

# DISCOMPOSED AT CORA LINN

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In July 1814 Wordsworth embarked on a six-week tour of Scotland accompanied by his wife and sister-in-law. In all, the holiday inspired the writing of five poems, the best known of which, “Yarrow Visited, September, 1814,” provides something of a touchstone for readings of the later poetry that seek to address the relations between vision, revision, and the restoration of creative power.<sup>1</sup> Of these five poems, only “Yarrow Visited” and the sonnet “To—(‘From the dark chambers of dejection freed’)” would appear in the following year’s collected *Poems*. Publication of “Suggested by a Beautiful Ruin upon One of the Islands of Loch Lomond, a Place Chosen for the Retreat of a Solitary Individual, from Whom This Habitation Acquired the Name of the Brownie’s Cell” and “Composed at Cora Linn in Sight of Wallace’s Tower” was delayed until *The River Duddon* volume of 1820, while “Effusion, in the Pleasure-Ground on the Banks of the Bran, Near Dunfield,” a verse most likely begun in August 1814, but perhaps not completed until after 1820, would not appear until the 1827 *Poetical Works*. My interest here is in “Composed at Cora Linn” and “The Brownie’s Cell”: poems forming a tributary to *The River Duddon* that disclose some of the literary, historical, and personal preoccupations informing this important volume.

q1, q2

Inspired by a visit to the Clyde Falls, and colored by the region’s association with the rebel leader William Wallace, “Composed at Cora Linn” looks back to an earlier stage in the poet’s life and to recollections of the friendship with Coleridge that, following the quarrel of 1812, appeared decisively to have fallen apart. Signs of the tensions that were to inform this quarrel were present in the autumn of 1803 when William and Dorothy,

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accompanied by Coleridge, made their first tour of Scotland. The tour may well have been prompted by a wish to reanimate the close, productive friendship that had resulted in the *Lyrical Ballads* and the scheme for the *Recluse*, but within the course of a few, unsettled days, Coleridge would leave the party, upset by the siblings' apparent lack of sympathy for his ailing physical and mental health but frustrated, too, by Wordsworth's failure to commit to the projected long philosophical poem. Other, political currents may have added to the general mood of disquiet as, following the collapse of the Peace of Amiens and the resumption of invasion fears, the Highlander's "Jacobinical" language and "cowardly sentiments" struck a discordant note (D. Wordsworth, *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* [hereafter *DWJ*] 1: 260, 267), reminding both poets of their earlier pre-revolutionary sympathies while souring, for Wordsworth at least, the interest in the redemptive potential of rural speech and folk traditions (Fulford 21).

q3

Leaving aside, for now, the significance of these political tensions I want to focus on a detail recorded in Dorothy's journal that sheds light on the aesthetic concerns of "Composed at Cora Linn" and provides some further insight into the deteriorating relationship with Coleridge. As is so often the case with a waning friendship, minor details often speak volumes. In this case, a visit to a renowned beauty spot served as a reminder of the intellectual spark that had first ignited the friendship, while providing confirmation of why that friendship could no longer be sustained. Situated in the grounds of Bonnington House, near New Lanark, the Clyde Falls had long been established as a stopping point on the eighteenth-century tourist circuit, enabling well-to-do visitors to experience a frisson of the sublime. As early as 1708, the then owner, Sir James Carmichael, had established a viewing pavilion that, with the aid of carefully placed mirrors on its rear wall, afforded "a very striking prospect of the fall," while granting the illusion of "the cataract pouring as it were upon your head" (Webster 131). By the turn of the nineteenth century, the preference for unmediated contact with scenes of natural wonder led Coleridge and Wordsworth's friend, the writer, lawyer, and journalist John Stoddart, in his account of the falls, to omit mention of the pavilion altogether and to focus instead on "the sublimity of the scene, formed by the old tower rising above a wooded rock . . . and the immense volume of water rushing past us, and the dizzy view downward, as the eye followed its furious descent" (158). In accordance with this emphasis on raw, untrammelled experience, Stoddart also records the "liberality" of the then owners, Sir John Lockhart Ross and Lady Ross

Baillie, in allowing public access to the site (157), with the implication that the ability of the eye to roam freely, no longer in thrall to the pantomimic technologies of the picturesque, was coeval with the relaxation of aristocratic control.

Amplifying this liberal impulse, Coleridge's description of the falls is characteristically attentive to minute particulars, to the point where ascriptions of personal identity dissolve in a torrent of subordinate clauses: "Moving higher ~~reach~~ & winding till we climb up directly over the place where I first sate, we see the whole fall, the higher, the lower & the inter-slope, with only a fragment of the wall-rock & the pool—the whole at once with the white conical pool, with a cloak of Mosses, and bushes & fir Trees, growing out of them" (*Notebooks* 1452). Still, amid the turbulent fluidity of the description—"See the shapes below me, in 3 yards of water / smooth water in a vault . . . hollow, unquiet, & changeful between the waters . . . the boiling foam beneath this fall" (1452)—Coleridge cannot help but take a snipe at the parochial observations of one of his fellow travelers: "The little Girl sent to *dog* & guide us, yawning with stretching Limbs, a droll dissonance with Dorothy's Raptures" (1452).

This, I think, is unfair, as Dorothy Wordsworth's thoughtful and delicately pitched response to the falls is situated precisely at the point where sublime "Raptures" give way to the intrusion of humdrum detail and picturesque cliché. In *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland A.D. 1803*, she observes how the "majesty and strength of the water . . . struck me with astonishment, which died away, giving place to more delightful feelings" (*DWJ* 1: 223). The sentence reads as a stock example of the Burkean sublime, with the initial feeling of stupefaction in the face of overwhelming power yielding to contemplative delight. As the entry proceeds Dorothy admits into the scene the moderating influence of the picturesque: a "neat, white lady-like house," an "ell-wide gravel walk," and, most welcome of all, a bench on which to sit: "placed for the sake of one of these views" (1: 223). On the previous day Dorothy had expressed her disappointment on discovering that the falls "were shut up in a gentleman's grounds, and to be viewed only by lock and key" (1: 219). She notes also, alluding to her brother's impression of the higher of the two falls, the Bonnington Linn, that "it does not make a complete self-satisfying piece, an abode of its own, as a perfect waterfall seems to do" (1: 220–21). The expectation of an encounter with sovereign power is belied still further by an account of Coleridge's conversation with a gentleman, a fellow tourist, who having "observed that it was a *majestic* waterfall" went on to undermine the accuracy of his

judgment by declaring that the falls were both “Sublime and beautiful” (1: 224). For Coleridge who, only the day before, had debated with Wordsworth “the precise meaning of the words grand, majestic [and] sublime” (*DWJ* 1: 223), the declaration was to provide a source of rich amusement. But in the light of Dorothy’s detailed account of the yielding of sublime astonishment to the poetics and politics of the picturesque, the gentleman tourist’s conflation of categories seems, on reflection, to be warranted: How, after all, should the site be perceived if not as a combination of the sublime *and* the beautiful?

Although there is no direct evidence to suggest that Wordsworth disagreed with Coleridge’s insistence on separating the categories of the sublime and the beautiful, he does address this distinction in his prose fragment “The Sublime & the Beautiful” (ca. 1811–12), in which he writes: “I take for granted that an object may be both sublime & beautiful: or, speaking more accurately, that it may have the power of affecting us both with the sense of beauty & with the sense of sublimity,” before adding, in a concession to late eighteenth-century critical orthodoxy, that “the mind cannot be affected by both these sensations at the same time, for they are not different from, but opposite to each other” (*Fragments* 32–33). Interestingly, Wordsworth teases out the question of the extent to which the sense of sublimity may be considered a product of an “external object” or of “the mind” in a passage that takes as its example the fall of the Rhine at Chafhausen, noting that “there are undoubtedly here before us two distinct images & thoughts: & there is a most complex instrumentality acting upon the senses, such as the roar of the Water, the fury of the foam, &c.; and an instrumentality still more comprehensive, furnished by the imagination, and drawn from the length of the River’s course, the Mountains from which it rises, the various countries thro’ which it flows, & the distant Seas in which its waters are lost” (40–41). On the back of these observations Wordsworth affirms the Kantian view that it is “absurd” to talk of an “object as being sublime or beautiful in itself, without reference to some subject by whom that beauty or sublimity is perceived” (41).

The shift in this fragment from a sublimity of “external objects & their powers, qualities, & properties,” to a sublimity of “the mind itself, & the laws by which it is acted upon” provides a useful point of orientation for the representation of the sublime in “Composed at Cora Linn” as the verse moves from acknowledging the “power” of a “mighty mass of water” (Wordsworth, *Fragments* 40) to musing on the associations aroused by the sight of “a ruined tower (called Wallace’s Tower)” (*DWJ* 1: 223). That, in 1814,

Wordsworth should respond less to the thunderous power of the falls and more to the distant, yet equally compelling, spectacle of the ruins of Cora Castle, traditionally but erroneously believed to be “Wallace’s Tower,” tells us much about the poet’s drift from an interest in natural phenomena and the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (*Lyrical Ballads* [hereafter *LB*] 744) toward a concern with history and the ideological underpinnings of individual and collective expressions of identity. That in 1803 Wordsworth was well on the way to departing from the object-oriented ontology manifested in his earlier work and, more immediately, in Coleridge’s fine-grained observations on the Clyde Falls may be seen in a related poem begun in 1803 but not finished until early 1820, the opening three lines of which appear in the Duddon volume’s “Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes”: “Address to Kilchurn Castle, upon Loch Awe.”<sup>2</sup> Prefaced by an extract from Dorothy’s journal commemorating the sight of “a ruined Castle on an Island,” the poem draws comparisons between the suspension of the surrounding flood’s “dizzy turbulence . . . Frozen by distance” (*CW* 38–39) and the subduing of the castle’s violent origins to “the perception of this Age” (4). Although recollected in tranquillity in the “Topographical Description” (“[Kilchurn] is respected . . . as a monument of security in times of disturbance and danger long passed-away”; Wordsworth, *River Duddon* 284), the ruin stands in the poem as an eerie reminder of “loud-throated War!” (*CW* 1) and of that history of “pride” and “fury uncontrollable” (43) that may yet return to discompose the present. And, as in 1803, so in 1814: what Wordsworth saw in the distant prospect of Cora Castle was a “Skeleton of unfinished humanity” (33), a ghostly relic abstracted from nature, symbolizing the ways in which popular enthusiasms might be used to arouse divisive nationalistic feelings.

Writing on Wordsworth’s treatment of the sublime in “Composed at Cora Linn,” Theresa Kelley in *Wordsworth’s Revisionary Aesthetics* remarks that the poem “is not primarily concerned with his (or anybody else’s) response to the waterfall, but with its visual and figurative relation to Wallace’s Tower,” which she reads as “a sign of sublime rebellion against tyranny” (173). Having shifted the emphasis from the spontaneous appreciation of natural grandeur to an engagement with the historical of the sublime, the problem presented by this relic is how to acknowledge the nobility of feeling associated with the resistance to tyranny while keeping the potential for radial enthusiasm in check. In the late summer of 1814 Wordsworth would have had ample reasons to look askance at the spread of high feelings in the wake of war, particularly in Scotland where memories of

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heroic resistance to English tyranny stalked a delicate line between sentimental fervor and outright support for political revolt. The recent success of Margaret Holford's *Wallace* (1809), Jane Porter's *The Scottish Chiefs: A Romance* (1810), and R. P. Gillies's *Wallace: A Fragment* (1813) had done much to rekindle interest in the Wallace legend, which over the previous century had evolved to fit the requirements of successive ideological positions: from the embodiment of Stuart sovereignty to the archetype of the "Scottish nation," and from the harbinger of the American and French Revolutions to the defender of the liberties secured under the Union (Cowan). Key to this most recent incarnation was Wallace's status as an emblem of heroic integrity, a man who "was determined, amidst the universal slavery of his countrymen, still to maintain his independency" (Hume 311) and who stood, "amid the wreck of all that was free and noble . . . like a solitary monument among the ruins of an ancient dynasty" (Chambers 383). Through his contact with James Hogg, Wordsworth may also have been aware of the competition, sponsored by "A Native of Edinburgh, and Member of the Highland Society of London," to compose a poem for an intended "National Monument to the Memory of Wallace" (Hemans 5). In her prize-winning entry, "Wallace's Invocation to Bruce," published to widespread acclaim in September 1814, Felicia Hemans capitalizes on the affective power of the Wallace legend, invoking the rebel hero's "resisting energy" (156), along with memories of Thomson, Burns, and Macpherson, to affirm the "quenchless fire" of Scottish "Freedom" (104). On the face of things, therefore, Hemans would appear to be stoking up the fires of national dissent. Yet although couched as a potentially dangerous paean to subversion, Hemans's poem was read and widely appreciated as a product of the Scottish heritage industry, providing confirmation of the extent to which rebel passions could be honored, safely and without consequence, in the hallowed space of "minstrel-lore" (285). The fact that Hemans, an English poet, was able to mimic so effectively the voice of rebellion did not go unnoticed. As the *Edinburgh Monthly Review* observed, Hemans's poem "demonstrates the disappearance of those jealousies which, not a hundred years ago, would have denied to such a candidate any thing like a fair chance with a native—if we can suppose any poet in the south then dreaming of making the trial, or viewing Wallace in any other light than that of an enemy, and a rebel against the paramount supremacy of England. We delight in every gleam of high feeling which warms the two nations alike, and ripens yet more that confidence and sympathy which bind them together in one great family"

(575). Thus, Hemans offered proof of the ability of “high feeling” to salve the wounds of history, providing her readers with the reassurance that national conflict could be represented and even enjoyed within the safe space of the poem.<sup>3</sup>

In *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1815–1845*, Tim Fulford argues persuasively that the poems Wordsworth composed on his 1814 Scottish tour “demonstrate the effect of [his] ambivalence about what he called the ‘balladism’ of Macpherson, Scott and Hogg, revealing both his desire to share their popularity by adapting the terms in which they versified Scottish history and his suspicion of the kind of history they constructed” (97). For understandable reasons Fulford does not include Hemans in his list of Scottish balladeers, but “Composed at Cora Linn,” although conceived before the publication of Hemans’s “Wallace’s Invocation to Bruce,” does offer some valuable lessons for the would-be rebel mythologist. For as much as Wordsworth’s poem seems to respond with enthusiasm to the Wallace legend, it works, too, to subtly disclose its status as a historically contingent fabrication. The association between the sovereign power of the falls and the resistant nobility of the ruined tower is granted expression in the opening stanza of both the 1814 and 1819 versions of the poem:

Lord of the Vale, astounding Flood!  
 The dullest leaf in this thick wood  
 Quakes conscious of thy power:  
 The caves reply with hollow moan,  
 And vibrates to its central stone  
 Yon time-cemented Tower!  
 (*Shorter Poems* [hereafter *SP*] 1–6)

With their echo of Thomson’s description of Cora Linn in “Summer” (“In one impetuous torrent, down the steep / It thundering shoots, and shakes the country round,” 592–93), the tail-rime stanza performs a kind of double apostrophic invocation, closer in some respects to Paul de Man’s reading of the poetics of prosopopoeia with its investment in the reanimation of the dead and resulting “figuration and disfiguration” of the living poet (de Man 76), as indicated by the ghastly “hollow moan” of the respondent caves. These lines are followed in the 1814 version by two stanzas in which an assertion of visionary splendor, powerful enough to exceed the natural sublimity of the Clyde, is framed by expressions of interrogative uncertainty:

What muse, what God restores to light  
 A long-lost Form, the Wallace wight,

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In patriot armour drest?  
 —I see him there, aloft, supreme,  
 A champion worthy of the stream,  
 The grey Tow'rs living crest.  
 His voice in desperate battles tried  
 Surmounts the thunder of the Clyde;  
 His arm—I ken no more—  
 O say to what regions flee  
 These shapes of awful phantasy,  
 To what untrodden shore?

(7–18)

q7

The poem's fascination with the restoration of the dead is here doubled once again, as the verse invokes Thomson's "haunted stream" ("Summer" 12) and subsequent praise of the "Great patriot-hero! Ill required chief!" ("Autumn" 901–02), while providing a demonstration of how the voice of the heroic dead cannot, or perhaps should not, be allowed to surmount the power of the natural sublime. Thus, in line 10 the cognitive certainty of "I see him there," together with the "voice" that "Surmounts" the natural sublimity of the Clyde, is qualified by the Germanic archaisms "wight" and "ken," studied expressions that, even as they indicate the extent of the speaker's possession by the speech of the spectral freedom-fighter, serve to expose the rhetorical architecture of the sublime, transforming unmediated vision into literary convention. The phrase "Wallace wight," in common circulation in Scottish balladry, but also used by Scott in *Marmion*, contributes to the sense of contrivance, adding to the poem's highly self-conscious take on the commodification of history. Notable too is the poem's wilful suspension of imaginative power, suggesting "an acceptance of imagination's inability to restore what has occurred or to repair damage caused" (Fulford 124). By such means the poem appears at this point to forgo the romanticizing of Scottish history while, in the same movement, disinvesting the power of the sublime with its claim to visionary fulfilment.

And yet, even as the poem contrives to diminish the power of "awful phantasy" it stops short of mounting a wholesale rebuttal of the folk traditions on which it feeds. For just as the conclusion of the "Invocation" bemoans as "cold" the "heart . . . That holds no converse" with Wallace's memory, so Wordsworth is drawn to suspend the impulse to ironize the valorization of heroic martyrdom, lest the drive toward acute self-consciousness prevents the "cold" "heart" from responding to "human weal

and woe" (*SP* 23–24). At this point, the poem shifts focus, moving away from the immediate prospect to address universal instances of noble self-sacrifice:

The man of abject Soul in vain  
 Shall walk the Marathonian plain,  
 Or thrid the shadowy gloom  
 That still invests the rocky pass,  
 Where stood sublime Leonidas  
 Devoted to the Tomb.

Nor deem that it can aught avail  
 For *such* to glide with oar or sail  
 Beneath the piny wood  
 Where Tell once drew, by Uri's lake,  
 His vengeful shafts—prepared to slake  
 Their thirst in Tyrant's blood!

(25–35)

Released from its immediate national context, the verse thus revokes its prior investment in self-conscious historicism to re-embrace the enchantment of history, arguing for a return to simple, naïve pleasure of revering heroic deeds performed in the service of liberty. The model for the poem's checking of the dangerous excesses of liberty may be seen in embryonic form in "Rob Roy's Grave," a verse from 1807 that adopts a similarly playful perspective on the behavior of those who, out of step with these prudential times, proclaim allegiance to the "law" (Wordsworth, *Poems in Two Volumes* 26) of the "heart" (31). Although "with some wild thoughts" representative of the "Chieftain of a savage Clan" (101–02), the poem imagines, fondly but somewhat bizarrely, that "were the bold Man living *now*" (66) he might provide a suitable challenger to Napoleon.

Like Rob Roy, Wallace, Leonidas, and Tell are presented at the close of "Composed at Cora Linn" as exemplars of heroic resistance to tyranny, but the poem's desire to desist from ironic self-scrutiny appears, when considered from the point of view of its immediate historical circumstances, to run up against a further set of difficulties. Composed in the phony post-war summer of 1814, the verses on Cora Linn provide a commentary not only on the vexed poetics of the sublime but also on the fraught politics of national liberty and independence. For while, on the one hand, the evocation of Marathon, Thermopylae, and Uri lent itself well to a narrative

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concerned with the imaginative appeal and moral worth of heroic singularity, on the other, it also recalled the mythological underpinnings of the French Revolution, which, following Napoleon's abdication in April, had been subjected to renewed scrutiny. When composing the poem's concluding stanzas, Wordsworth seems to have recalled a passage in *Descriptive Sketches* (1793; hereafter *DS*), a poem shortly to be revised for partial publication in the 1815 two-volume *Poems*, that describes the figure of a boatman, "over-aw'd" before "The pictur'd fane of Tell" and driven to tears by "the Marathonian tale" (*DS* 348–50). Who, the poem asks, when walking the ground "where hounor'd men of ancient days / Have wrought with god-like arm the deeds of praise," would not feel the "power of strong controul . . . oppress his labouring soul"? Echoing Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, with its vision of a new world, released from "continual dread" (14), *Descriptive Sketches* goes on to locate the affective power of heroic exempla within a larger narrative of millenarian hope: "Oh give, great God, to Freedom's waves to ride / Sublime o'er Conquest, Avarice, and Pride, / To break, the vales where . . . dark Oppression builds her thick-ribb'd tow'rs" (792–95), only to qualify that hope with recollections of that "dead load of mortal ills" (818), which prevent the realization of paradise on earth. Significantly, as if recollecting Coleridge's objections to the "Jacobin Traitor of a Boatman" (Coleridge, *Notebooks* 1469) encountered at Loch Lomond on the 1803 tour, for the 1815 edition Wordsworth cut both the lines celebrating Tell and Marathon along with the concluding hymn to liberty. If, in 1793, the march of liberty proceeds "sad and slow" (*DS* 813), by 1814 it would appear to have come to a halt.

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Yet, even as Wordsworth represented his own, earlier revolutionary aspirations as touching but ultimately ineffectual reminders of radical intent, there were others for whom the "power" of "Freedom," as displayed in related depictions of the "sublime Leonidas," remained undiminished (*DS* 756). Wordsworth could not have been aware of David's recently completed *Leonidas at Thermopylae* (1799–1814), but the painting conveys effectively the extent to which expressions of self-sacrifice in the face of looming defeat could be placed in the service of revolutionary aspirations. More immediately, in canto 2 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Lord Byron had invoked the "hopeless warriors of a willing doom" (698) as a rallying cry for the cause of Greek independence and as a demonstration of the "Spirit of freedom!" (702). But, while for David and Byron the Spartan defeat could be used to promote the cause of liberty, for Wordsworth, dismayed by the terms of Napoleon's exile that had, in his view, left the way open for

a return of imperial despotism, the lines commemorating Thermopylae served a shadowy, less determinate purpose. In summation, the distinction between the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary readings of the heroic resistance to tyranny turns on the different ways in which the spirit of freedom is represented. Where, for Byron, “the sepulchral strait” (699) is depicted as, at once, the grave and the birthing place of an undaunted “Spirit” (701), able to withstand defeat and to find itself reborn in global struggles for independence and liberty, for Wordsworth the manifestation of spirit, as the lines addressing the appearance of Wallace’s ghost convey, is an altogether more limited affair; the ghost appears, only to “flee” (16) to regions unknown. Confined, in other words, to the realm of imagination, the sacrifices of Wallace, the Athenians, Leonidas, and Tell—a trajectory from fact to fiction that is itself indicative of a desire to segregate history and myth—are prevented from taking shape in the sphere of political actuality.

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The first draft of “Composed at Cora Linn in Sight of Wallace’s Tower” may be read, then, as a poem that cautiously acknowledges the sublimity of acts of individual self-sacrifice while seeking, at the same time, to curtail the affective power of such acts. The execution of this task is a delicate matter since the deployment of irony runs the risk of voiding the poem of the precise affective tone that enables the reader to be moved by instances of heroic self-abnegation. At the same time, the poet wishes to avoid the imaginative excesses, as evidenced in Porter’s lurid novelization of the Wallace legend, that risk the perpetuation of revolutionary violence. The spirit that haunts Wordsworth’s poem makes visible the principle that impels individuals and nations to pursue the path of freedom, but that spirit is not itself free.

When, in late 1819, Wordsworth retrieved the manuscript of “Composed at Cora Linn” with a view to including the poem in the *Duddon* volume, further pains were taken to constrain the resonant voice of the “Wallace Wight.” Most notably, the revised version incorporates two additional stanzas, inserted between stanzas one and two in the original poem:

And yet how fair the rural scene!  
 For thou, O Clyde, has ever been  
 Beneficent as strong;  
 Pleased in refreshing dews to steep  
 The little trembling flowers that peep  
 Thy shelving rocks among.

Hence all who love their country, love  
 To look on thee—delight to rove  
 Where they thy voice can hear;  
 And to the patriot-warrior's Shade,  
 Lord of the vale! to Heroes laid  
 In dust, that voice is dear!

(SP 7–18)

The powerful moans and vibrations of the fall that, in the earlier version of the poem, were subsumed by the unearthly cry of the patriot are, in this version, supplanted by visions of beauty and calm that enable natural forms not solely to “Quake” but to find refreshment beside the waters of the now “Beneficent” Clyde. Here, then, the category of the beautiful is used to contain the unruly force of the sublime, transforming the undoing of unity and order into a principle of restoration.

Written in the wake of Peterloo, the appeal to “all who love their country” seems even more significant. Intended as an affirmation of the Union at a time of disruption, the infusion of love for nature and love of country, underpinned by the “voice” (SP 15) of the Clyde, signals the extent to which the principle of liberty, here identified with the right to “rove” (14), is now dependent on the inclusion/exclusion of the “patriot-warrior’s Shade” (16). In a manner akin to Giorgio Agamben’s account of the “state of exception,” the aberrant energy of the ghost is included in the constitution of the poem but only to the extent that it signifies all that must be excluded if discourse, whether literary or political, is to be deemed rational.<sup>4</sup> As if to quell still further the potential for a return of the call to “Freedom” within the sphere of actuality, Wordsworth undertakes a significant alteration by removing all reference to the imaginative power of the poet. The movement from “I see him there, aloft . . . I ken no more” is thus replaced in the revised poem by depersonalized description:

Along thy banks at dead of night,  
 Sweeps visibly the Wallace Wight;  
 Or stands in warlike vest,  
 Aloft, beneath the moon’s pale beam,  
 A Champion worthy of the Stream,  
 Yon grey tower’s living crest!

(19–24)

By avoiding the admission of visionary failure, which in the original version had introduced a potentially fatal note of self-reflexive irony, the verse is able to undertake a more seamless transition to the affirmation of high

feeling for the noble dead, thereby finally detaching, in a manner that the 1814 poem struggled to accomplish, the connection between personal affect and political action. The memory of Wallace may now be revered, but the divisive history associated with that figure would seem no longer to disturb the composure of the present.

There is, however, a further aspect of the composition history of the poem to consider, which bears no less on the links between the friendship with Coleridge, the Duddon sonnets, the spectral *Recluse*, and the unfulfilled promise of “a narrative Poem of the Epic kind” (Wordsworth and Wordsworth, *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years* [hereafter *EY*] 594). Toward the end of April 1814 Wordsworth concluded a letter to Frances Wrangham with the news that he was working on the proofs of “A Portion of a long Poem . . . that will see the light ere long,” before extending congratulations “on the overthrow of execrable Despot: and the complete triumph of the *War-faction* of which noble body I had the honour to be as active a Member as my abilities and industry would allow” (Wordsworth and Wordsworth, *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years* 144). A few days later, in correspondence with Thomas Poole, he reiterated his first announcement, declaring that the work is a “portion of a Poem, which, if I live to finish it, I hope future times will ‘not willingly let die’” (146). In a year, during the course of which the distinction between complete and partial triumphs would come under severe strain, Wordsworth’s invocation of Milton’s claim to lasting authority, from *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), is followed by a justification, the confident tone of which is hedged by a significant tell: “These you know are the words of my great Predecessor, and the depth of my feelings upon some subjects seems to justify me in the act of applying them to myself, while speaking to a Friend” (146). As Wordsworth repeatedly announced, *The Excursion* was to be a portion of a much greater whole, but concerns about his ability to complete that work, and about the likelihood of it making an enduring contribution to literary culture equal to that of Milton, were heightened by memories of the expectations of that other, great predecessor and recently estranged “Friend,” Coleridge.

When, five years later, Wordsworth returned to the manuscript of “Composed at Cora Linn” it was in the wake of the extended period of work on the *Prelude*, the so-called C-stage revision undertaken between late 1818 and early 1820. That the revised poem could be understood as a form of peace offering to Coleridge is announced on the title page by the small, but significant alteration of “Addressed to / S. T. Coleridge” to “Addressed to his Friend / S. T. Coleridge.” However, as peace offerings

go, MS C. appears at times to seek intimacy with the friend while working simultaneously to maintain distance. Thus, in one notable revision to the lines addressing Coleridge's exile in Sicily from the conclusion of Book 10, Wordsworth, alluding to the Ovidian myth of the subaquatic pursuit of the nymph Arethusa by the river god Alpheus, writes of how "our souls" may be taught

. . . to flow, though by a rough  
And bitter world surrounded, as, untinged  
With aught injurious to her native freshness  
Flowed Arethusa under briny waves  
Of the Sicilian Sea. Delicious Fount!  
(lines 1069–73; *Thirteen-Book Prelude* [hereafter *Prelude*] 2: 201–02)

Ostensibly couched in the form of a hope that, by drinking of the waters of Arethusa's fount, Coleridge may be cleansed of the taints of addiction and forbidden love that have stymied his creative powers, the lines imply too that estranged poets may in some way flow together, united in the shared pursuit of "native freshness." However, as Eric C. Walker points out, the lines that follow, comprising a tortuously extended series of modifying clauses, achieves the opposite effect (143–44). By figuring Coleridge as a perpetual wanderer, attaining temporary refuge in foreign "woods," "echoing caves" (1087), and "Temples" (1089), the poet is placed at a considerable remove from his "home" (1079), suggesting that, on at least one level, Wordsworth is happy to keep his friend at arm's length.

q11

A related pattern of distance and intimacy may be seen in the Duddon series, both in the dedicatory sonnet, with its rejection of classical rivers in favor of a "native stream" (9), and in the sequence's signaled indebtedness to Coleridge's unrealized long rural poem "The Brook"—a reference that slyly abrogates responsibility for failing to complete *The Recluse* by deflecting attention to the related failings of that work's primary instigator ("May I not venture, then, to hope, that . . . these Sonnets may remind Mr. Coleridge of his own more comprehensive design, and induce him to fulfil it?"; Wordsworth, *Sonnet Series* 76–77). But aspects of that pattern may be perceived too in a poem that shares with "Composed at Cora Linn" an origin in the Scottish tours of 1803 and 1814. Printed on pages 104–09 of the Duddon volume, in advance of "Composed at Cora Linn" on pages 110–12, "The Brownie's Cell" pays ambiguous tribute to a self-exiled former warrior turned hermit and prophet-poet. Seeking refuge in the ruins of a chantry chapel on a "little lonely Isle" (SP 15) the spectral clansman

appears, at first glance, to be a figure lifted directly from the pages of Macpherson, Hogg, and Scott. However, as the verse proceeds it is made clear that the Brownie's efforts to mythologize his clan's "faded glories" (60) are the product of a disturbed and unruly consciousness, the works of a man who has undergone a "strange descent" (52). While not unsympathetic to the clansman's fate, the poem maintains that "Impassion'd dreams" (59) suffused with Virgilian images of pending apocalypse—"Towers rent, winds combating with woods— / Lands delug'd by unbridl'd floods" (63–64)—have no place in the postwar dispensation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Brownie's cell is renounced as a "Wild Relique," a "beauteous" (91) but no longer serviceable echo of a primitive past. In tandem with "Composed at Cora Linn" the verse warns of the dangers of nationalistic bardolatry, but its portrayal of a poet separated from community, subject to nightmarish visions while undergoing a physical and mental decline, hints too of another man's "strange descent" (52).<sup>6</sup>

q12

Thoughts of that strange descent may also be detected in "Effusion in the Pleasure-Ground on the Banks of the Bran, near Duffield." Here, perhaps with recollections of the viewing house at Cora Linn in mind, Wordsworth writes disparagingly of a "hollow dome," raised on a gentleman's estate, in the interior of which a "picture of Ossian" is parted in the middle, as if by magic, to reveal a "great cascade . . . reflected in innumerable mirrors upon the ceilings and the walls" (lines 133–34; *DWJ* 1: 358). Conjoining disgust at the spectacle of the artificial sublime with disdain for Macpherson's debasement of authentic bardic culture, the verse dismisses such "pains to dazzle and confound" as the product "of a sick man's dream" (23–26), before imagining an alternative portrayal of the bard, hewn "with local sanctities in trust" from "mural rock" (80–85). However, the recovery of authenticity is swiftly marred as, in what could be read as a pointed allusion to the "Eolian Harp" and its subsequent dereliction as the "Devil's yule" of the "Dejection" ode (Coleridge, *Complete Poems* 106), the poem conjectures how "The Wind might force" the effigy's

. . . deep-grooved harp  
To utter melancholy moans  
Not unconnected with the tones  
Of soul-sick flesh and weary bones;  
While grove and river notes would lend,  
Less deeply sad, with these to blend!  
(95–100)

The presence of Coleridge in these lines serves, then, merely to awaken a melancholy sense of that which has been lost and can no longer be recovered. By the close of the verse, the speaker appears to be certain neither of the ability of poetry to restore the virtues associated with “Low and rustic life” (*LB* 743) nor of the ability of the patrician classes to surmount the “Vain Pleasures of luxurious life” (*SP* 105). Accordingly, the poem ends on a note of irresolution with the speaker “thirsting for redress, / Recoiled” into a “wilderness” (127–28) that stands as a cypher for a state of artistic and political indeterminacy.

In Wordsworth’s Scottish poems, warnings of the dangers of heightened vision to individual and collective well-being circulate alongside shadowy intimations of deeper, personalized concerns regarding the fate of poetic authority in a postwar world. With the representative of that older, precivilized, bardic mode, re-exiled, as it were, to Sicily and on terms that, in the C-stage revision of 1819, would seem to render him a permanent exile, the postwar poet is free to renew his own unique poetic vocation. The problem is, however, that as much as Coleridge is kept at bay, traces of that old, vexed relationship continue to lay claim to the productions of the present. Thus, in returning to “Cora Linn,” and by recalling the circumstances, both literally and figuratively, that led to its composition, Wordsworth is brought headlong into a confrontation with the evidence of his failure to complete a long poem.

That evidence is manifested in the self-quotation from Book 1 of the *Prelude* (1: 214–20) that was added as an epigraph to the published version of “Composed at Cora Linn”:

q13

—How Wallace fought for Scotland, left the name  
Of Wallace to be found, like a wild flower,  
All over his dear Country; left the deeds  
Of Wallace, like a family of ghosts,  
To people the steep rocks and river banks  
Her natural sanctuaries, with a local soul  
Of independence and stern liberty.

(MS)

q14

Extracted from the “post-Preamble,” in which the poet outlines his ambition to write a heroic narrative poem, the lines serve as a veiled record of thwarted potential while offering a further perspective on Wordsworth’s engagement with the Wallace legend. Two details, taken from the tortuous composition history of the *Recluse*, have an important bearing on

"Composed at Cora Linn." Not long after his return from the 1803 tour of Scotland, Coleridge remarked that Wordsworth "has made a Beginning to his Recluse" (Reed 633). However, as Reed notes, the reliability of the claim is undermined both by the "vague and emotional character of the context of the statement" and by the uncertainty surrounding Coleridge's understanding of the relationship between the *Recluse* and the autobiographical poem addressed to him (633). The claim is qualified further by Dorothy's mention in late November that "William has not done anything of importance at his great work" and that "two little poems" inspired by the tour in Scotland are "all that he has actually done lately" (633). While Reed concludes that some work on the *Prelude* was undertaken just before the trip to Scotland, it is doubtful that any further work took place until late December or early January. In lieu of any existing work for the *Recluse* or for the *Prelude*, what does appear to have been seeded by the trip to Scotland is a distinction between the writing of "a Philosophical Poem and a narrative one," with the latter defined more precisely, as "a narrative Poem of the Epic kind" (EY 594).

That by the summer of 1806 Wordsworth had put paid to this ambition is made clear by a passage from *Home at Grasmere*: "Then farewell to the Warrior's deeds, farewell / All hope, which once and long was mine, to fill / The heroic trumpet with the muse's breath!" (953–55). But, like a family of ghosts, those deeds would return periodically to haunt the poet, not least when visiting the sites associated with Wallace's name. In the summers of 1803 and 1814, when Wordsworth stood at Cora Linn, and again in 1819 when he recalled those visits while revising the *Prelude*, he was reminded of his attempts to write a long, heroic poem in the Miltonic manner. That memory was, in turn, triggered by thoughts of the much greater whole, the *Recluse*, of which the unfinished poem to Coleridge could be considered a mere part while the unrealized heroic poem, with its investment in forces of dissent and division, could, within a context of international and national conflict, be regarded as a dangerous distraction. Thus, while a river runs through *The River Duddon: A Series of Sonnets: Vaudracour and Julia; and Other Poems*, providing "equal room and freedom for description [and] incident" while supplying "a natural connection to the parts, and unity to the whole" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 2: 195–96), closer scrutiny, of the sonnets and of their accompanying poems, tends to muddy this impression, creating countercurrents, stirring up alluvial deposits that originate in earlier, abandoned contexts and that point toward a different understanding of the relations between parts and of the unity of the whole.

## NOTES

1. See, e.g., Gill 163 and Fulford 102–08.
2. The first three lines of the poem are quoted by Dorothy in her *Tour* under August 31, 1803. See *DWJ* 1: 304–05. These lines appear in print in the “Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes” on p. 284 of the 1820 Duddon volume, but the poem was not published in its entirety until the 1827 *Poetical Works*. For further details, see Wordsworth, *Cornell Wordsworth* (hereafter *CW*), 415–19. Quotations from Wordsworth’s poetry are taken from the corresponding Cornell editions listed in the Works Cited.
3. For an insightful discussion of Hemans’s poem and related versifications of the Wallace legend, see Goslee.
4. For a reading of Agamben and Wordsworth that bears on this notion, see Shaw.
5. See *Georgics* book 1: “How oft we saw Aetna flood the Cyclopes’ fields, when streams poured from her rent furnaces, and she whirled balls of flame and molten rocks! . . . the Alps rocked with unwonted terrors . . . Eridanus, king of rivers, washed away in the swirl of his mad eddy whole forests” (Virgil 113–14). The connection between “The Brownie’s Cell” and *Georgics* book 1 is discussed in further detail in Shaw 260–61.
6. Tim Fulford’s exemplary reading of “The Brownie’s Cell” underpins this account. See Fulford 114–29.

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## QUERIES TO THE AUTHOR

**Q1.** Au: Your article has been lightly edited for grammar, clarity, consistency, and conformity to journal style, including issues of hyphenation and capitalization. The *MLA Handbook* is followed for matters of style, and *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* is followed for spelling. Please read your proof carefully to make sure that your meaning has been retained. **Important:** Please do not modify the existing text on the proof pdf (i.e., do not use “edit text” or other content-editing tools that will not show your changes), but please instead use the annotation tools to add your changes to the pdf (i.e., they will show up as marked inserts/deletions and/or comments). Note that any nonvisible changes made to the existing proof will not be made by the typesetter.

**Q2.** Au: Please note that British English spellings and punctuation have been changed to American English spellings and punctuations throughout (e.g., “coloured” to “colored”).

**Q3.** Au: Per journal style, when abbreviations for titles are used (e.g., *DWJ*), they are spelled out at their first mention in the text, so I’ve added some additional information to the first in-text citations of all such cited sources. I’ve also changed “i.” to “1:” to indicate that these citations come from vol. 1. If this is incorrect, please let me know.

**Q4.** Au: Journal style calls for citations of lines of poetry to be identified as such (so as not to confuse them with page citations) when this information is not clear from the context. Please check to make sure all line citations that may be mistaken for page citations are identified as lines rather than pages, esp. in running text.

**Q5.** Au: Do you mean “radical enthusiasm” here? Or is “radial enthusiasm” correct?

**Q6.** Au: Journal style calls for the titles of poems that are part of a larger collection to be in quotation marks rather than italics, so I’ve made that change here and throughout, OK?

**Q7.** Au: Are lines 7–18 also from the *Shorter Poems*? Since you’ve cited other works between the first poetry extract and this one, it may be helpful to repeat the source of the stanzas here.

**Q8.** Au: Since the *Poems in Two Volumes* is only cited here in this paragraph, I’ve not included “[hereafter *PTV*]” in this citation. Other citations that were only cited once in the text (and that originally had an abbreviation provided in the Works Cited list) also use only a spelled out version of their titles in in-text citations. OK?

**Q9.** Au: Is the quote “continual dread” from “(14)” here from Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue or *Descriptive Sketches*?

**Q10.** Au: Please specify which Wordsworth source is being cited here with “(16).”

**Q11.** Au: Are the numbers in parentheses here (i.e., 1087, 1089, 1079) references to lines in the *Prelude*? (Since you have a parenthetical page citation

for the work by Walker between these quotes and the lines of poetry above, it may be helpful to repeat the source to avoid confusion.)

**Q12.** Au: re n. 5: Is the first set of ellipses in the original, and the second to indicate your own omission?

**Q13.** Au: Since this comes from Book 1, I've assumed it is in vol. 1 of the 2-volume work and adjusted the citation accordingly. If this incorrect, please let me know.

**Q14.** Au: What does *MS* stand for here in the attribution line? Can line numbers be given instead, for consistency with the attribution lines for other poetry extracts?

**Q15.** Au: Is "1794–1804" the title of vol. 1 of the *Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*?