contrary, should give us pause. What strikes one most about Wordsworth's pictorialism is, first, simply its heterogeneity and, second, the uncommon fascination with visual set-pieces as such.

Even the casual reader is aware of passages in which Wordsworth writes of inability to "paint" some picture that he would convey to his reader. In *Tintern Abbey*, for example, "For nature then / . . . To me was all in all.—I cannot paint / What then I was" (ll. 72–76). Wordsworth is not merely bowing toward the old notion that the poet gives us "speaking pictures." In fact, he is leaning rather in the opposite direction. In pointing up the poet's struggle, even his inability, to successfully paint his pictures upon poetic canvas, he posits a primacy of images in the poet's mind, images which cannot in fact readily be made to speak. In the mind, the image stands independent of the word. This is a recurring notion in Wordsworth's poetry. One thinks of the lines which introduce the "prospectus" to *The Recluse*: "On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life, / Musing in solitude, I oft perceive / Fair trains of imagery before me rise." When the Wordsworthian recluse sits down to reflect in his solitude, what first rises up before him is not the word. Instead, he is haunted by "fair trains of imagery." He sees, first of all, pictures of things. So does the poet of *The Waggoner*:

Darbishire edition of Wordsworth's *Poetical Works* (Oxford, 1940–49; vol. 2 reissued by Helen Darbishire in 1952). For *Prelude* quotations, I have used the de Selincourt edition, revised by Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1959); references are to the 1850 version of that poem.

3. *Resolution and Independence*, ll. 129–31.

What shifting pictures—clad in gleams
Of colour bright as feverish dreams!
Earth, spangled sky, and lake serene,
Involved and restless all—a scene
Pregnant with mutual exaltation,
Rich change, and multiplied creation!
This sight to me the Muse imparts.

[Canto 3, ll. 36–42]

This is interesting, but still more so is the fact that the poet is by no means distinctive in his experience of such pictorial hauntings. The dramatic characters of his poems are similarly affected. Some of these characters, to be sure, are in part types of Wordsworth himself and hence are perhaps mute poets. Such, for example, is the Wanderer in *The Excursion*, of whose intellectual development Wordsworth writes:

he thence attained
An active power to fasten images
Upon his brain; and on their pictured lines
Intensely brooded, even till they acquired
The liveliness of dreams.

[book 1, ll. 144–48]

So too perhaps is the Solitary of the same poem, to whom the Wanderer says, "You dwell alone; / You walk, you live, you speculate alone; / Yet doth remembrance, like a sovereign prince, / For you a stately gallery maintain / Of gay or tragic pictures" (book 4, ll. 558–62). But other of Wordsworth's dramatic characters, who are by no means obviously poetic, also create and maintain picture galleries in their minds. Thus, old Adam in *The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale*: "'Mid coaches and chariots, a waggon of straw, / Like a magnet, the heart of old Adam can draw; / With a thousand soft pictures his memory will teem, / And his hearing is touched with the sounds of a dream" (ll. 77–80).

That the old farmer in this last quotation should be named Adam is, as often with Wordsworth's namings, significant. We are invited to consider this Adam, drifting away from the coach-and-chariot world of his present, "real" sensory experience into the picture-world of his own mind, as the father of us all. In our experience, his is reproduced: we are all Adams, shapers of pictures which stock the mind; and we tend to drift inward, wandering through our mental gallery. One recalls Wordsworth

addressing his sister Dorothy near the conclusion of *Tintern Abbey*: "and, in after years, / When these wild ecstasies shall be matured / Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind / Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms . . ." (ll. 137–40). The difference between the ordinary man and the poet in this matter is not a profound one. The poet, we remember from the preface, is a *man* speaking to men. Those "fair trains of imagery" Wordsworth mentions in his "prospectus" rise up in all of us. The poet is simply that man among us who, instead of "Husbanding that which they possess within" and so going "to the grave, unthought of" (*Excursion* 1, ll. 90–91), seeks to draw what is within out. The poet struggles to make the mind's pictures speak.

To Wordsworth, man is a picture-shaping animal. Hence Wordsworth's tendency in his many passages descriptive of encounter⁴ to emphasize form or shape more than linguistic impression. Consider the encounter with a blind beggar in book 7 of *The Prelude*, for example: the beggar stands "propped against a wall, upon his chest / Wearing a written paper, to explain / His story, whence he came, and who he was"; and Wordsworth's mind is "Caught by that spectacle." But what arrests the mind has nothing to do with what is written on the beggar's paper; rather, it is "on the shape of that unmoving man, / His steadfast face and sightless eyes" that "I gazed, / As if admonished from another world" (ll. 639–49; italics mine). Or again, the encounter with the leech-gatherer in *Resolution and Independence*: "While he was talking thus the lonely place, / The old Man's shape, and speech—all troubled me." What first impresses the mind is shape; and second, with a comma and almost as an afterthought, speech. But then in the next two lines, and even as the leech-gatherer continues talking, speech dwindles into insignificance as the mind shapes its image: "In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace / About the weary moors continually" (ll. 127–30).

The mind takes its cue from substantial hints in the world of outer sensory experience; but then, shaping these on its own terms, it begins withdrawing (as does old Adam) into the interior world of self-created pictures. So Margaret in book 1 of *The Excursion*, withdraws into dreams of her husband's return: "On this old bench / For hours she sate; and evermore her eye / Was busy in the distance, shaping things / That made her heart beat quick" (ll. 879–82). So too Wordsworth, as a child, with-

4. For the encounter pattern in Wordsworth, see Frederick Garber, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Encounter* (Urbana, 1971).

drew into his own picture of far-off London: "Would that I could now / Recall what then I pictured to myself, / Of mitred Prelates, Lords in ermine clad . . . Dreams . . ." (*Prelude* 7, ll. 106–11). The mind composes for itself its own pictures, shaping "dreams."

The metaphysics underlying such picturing emerges, I think, in that famous image of "the Child among his new-born blisses" in the *Immortality Ode*:

See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art.

[ll. 90–92]

The Child ("father of the Man," Wordsworth reminds us in the poem's epigraph) is, first of all, a *shaper* of things. He relates to the things of the outer world by shaping them into little plans or charts which correspond to "his dream of human life." What Wordsworth is pointing to here, of course, is simply the fact that small children play; but he is pressing us to recognize that this fact is not really so simple. Instead of conforming themselves to the earthly nature of things, children play games with that nature. They ignore the "laws" of nature and create their own rules of the game. A child, as we say, "makes things up"; and Wordsworth would have us attend to the implications of our language: this child is a "maker," and he raises things "up." The child's play, that is, is like the play of God: he shapes what for him is brute matter into the stuff of his dream. Hence the famous "trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home" (ll. 64–65). And hence Wordsworth's assertion that the child's "newly-learned art" is attended by "light upon him from his father's eyes!" Art or child's-play manifests the activity of the fallen god, bringing the Father's light into darkness.

With time, of course, this light fades—first, to the "gleam," and then, finally, into embers. Yet there are still live coals in these embers, as the *Immortality Ode* goes on to argue: "O joy! that in our embers / Is something that doth live" (ll. 129–30). We are able to remember the earlier gleam, and, through that, the light which once was. Which brings us back to those mental galleries of pictures through which Dorothy and Wordsworth's *Solitary* are urged to walk. Wordsworth's "gleam" is associated most obviously with the process of what we ordinarily think of as artistic creation. But that gleam is equally and still more interestingly

associated simply with the primal impulse, which attends mental activity in general, to shape pictures from life's experiences. There is, for example, Wordsworth's tribute to his wife Mary: "She was a *Phantom* of delight / When first she *gleamed* upon my sight; / . . . A dancing *Shape*, an *Image* gay, / To haunt, to startle, and way-lay" ("She Was a Phantom," ll. 1-10; italics mine). Whether through that conscious activity we call art or simply through that unconscious picture-making which characterizes the art of human perception, the growing adult continues, though less obviously, to play a child's game with the world around him.

But, ultimately, that child's game is God's game. Man's mental picture-making is a manifestation of his otherwise forgotten divinity ("Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting"). This is of primary importance to Wordsworth, and it loads the pictures which appear in his poetry with a weight of significance and implication which, to the casual reader, may not be immediately obvious.

Let us go back to those introductory lines from *Tintern Abbey* and consider the passage in full and with attention to poetic context.

—Once again

Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of a more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

[ll. 4-22; italics mine]

The lines I have italicized indicate the dramatic quality of the passage.

We have here not simply description of a scene, but rather a mind shaping a picture of the scene. And there is tension in the activity. The mind repeatedly insists that it is here *again*, in "repose" at this *same* place, beholding this *same* scene it beheld once before. But Wordsworth makes us aware that the things being seen exist in a dimension of time and change: "these orchard-tufts" change and grow in tune with changing "seasons," fruits ripening and falling, new unripe fruits appearing. And he makes us aware that the mind is having some trouble capturing this growing, changing nature in permanent mental categories: the mind makes a wrong move and its picture slips for a moment ("Once again I see / These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows"); but it then recovers ("little lines / Of sportive wood run wild"). Both a literal and a symbolic touch here: what were once hedge-rows are no longer quite that; and the mind's attempt to render sportive wildness into "rows" fails. Hence "uncertain notice," the drama of indecision, at the passage's climax: its suggestion either of human presence struggling to dwell where there is no dwelling or of some hermit, "alone" and cave-enclosed, linked not to the outer world but only to "his" fire. The passage invites us to experience the mind forming a picture to which the sportive wildness of things will not quite conform.

Hence the richness of the word *forms* in the passage that follows:

These beautiful forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet.

[ll. 11-17]

Five years earlier, the mind had formed a picture, carried forms away with it; and now, returning, it has sought to fit those forms to the scene again. The question of the poem becomes whether it can do so; or, more precisely, the question becomes whether it can persuade itself to cling to its picture of nature:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again.

[ll. 58-61]

The "gleams of half-extinguished thought" are most important. Within the poem, this phrase of course looks back to the hermit's "fire" and thus reminds us that the picture of a calm, beauteous nature wherein man can find "repose" under the "dark" sycamore is a picture not of nature itself but "of the mind." But these "gleams" also transcend the poem, ushering our reader's mind into the mythology which weaves its thread through other Wordsworth poems. We find ourselves halfway down that road between the Child, playing games upon the world's matter with "light upon him from his father's eyes," and the aging Adult, stirring only the "embers" of the celestial light. The question of *Tintern Abbey* is thus, more profoundly, whether the mind will revive its own spark of divine activity. And the answer in *Tintern Abbey* is of course yes. The mind's picture does revive: what the mind "would" believe ("other gifts / Have followed; for such loss, I would believe, / Abundant recompense" [ll. 86–88]) becomes what it *does* believe, as the poem presses toward expression of "cheerful faith" (l. 113), and that significantly *mental* mansion "for all lovely forms" (ll. 139–40; italics mine) which I discussed above.

The weight of significance attendant upon the "picture of the mind" in *Tintern Abbey* is generally present in Wordsworth's pictorial passages. Without too much distortion, we can isolate two main, complementary aspects of this significance. First, it is sometimes most important that a Wordsworth picture is *of the mind*. The characteristics of the picture suggest something about the nature of the mind. This in turn points back to the nature of that divinity of which the mind retains a spark. Thus, for example, those images of fusion in Wordsworth ("connect / The landscape with the quiet of the sky") tell us not about the world of nature, but rather about how the mind *would* see that world of nature; and this leads us toward the world of spirit, how a God sees. What in some cases may be most significant, however, is not the particular imagery that goes into the picture but rather the nature of the distinction between the picture *qua* picture and the qualities of the sensory, experiential world from which the picture takes its cue.

In Wordsworth's *Elegiac Stanzas* what is fundamentally important is not the particular character of the picture Beaumont has painted of Peele Castle (hemmed in by "This sea in anger, and that dismal shore"), nor is it the character of the picture Wordsworth affirms that he himself would have painted in his unknowing youth ("A Picture had it been of lasting ease, / Elysian quiet, without toil or strife"). The significance is

instead that both these pictures are static extremes, abstractions from the shifting nature of the world they pretend to portray. Here, as in *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth makes us recall that the "real" world is one of changing seasons: "How perfect was the calm! it *seemed* no sleep; / No mood, which season takes away, or brings" (ll. 9–10; italics mine). Beyond the mind's *seemed*, we are so reminded, lies the shifting world of calm *and* storm. But the poem now draws us away from this world into the realm of the mind's picturings:

Ah! if mine had been the Painter's hand,
To express what then I saw; and *add the gleam,*
The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's *dream.*

[ll. 13–16; italics mine]

Now we find ourselves involved in a question about which is the truer *picture* of the world, Wordsworth's youthful picture of endless calm or Beaumont's picture of endless strife. The fact, of course, is that both pictures are unnatural; but Wordsworth's dramatic point is that the mind does not think about this. The mind's "real" world is one of permanencies; and the mind's only question, therefore, is which vision of permanence is the more "wise and well" (l. 45). This imposition of permanence in both pictures, to which the mind adapts itself so cheerfully, is that "gleam" introduced earlier. It is the "light that never was, on sea or land." This "light" was never "on sea or land"—but then where was it? It comes from the mind—but, if not to be found anywhere in the world, then from what did the mind derive such an unnatural notion? Wordsworth is teasing us back toward clouds of glory, those fragmentary memories of eternity that emerge in human thought as attraction to permanence.

The characteristics of a given picture, then, or sometimes simply the properties of picture *qua* picture, open windows upon the nature of the mind. Sometimes, however, it is the pictorial activity more than the picture itself that receives special emphasis. Thus in the final stanza of *The Two April Mornings*:

Matthew is in his grave, yet now,
Methinks, I see him stand,
As at that moment, with a bough
Of wilding in his hand.

Of primary importance here is the young speaker's *act* of picturing. The poem sets up a drama of choice. We humans live in a natural world characterized by cyclic revolutions. Particular identities like Matthew and his daughter Emma live and die, but their generic forms reappear. Matthew, turning from his daughter's grave, confronts, "Beside the churchyard yew, / A blooming Girl, whose hair was wet / With points of morning dew" (ll. 42–44). While in one sense she is not Emma, in another sense she is. The problem is whether to accept this recompense—and Matthew rejects it. At the poem's conclusion, we find the young speaker making the same choice: he turns back in his mind to what has disappeared, reviving his picture of Matthew. By setting this pictorial action in a context of "April Mornings," Wordsworth colors it with a pun yielding religious significance. We are reminded that nature's cycles are, in their own natural kind, resurrections: all things are reborn in the return of April morning; and they rise up glistening, offering to replace our tears with "morning dew." But the speaker, like Matthew before him, turns from this consolation. He gives himself, instead, to an unnatural resurrection.⁵ For him, morning becomes mourning (and morning dew, mourning *due*); and he raises Matthew from his grave through the pictorial impulse of his own mind. It is the act of picturing which, in this poem, Wordsworth would have us find awesome. The human mind is reacting against nature. It plays God. In picturing, the mind reveals it is not of this world.

Wordsworth's pictures, then, mean beyond themselves. One only begins to learn what they mean by pressing deep, seeking out those principles of pictorial significance which lie behind the pictures in the poet's work. We must ask not only what, but also why. Unless we ask this latter question, we may not know what we are looking at.

5. See Karl Kroeber, *The Artifice of Reality* (Madison, 1964): For Wordsworth, he argues, "remembering is a creative, not a mechanical process, a human form of resurrection" (p. xix).

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*What Coleridge Thought
of Pictures*

Henry Nelson Coleridge, nephew and son-in-law of the poet, praised his uncle as "an unerring judge of the merits of any serious effort in the fine arts."¹ The present brief exploration will touch on some of the ways Coleridge came to judge pictures on a wall before him.

The graphic arts came into full existence for Coleridge, as for Wordsworth,² from acquaintance with Sir George Beaumont in 1803. After a week with the Beaumonts at Dunmow, Essex, in February 1804, he wrote to John Rickman:

. . . I have learnt as much fr[om] Sir George respecting Pictures & Painting and Painte[rs as] I ever learnt on any subject from any man in the same Space of Time. A man may employ time far worse than in learning how to look at a picture judiciously. [CL, 2:1063]

Pompous though his second sentence might seem, it may have sounded eminently debatable to the statistical assistant to Parliament who received it; more to the point, it is replete with self-discovery. The "divine" paintings owned by Sir George made Coleridge "almost an apostate to Music" (1066). Although Beaumont's Coleorton Hall was not yet completed, many of the famous paintings later to enter the National Gallery hung at Dunmow or in the Beaumont's house in Grosvenor Square, where Coleridge stayed before leaving for Malta in March. From the Beaumont collection, we can identify among Coleridge's favorites a large, detail-packed Rubens, *Autumn*, *Chateau de Steen*—which made

1. 77, 2:219 n. See the list of abbreviations at the end of this chapter.

2. Martha Hale Shackford, *Wordsworth's Interest in Painters and Painting* (Wellesley, 1945), pp. 10–18.