



*The Poems of
William Wordsworth*

COLLECTED READING TEXTS
FROM
THE CORNELL WORDSWORTH

EDITED BY JARED CURTIS

IN THREE VOLUMES

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VOLUME III

EDITED BY JARED CURTIS

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Preface

The Cornell Wordsworth series, under the general editorship of Stephen Parrish, began appearing in 1975. Through controversy and acclaim, the editions have steadily appeared over three decades, coming to completion in 2007 with the publication of the twenty-first volume—an edition of *The Excursion*—and a supplementary volume of indexes and guides for the series. The purpose of this edition is to collect all of the earliest complete reading texts garnered from the twenty-one volumes in the series.

The earliest records of Wordsworth’s poetic composition date from 1785, when he was fifteen years old, and the latest date from 1847, when he was seventy-seven. In the interim he composed hundreds of poems, thousands of verses, not all of which reached—or survived in—a “completed” state. All of those that did are included here. If William Butler Yeats was remarkable for reinventing his poetic self, Wordsworth might be said to have constantly “revisited” his. Three of his lyrics bear the revealing sequential titles, “Yarrow Unvisited” (1803), “Yarrow Visited” (1814), and “Yarrow Revisited” (1831). In the first, the poet-traveler prefers his imagined Yarrow—the Yarrow of Scots balladeers Nicol Burne, John Logan, and William Hamilton—to the physical one. In the second, the “genuine” Yarrow engenders an image that

Will dwell with me—to heighten joy,
And cheer my mind in sorrow.

And the third pays tribute to his friend and fellow poet, Walter Scott, with whom he toured the Yarrow valley before the ailing Scott departed for Italy: in this time of “change and changing,” prays that the valley maintain its power to restore “brightness” to “the soul’s deep valley.” Significant threads of Wordsworth’s development as a poet are embodied in these three elegiac tributes. They are all written in a ballad stanza that Wordsworth borrowed and adapted from the older Scots poets. A glance through the pages of this volume will illustrate the varied verse forms the poet adopted and transformed over his long career. Obvious favorites were his own meditative style of blank verse and the sonnet in its various guises. But he employed a variety of meters, stanzaic patterns, and rhyme schemes in producing poems ranging from ballads to autobiography, satirical squibs to verse romance, from epitaphs to royal tributes. The methods, too, of the three “Yarrows” are instructive. The primacy of the imagination is sug-

gested in the poet's reluctance to visit the famed valley; upon visiting the place, the poet's response is to preserve it in memory as a "spot of time" to bind his days, "each to each" as a remedy for future sorrow; and on revisiting the valley he acknowledges that sorrow and attempts to recharge the healing power of memory.

Another example of "revisiting" can be found in the restless energy that Wordsworth displayed over his entire writing life in composing sonnets, both singly, as apparently instant responses to present scene, public event, or personal history, and in series, building both narrative and argument through this highly adaptive form. And, occupying the center of this metaphor are the several attempts to write the story of his inner life as a poet, here represented in the three versions of *The Prelude*.

Annotation is confined largely to reproducing the notes Wordsworth published with his poems. Editorial commentary has been kept to a minimum, given the rich resource in each of the Cornell Wordsworth volumes, leaving room instead for the poetry. For information about the source of the text, its compositional history, its textual and interpretive annotation, and its social and historical context, the reader is referred to the appropriate volumes in the series, cited in the editor's notes at the end of each volume.

The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar (1798, 1803–1804)¹

The Ruined Cottage. A Poem—

Give me a spark of nature's fire,
Tis the best learning I desire.

• • • • •

My Muse though homely in attire
May touch the heart.

Burns.—

PART 1ST.—

Twas Summer; and the sun was mounted high.
Along the south the uplands feebly glared
Through a pale steam, and all the northern downs
In clearer air ascending shewed their brown
And [] surfaces distinct with shades 5
Of deep embattled clouds that lay in spots
Determined and unmoved, with steady beams
Of clear and pleasant sunshine interposed;
Pleasant to him who on the soft cool grass
Extends his careless limbs beside the root 10
Of some huge oak whose aged branches make
A twilight of their own, a dewy shade
Where the wren warbles, while the dreaming man,
Half conscious of that soothing melody,
With sidelong eye looks out upon the scene, 15
By those impending branches made []
More soft and distant. Other lot was mine.
Across a bare wide Common I had toiled
With languid feet which by the slippery ground
Were baffled still; and when I sought repose 20
On the brown earth my limbs from very heat

¹ For the sources of the reading texts and the editor's commentary see "*The Ruined Cottage*" and "*The Pedlar*," ed. James A. Butler (1979).

Could find no rest nor my weak arm disperse
 The insect host which gathered round my face
 And joined their murmurs to the tedious noise
 Of seeds of bursting gorse which crackled round. 25
 I rose and turned towards a group of trees
 Which midway in the level stood alone,
 And thither come at length, beneath a shade
 Of clustering elms that sprang from the same root
 I found a ruined Cottage, four clay walls 30
 That stared upon each other.—'Twas a spot!
 The wandering gypsey in a stormy night
 Would pass it with his moveables to house
 On the open plain beneath the imperfect arch
 Of a cold lime-kiln. As I looked around 35
 Beside the door I saw an aged Man
 Stretched on a bench whose edge with short bright moss
 Was green and studded o'er with fungus flowers;
 An iron-pointed staff lay at his side.
 Him had I seen the day before—alone 40
 And in the middle of the public way
 Standing to rest himself. His eyes were turned
 Towards the setting sun, while with that staff
 Behind him fixed he propped a long white pack
 Which crossed his shoulders: wares for maids who live 45
 In lonely villages or straggling huts.
 I knew him—he was born of lowly race
 On Cumbrian hills, and I have seen the tear
 Stand in his luminous eye when he described
 The house in which his early days were passed 50
 And found I was no stranger to the spot.
 I loved to hear him talk of former days
 And tell how when a child ere yet of age
 To be a shepherd he had learned to read
 His bible in a school that stood alone, 55
 Sole building on a mountain's dreary edge,
 Far from the sight of city spire, or sound

Of Minster clock. He from his native hills
 Had wandered far: much had he seen of men,
 Their manners, their enjoyments and pursuits, 60
 Their passions and their feelings, chiefly those
 Essential and eternal in the heart,
 Which 'mid the simpler forms of rural life
 Exist more simple in their elements
 And speak a plainer language. He possessed 65
 No vulgar mind though he had passed his life
 In this poor occupation, first assumed
 From impulses of curious thought, and now
 Continued many a year, and now pursued
 From habit and necessity. His eye 70
 Flashing poetic fire, he would repeat
 The songs of Burns, and as we trudged along
 Together did we make the hollow grove
 Ring with our transports. Though he was untaught,
 In the dead lore of schools undisciplined, 75
 Why should he grieve? He was a chosen son:
 To him was given an ear which deeply felt
 The voice of Nature in the obscure wind,
 The sounding mountain and the running stream.
 To every natural form, rock, fruit, and flower, 80
 Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
 He gave a moral life ; he saw them feel
 Or linked them to some feeling. In all shapes
 He found a secret and mysterious soul,
 A fragrance and a spirit of strange meaning. 85
 Though poor in outward shew, he was most rich;
 He had a world about him—'twas his own,
 He made it—for it only lived to him
 And to the God who looked into his mind.
 Such sympathies would often bear him far 90
 In outward gesture, and in visible look,
 Beyond the common seeming of mankind.
 Some called it madness—such it might have been,

But that he had an eye which evermore
 Looked deep into the shades of difference 95
 As they lie hid in all exterior forms,
 Which from a stone, a tree, a withered leaf,
 To the broad ocean and the azure heavens
 Spangled with kindred multitudes of stars,
 Could find no surface where its power might sleep, 100
 Which spake perpetual logic to his soul,
 And by an unrelenting agency
 Did bind his feelings even as in a chain.
 So was he framed, though humble and obscure
 Had been his lot. Now on the Bench he lay 105
 Stretched at his length, and with that weary load
 Pillowed his head—I guess he had no thought
 Of his way-wandering life. His eyes were shut;
 The shadows of the breezy elms above
 Dappled his face. With thirsty heat oppressed 110
 At length I hailed him, glad to see his hat
 Bedewed with water-drops, as if the brim
 Had newly scooped a running stream. He rose
 And, pointing to a sun-flower, bade me climb
 The [] wall where that same gaudy flower 115
 Looked out upon the road. It was a plot
 Of garden-ground, now wild, its matted weeds
 Marked with the steps of those whom as they pass[’d],
 The gooseberry trees that shot in long [],
 Or currants shewing on a leafless stem 120
 Their scanty strings, had tempted to o’erleap
 The broken wall. Within that cheerless spot,
 Where two tall hedgerows of thick willow boughs
 Joined in a damp cold nook, I found a well
 Half choaked []. 125
 I slaked my thirst and to the shady bench
 Returned, and while I stood unbonneted
 To catch the current of the breezy air
 The old man said, “I see around me []

Things which you cannot see. We die, my Friend, 130
 Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
 And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
 Dies with him or is changed, and very soon
 Even of the good is no memorial left.
 The waters of that spring if they could feel 135
 Might mourn. They are not as they were; the bond
 Of brotherhood is broken—time has been
 When every day the touch of human hand
 Disturbed their stillness, and they ministered
 To human comfort. As I stooped to drink, 140
 Few minutes gone, at that deserted well
 What feelings came to me! A spider's web
 Across its mouth hung to the water's edge,
 And on the wet and slimy foot-stone lay
 The useless fragment of a wooden bowl; 145
 It moved my very heart. The time has been
 When I could never pass this road but she
 Who lived within these walls, when I appeared,
 A daughter's welcome gave me, and I loved her
 As my own child. Oh Sir! the good die first, 150
 And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust
 Burn to the socket. Many a passenger
 Has blessed poor Margaret for her gentle looks
 When she upheld the cool refreshment drawn
 From that forsaken well, and no one came 155
 But he was welcome, no one went away
 But that it seemed she loved him. She is dead,
 The worm is on her cheek, and this poor hut,
 Stripped of its outward garb of household flowers,
 Of rose and jasmine, offers to the wind 160
 A cold bare wall whose earthy top is tricked
 With weeds and the rank spear-grass. She is dead,
 And nettles rot and adders sun themselves
 Where we have sat together while she nursed
 Her infant at her bosom. The wild colt, 165

The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman

[When a Northern Indian, from sickness, is unable to continue his journey with his companions; he is left behind, covered over with Deer-skins, and is supplied with water, food, and fuel if the situation of the place will afford it. He is informed of the track which his companions intend to pursue, and if he is unable to follow, or overtake them, he perishes alone in the Desert; unless he should have the good fortune to fall in with some other Tribes of Indians. It is unnecessary to add that the females are equally, or still more, exposed to the same fate. See that very interesting work, Hearne's *Journey from Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*. When the Northern Lights, as the same writer informs us, vary their position in the air, they make a rustling and a crackling noise. This circumstance is alluded to in the first stanza of the following poem.]

The Complaint, &c.

Before I see another day,
 Oh let my body die away!
 In sleep I heard the northern gleams;
 The stars they were among my dreams;
 In sleep did I behold the skies, 5
 I saw the crackling flashes drive;
 And yet they are upon my eyes,
 And yet I am alive.
 Before I see another day,
 Oh let my body die away! 10
 My fire is dead: it knew no pain;
 Yet is it dead, and I remain.
 All stiff with ice the ashes lie;
 And they are dead, and I will die.
 When I was well, I wished to live, 15
 For clothes, for warmth, for food, and fire;
 But they to me no joy can give,
 No pleasure now, and no desire.
 Then here contented will I lie;
 Alone I cannot fear to die. 20

The Prelude (1805–1806)¹

BOOK FIRST

INTRODUCTION, CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL TIME

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze
 That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
 And from the sky: it beats against my cheek
 And seems half conscious of the joy it gives.

O welcome Messenger! O welcome Friend! 5
 A Captive greets thee, coming from a house
 Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free,
 A prison where he hath been long immured.
 Now I am free, enfranchis'd and at large,
 May fix my habitation where I will. 10

What dwelling shall receive me? In what Vale
 Shall be my harbour? Underneath what grove
 Shall I take up my home, and what sweet stream
 Shall with its murmurs lull me to my rest?

The earth is all before me: with a heart 15
 Joyous, nor scar'd at its own liberty
 I look about, and should the guide I chuse
 Be nothing better than a wandering cloud
 I cannot miss my way. I breathe again;
 Trances of thought and mountings of the mind 20
 Come fast upon me: it is shaken off,
 As by miraculous gift 'tis shaken off,
 That burthen of my own unnatural self,
 The heavy weight of many a weary day
 Not mine, and such as were not made for me. 25
 Long months of peace (if such bold word accord
 With any promises of human life)
 Long months of ease and undisturb'd delight

1 For the source of the reading text and the editor's commentary see *The Thirteen-Book "Prelude,"* ed. Mark L. Reed, 2 vols. (1999).

Are mine in prospect: whither shall I turn
 By road or pathway or through open field, 30
 Or shall a twig or any floating thing
 Upon the river, point me out my course?
 Enough that I am free; for months to come
 May dedicate myself to chosen tasks;
 May quit the tiresome sea, and dwell on shore, 35
 If not a settler on the soil, at least
 To drink wild water, and to pluck green herbs,
 And gather fruits fresh from their native bough.
 Nay more, if I may trust myself, this hour
 Hath brought a gift that consecrates my joy; 40
 For I, methought, while the sweet breath of Heaven
 Was blowing on my body, felt within
 A corresponding mild creative breeze,
 A vital breeze which travell'd gently on
 O'er things which it had made, and is become 45
 A tempest, a redundant energy
 Vexing its own creation. 'Tis a power
 That does not come unrecognis'd, a storm,
 Which, breaking up a long continued frost
 Brings with it vernal promises, the hope 50
 Of active days, of dignity and thought,
 Of prowess in an honorable field,
 Pure passions, virtue, knowledge, and delight,
 The holy life of music and of verse.
 Thus far, O Friend! did I, not used to make 55
 A present joy the matter of my Song,
 Pour out, that day, my soul in measur'd strains,
 Even in the very words which I have here
 Recorded: to the open fields I told
 A prophecy: poetic numbers came 60
 Spontaneously, and cloth'd in priestly robe
 My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
 For holy services: great hopes were mine;
 My own voice chear'd me, and, far more, the mind's

Shorter Poems (1807–1820)¹

“Mark the concentrated Hazels that enclose”

Mark the concentrated Hazels that enclose
 Yon old grey Stone, protected from the ray
 Of noontide suns:—and even the beams that play
 And glance, while wantonly the rough wind blows,
 Are seldom free to touch the moss that grows 5
 Upon that roof—amid embowering gloom
 The very image framing of a Tomb,
 In which some ancient Chieftain finds repose
 Among the lonely mountains.—Live, ye Trees!
 And Thou, grey Stone, the pensive likeness keep 10
 Of a dark chamber where the Mighty sleep:
 For more than Fancy to the influence bends
 When solitary Nature condescends
 To mimic Time’s forlorn humanities.

“The Shepherd, looking eastward, softly said”

The Shepherd, looking eastward, softly said,
 “Bright is thy veil, O Moon, as thou art bright!”
 Forthwith, that little Cloud, in ether spread,
 And penetrated all with tender light,
 She cast away, and shewed her fulgent head 5
 Uncover’d;—dazzling the Beholder’s sight
 As if to vindicate her beauty’s right,
 Her beauty thoughtlessly disparaged.
 Meanwhile that Veil, removed or thrown aside,
 Went, floating from her, darkening as it went; 10
 And a huge Mass, to bury or to hide,
 Approached this glory of the firmament;
 Who meekly yields, and is obscur’d;—content
 With one calm triumph of a modest pride.

¹ For the sources of the reading texts and the editor’s commentary see *Shorter Poems, 1807–1820*, ed. Carl H. Ketcham (1989).

Notes

Thanksgiving Ode, January 18, 1816

WW printed an Advertisement to the volume titled *Thanksgiving Ode, January 18, 1816. With Other Short Pieces, Chiefly Referring to Recent Public Events* (1816). The *Ode* occupies the prime place in the volume.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It is not to bespeak favour or indulgence, but to guard against misapprehension, that the author presumes to state that the present publication owes its existence to a patriotism, anxious to exert itself in commemorating that course of action, by which Great Britain has, for some time past, distinguished herself above all other countries.

Wholly unworthy of touching upon so momentous a subject would that Poet be, before whose eyes the present distresses under which this kingdom labours, could interpose a veil sufficiently thick to hide, or even to obscure, the splendor of this great moral triumph. If the author has given way to exultation, unchecked by these distresses, it might be sufficient to protect him from a charge of insensibility, should he state his own belief that these sufferings will be transitory. On the wisdom of a very large majority of the British nation, rested that generosity which poured out the treasures of this country for the deliverance of Europe: and in the same national wisdom, presiding in time of peace over an energy not inferior to that which has been displayed in war, *they* confide, who encourage a firm hope, that the cup of our wealth will be gradually replenished. There will, doubtless, be no few ready to indulge in regrets and repinings; and to feed a morbid satisfaction, by aggravating these burthens in imagination, in order that calamity so confidently prophesied, as it has not taken the shape which their sagacity allotted to it, may appear as grievous as possible under another. But the body of the nation will not quarrel with the gain, because it might have been purchased at a less price: and acknowledging in these sufferings, which they feel to have been in a great degree unavoidable, a consecration of their noble efforts, they will vigorously apply themselves to remedy the evil.

Nor is it at the expense of rational patriotism, or in disregard of sound philosophy, that the author hath given vent to feelings tending to encourage a martial spirit in the bosoms of his countrymen, at a time when there is a general outcry against the prevalence of these dispositions. The British army, both by its skill and valour in the field, and by the discipline which has rendered it much less formidable than the armies of other powers, to the inhabitants of the several countries where its operations were carried on, has performed services for

humanity too important and too obvious to allow anyone to recommend, that the language of gratitude and admiration be suppressed, or restrained (whatever be the temper of the public mind) through a scrupulous dread, lest the tribute due to the past, should prove an injurious incentive for the future. Every man, deserving the name of Briton, adds his voice to the chorus which extols the exploits of his countrymen, with a consciousness, at times overpowering the effort, that they transcend all praise.—But this particular sentiment, thus irresistibly excited, is not sufficient. The nation would err grievously, if she suffered the abuse which other states have made of military power, to prevent her from perceiving that no people ever was, or can be, independent, free, or secure, much less great, in any sane application of the word, without martial propensities, and an assiduous cultivation of military virtues. Nor let it be overlooked, that the benefits derivable from these sources, are placed within the reach of Great Britain, under conditions peculiarly favourable. The same insular position which, by rendering territorial incorporation impossible, utterly precludes the desire of conquest under the most seductive shape it can assume, enables her to rely, for her defence against foreign foes, chiefly upon a species of armed force from which her own liberties have nothing to fear. Such are the blessed privileges of her situation; and, by permitting, they invite her to give way to the courageous instincts of human nature, and to strengthen and to refine them by culture. But some have more than insinuated, that a design exists to subvert the civil character of the English people by unconstitutional applications and unnecessary increase of military power. The advisers and abettors of such a design, were it possible that it should exist, would be guilty of the most heinous crime, which, upon this planet, can be committed. The author, trusting that this apprehension arises from the delusive influences of an honourable jealousy, hopes that the martial qualities, which he venerates, will be fostered by adhering to those good old usages which experience has sanctioned; and by availing ourselves of new means of indisputable promise; particularly by applying, in its utmost possible extent, that system of tuition, of which the master-spring is a habit of gradually enlightened subordination;—by imparting knowledge, civil, moral and religious, in such measure that the mind, among all classes of the community, may love, admire, and be prepared and accomplished to defend that country, under whose protection its faculties have been unfolded, and its riches acquired; by just dealing towards all orders of the state, so that no members of it being trampled upon, courage may every where continue to rest immoveably upon its ancient English foundation, personal self-respect;—by adequate rewards, and permanent honours, conferred upon the deserving; by encouraging athletic exercises and manly sports among the peasantry of the country; and by especial care to provide and support sufficient Institutions, in which, during a time of peace, a reasonable proportion

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