5

Wordsworth in 'The Churchyard among the Mountains'

CUCKOOS AND CUCKOO-CLOCKS: THE LIVING DEATH OF FAME

> The accounts from Rydal are alarming. I fear that the great poet is approaching to what will be the commencement of his fame as a poet—For there seems an unwillingness to acknowledge the highest merit in any living man—

In April 1850 Henry Crabb Robinson paradoxically 'fear[ed]' the death of his friend the 'great poet', yet had to welcome the author's death that conferred immortal life on the surviving works.[1] Robinson recognizes that readers' tendency to conflate works and man destabilizes contemporary critical valuations, an issue Stephen Gill dramatizes in *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (1998) as the coexistence of *two* late-Wordsworths:

> There was 'Wordsworth', the identifying term for an ever-increasing body of poetry and prose, some of which reached back to the end of the previous century . . . But there was also William Wordsworth, Esq., of Rydal Mount, latterly, title-pages proudly announced, 'D. C. L., Poet Laureate, etc. etc.'. . . . Reviews and articles up to 1850 dealing with 'Wordsworth' habitually referred to the Lake District sage in person, as if cherishing his continuing existence among the living.[2]

Gill usefully differentiates the functions of authorship and publishing from those of public image and celebrity; yet the honorifics after Wordsworth's name on later title-pages—public office and establishment respectability used as marketing tools—hint that the separation of the two was more rhetorical than actual.

[1] *HCR* ii. 724. [2] Gill, 81.

Wordsworth's death on 23 April 1850 should mark the definitive separation of transcendent poetry from ephemeral poet. Coincidental details endorsed death's canonizing power; 23 April was Shakespeare's birth- and death-day, an anniversary identifying Wordsworth as the Victorian Shakespeare. Wordsworth's physiological death may be timed precisely by Isabella Fenwick's Swiss cuckoo-clock ('Mr. Wordsworth breathed his last calmly, passing away almost insensibly, exactly at twelve o'clock, while the cuckoo clock was striking the hour'); yet some newspapers and periodicals' comparative indifference suggested that the 'immortal' Wordsworth was long dead.[3] Nothing new had appeared since *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* (1842), and some papers identified *Yarrow Revisited, and other Poems* (1835) as the last significant publication, while his acceptance of the Laureateship on Robert Southey's death in 1843 was conditional on its being purely honorary. 'The death of a poet creates an official vacancy—the Laureate Wordsworth has departed. It is an historical fact, but not more; for he had long been withdrawn from the world of active life, and even his pen had forgotten its function.' *The Spectator* does not display even conventional grief; it chooses the Saturday of Wordsworth's funeral to object that he functioned neither as Laureate nor poet, that the 'death of the poet' (the creative faculty's extinction) is old news: '[H]is glory was on the shelves: man and public officer, he was unknown to the world—was but "a wandering voice" of the past', the poet of 'To the Cuckoo' (1804).[4] The tropaic transmogrification of living writer into living works also suggests the 'glorious' poetic soul had passed into a 'shelved' body. *The Illustrated London News* notice was a mere caption to a large engraving of Rydal Mount:

> [W]e announce the death of William Wordsworth, one of the last and most illustrious of a race of poets now all but extinct . . . Full of years and of honours, the venerable bard has passed from amongst us, to rejoin his illustrious friends and contemporaries, Coleridge and Southey. We have no wish, now that the tomb is about to receive his mortal remains, to submit to the cold analysis of criticism the inspirations of his genius.[5]

[3] Edward Quillinan's journal, quoted in *Memoirs*, ii. 506–7.

[4] 'News of the Week', *The Spectator*, 23 (27 Apr. 1850), 385; 'William Wordsworth', *The Athenaeum*, 27 Apr. 1850, 448.

[5] 'Death of the Poet Wordsworth', *The Illustrated London News*, 16 (27 Apr. 1850), 296.

Wordsworth's contemporary relevance is subordinated to his nostalgic but redundant character as a Romantic relic, survivor of an illustrious but defunct 'race of poets'. Etiquette not emotion restrains the dissecting 'cold analysis of criticism' (the 'inspirations of his genius' might not survive the examination). The 'venerable bard' overstayed his welcome, too long surviving not only 'contemporaries', but aftercomers. The late Wordsworth had been enshrined in a temple of fame founded on others' deaths, as suggested by the poetic death register of the 'Extempore Effusion Upon the Death of James Hogg' (1835), the lingering voice of the mourner asserting his survival. Of the casualties of the 1820s (Keats, Shelley, Byron), 1830s (Hazlitt, Scott, Crabbe, Lamb, Coleridge, Hemans, Godwin, Landon), and early 1840s (Southey, Campbell), only Rogers, Hunt and Landor survived Wordsworth into the high Victorian age, living fossils in a cabinet of curiosities.

One effect of survival was Wordsworth's anticipation of posterity. Gill's anecdotes of pilgrimage and relic-gathering—from Elizabeth Barrett's delight at receiving 'a slip of green' from Wordsworth's garden in 1841, to the 'two thousand names' entered in the Visitors Book during the 1840s—are graphic indicators of Wordsworth's premature immortality: 'For the first time in English history a writer's home had become a place of general pilgrimage while its saintly incumbent was still alive.'[6] Visiting in 1838, American senator Charles Sumner reported 'I have seen Wordsworth! How odd it seemed to knock at a neighbour's door, and inquire, "Where does *Mr.* Wordsworth live?" Think of rapping at Westminster Abbey, and asking for Mr. Shakespeare, or Mr. Milton!'[7] 'Wordsworth' signifies first a body of canonical literature, making it incredible not only that Sumner has 'seen Wordsworth', but that a '*Mr*. Wordsworth' is still 'living' anywhere. The pilgrim's comparison with other immortals (mistakenly imagined as residents of Poets' Corner) tropes Wordsworth as already translated.

The Victorian Wordsworth had occupied a liminal position between creative demise and the works' perpetual life, minimizing his death's impact, diffusing the border between animation and decay, and suggesting why pilgrims transferred their devotions readily to Wordsworth's grave in St Oswald's churchyard, Grasmere. Wordsworth's grave was an intensely popular 'shrine' for actual and

[6] Gill, 10, 14, 11. [7] Ibid. 14.

imaginative pilgrimage, a 'terminal' site creating hundreds of representations. Few readers regretted that the Poet Laureate had no public funeral or Poets' Corner grave, and pilgrims actively celebrated what Joseph John Murphy called 'his low but honoured grave', realizing his fantasy of future generations coming from around the world to 'call the place their spirits' fatherland'.[8]

Little attention has been paid to the grave's strong presence in the post-1850 reception, and Gill does not include it with the factors which 'began the process of transmitting an image of Wordsworth for posterity—the appearance of *The Prelude*, the publication of the official biography, and the erection of public monuments'.[9] *The Prelude* (1850) and Dr Christopher Wordsworth's *Memoirs of William Wordsworth* (1851), entering the public domain in close succession and because of the poet's departure, profoundly influenced mid-Victorian reception; but they were also unsatisfactory memorials. While Wordsworth's continuing presence was sought through houses, landscapes and landmarks, personal effects, manuscripts, and published books, he was uniquely 'present' at the grave. The Victorians' view of the poet's corpse as a physical link to transcendent genius helps account for their ongoing obsession with his burial-place, as does the country churchyard's iconic status during the 1840s burial crisis, and the authority found for reforming Anglican churchyards (and discrediting the modern cemetery) in his 'Essay upon Epitaphs'. Wordsworth's biographical afterlife is involved with his grave's iconography, a fertile originary site, place of inspiration and creative renewal for many Victorian poets.

WORDSWORTH'S MORTAL REMAINS

Visiting the Lakes in 1855, Nathaniel Hawthorne almost 'pilfer[ed] some flower or ivy-leaf . . . to be kept as sacred memorials' from the *wrong* garden ('How queer, if we should have carried away ivy-leaves and tender recollections from this domicile of a respectable quaker'), but the grave was unmistakable: 'I plucked some grass and weeds from it; and as he was buried within so few years, they may fairly be thought to have drawn their nutriment from Wordsworth's

[8] 'The Yews of Borrowdale' (1855), ll. 10, 27, *Sonnets and Other Poems Chiefly Religious* (1890), 63.
[9] Gill, 28–9.

mortal remains—and I gathered them from just above his head.'[10] The souvenir is not evidence only that *I was there*, but that Wordsworth was too; it is substantially not associatively Wordsworthian, because *something* has passed from the poet's *brain* to the grass—although the modern reader baulks at Hawthorne's implication that the sprigs are literal relics of genius. 'Wordsworth's mortal remains' appear uncannily potent, though exploited by the visitor's activity ('I plucked . . . I gathered').[11] Yet authority for this materialist reading of spirit may be read in *The Prelude*'s final lines, where the poem's 'lasting inspiration' is identified as 'how the mind of man becomes | A thousand times more beautiful than the earth | On which he dwells', while at the same time being 'Of substance and of fabric more divine'.[12] As Andrew Bennett argues, 'In admitting the "substance and fabric" of the mind even while transcendentalizing it, Wordsworth opens the way, at the end of the poem on the growth of the poet's mind, for a singular materiality of mind, the remains of consciousness as not only real but corporeal.'[13] Bennett's suggestion that this conclusion performs the 'dissolution of the conventional opposition between the mind or soul or spirit as "exalted" and "divine", as permanent or eternal on the one hand, and the body, "frame or "earth" as temporary or transient on the other', is especially pertinent in the immediate context of the poet's death, where the Wordsworthian spirit was sought within a climate of mourning.

The poet lived in several houses, but had only one 'last home'; association consecrated the body's location, creating an enduringly potent point of contact. The site of Wordsworth's physical remains influenced constructions of Wordsworth significantly more than Thomas Woolner's wall tablet in Grasmere Church or Frederick Thrupp's statue in Westminster Abbey (both 1854)—and more successfully inspired emotional contemplation of his memory. Gill comments that late in the century 'the Wordsworth who had become a national monument continued to claim readers as a vital force'; many such readers went to the grave, which shared with the poetry the redemptive potential to save Wordsworth from becoming a monumental dead weight.

[10] Hawthorne, 166, 169.

[11] Hawthorne notes that the 'grass is quite worn away from the top . . . it looks as if people had stood upon it' (168).

[12] *The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind (1805 Text)*, ed. E. de Selincourt, corr. S. Gill (1970), 241, Bk. xiii. ll. 436, 439–41, 445.

[13] Bennett, 97.

Only Richard Monckton Milnes, defending poetry's honour, thought 'Wordsworth should have had a public funeral'.[14] Isabella Fenwick initially objected to a public monument: '[W]hen I think of a monument in Westminster Abbey, and know his feeling and opinion of such things, I do dislike the idea with all my disliking feelings. I never heard him approve much of any memorial excepting for statesmen and warriors . . . Who that has visited, or shall ever visit, his grave in the churchyard among the mountains would wish for any monument?'[15] Despite his position as the state incarnation of 'Poetry', Wordsworth was not in the public domain like 'statesmen and warriors': the grave was complete in its natural simplicity, with a small, plain slate headstone, inscribed only with name and year of death. (Fenwick did, however, contribute to the public subscription for the Poets' Corner monument.) William Knight later considered Grasmere a 'fitter resting-place for Wordsworth—a quiet spot amongst the graves of the "statesmen," in a region imperishably associated with himself—than a corner in Westminster Abbey would have been', consciously associating Wordsworth with the local 'statesmen', the Dales yeomen.[16] Wordsworth's grave represents the epitome of nineteenth-century anti-monumental pastoralism, which valued affective memorials rather than didactic ideal sculpture or epitaphs. The anti-monumental strain is strong in Wordsworth's poetry; in 'The Brothers' and Book 6 of *The Excursion* ('The Church-yard among the Mountains'), the unmarked grave is not neglected or forgotten, but intelligible only to local people. This harmony between Wordsworth's public image, poetics, and grave, made the site appear poetically patterned and intentional: Wordsworth's material grave fulfilled expectations formed by literary ideals.

'ESSAY UPON EPITAPHS'

The anti-monumental pastoral tradition had already been boosted by a Wordsworthian text ostensibly committed to monumental commemoration, the 'Essay upon Epitaphs'.[17] Of three linked articles drafted in late 1809 and early 1810, only the first was published in

[14] 29 Apr. 1850, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers* (3 vols., 1938), ii. 697.
[15] *Autobiography* (2 vols., 1885), ii. 56, 61.
[16] *The Life of William Wordsworth* (3 vols., 1889), iii. 491.
[17] 'Essays upon Epitaphs', Owen & Smyser, ii. 45–119.

his lifetime (the other two remained in unrevised manuscript drafts until Grosart's 1876 edition of the *Prose*). Initially accessible to the limited readership of Coleridge's periodical *The Friend* (22 February 1810), by 1850 the 'Essay upon Epitaphs' was well known within Wordsworth's œuvre. Adapted as a documentary pendant to the first edition of *The Excursion* (1814), it was reprinted in this context (1820), and thereafter in the *Poetical Works* (1827; 1832; 1836–7; 1849–50) and *Poems* (1845). W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser note that variants indicate that Wordsworth reviewed the Essay at every opportunity, although revisions were minor after 1827. At the zenith of Wordsworth's cultural authority (1835–50), he also gave permission for the Essay to appear in three editions of Joseph Snow's *Lyra Memorialis: Original Epitaphs and Churchyard Thoughts* (1845; 1847; 1857).

Snow's book participates in the broader Anglican reform movement, by urging that Romanist and secular motifs in epitaphs and monuments be replaced with 'pure' Christian doctrine. Snow was judged to 'suggest a purer taste and a more impressive style in our churchyard memorials, and by every word and thought to point through the shadow of the tomb to the brightness and light beyond it'; the model texts were 'Sermons in Stones'.[18] Snow coyly acknowledges Wordsworth's useful authority: 'The Author avails himself of the opportunity publicly to express his thanks to Mr. Wordsworth for the ready permission accorded to him of enriching this little volume with an Essay which enforces, in language just and elegant, the principles on which Epitaphs should be constructed.'[19]

Snow's project, and his re-presentation of Wordsworth's text, typifies the historical moment in being a reaction against threatening burial and commemoration innovations. The doctrinal purity of churchyard inscriptions was not a burning public issue of the 1840s, unlike closing the city churchyards blamed for cholera outbreaks and other public health outrages, and creating secure, respectable burial-space for the urban populace. *Lyra Memorialis* represents the Anglican backlash against dissenting, secularizing, and commercializing cemeteries, which deprived parish priests of burial and service fees, weakened authority over parishioners, and gave the bereaved

[18] Joseph Snow, *Lyra Memorialis: Original Epitaphs and Churchyard Thoughts, in Verse. With an Essay, by William Wordsworth* (1847), from 'Notices of the First Edition'.

[19] Snow, *Lyra*, preface to the 2nd edn., n.p.

more freedom of choice. The practical Anglican response was to repackage the rustic churchyard as the site of true Christian piety, associated with establishment morals and politics. Wordsworth's 'Essay', written as though there was no mainstream alternative to the consecrated Anglican churchyard (as in 1810 there was not), is appropriated to Snow's covert agenda discrediting progressive burial and calling the faithful back.

The 'Essay' proposes not only an epitaphal poetics, but an aesthetics of burial. Thus Wordsworth's confidence that commemoration evinces an implicitly Christian 'consciousness of a principle of immortality in the human soul' allows the approval of ancient, pagan custom. The advantages of classical extramural interment are considered: 'We might ruminate upon the beauty which the monuments, thus placed, must have borrowed from the surrounding images of nature.'[20] Nature's purpose here is its 'strong appeals to visible appearances' and 'affecting analogies', 'of admonitions and heart-stirring remembrances, like a refreshing breeze that comes without warning, or the taste of the waters of an unexpected fountain'.[21] The allegorical text is grounded in natural phenomena, which are in turn spiritualized by the text; such 'suggestions' gave 'to the language of the senseless stone a voice enforced and endeared by the benignity of that nature with which it was in unison'. The longing to recover a lost 'unison' between nature and language adapts to the conservative, nostalgic ideology of the 1840s: 'We, in modern times, have lost much of these advantages'; 'when death is in our thoughts, nothing can make amends for the want of the soothing influences of nature, and for the absence of those types of renovation and decay'. Even in 1810, Wordsworth lamented the inexorability of urban burial and 'modern' losses; but by mid-century the lack of 'the soothing influences of nature' in burial-places was a high-profile problem; city churchyards lacked nature; cemeteries, as modern institutions, were implicitly against nature.

The 'Essay' quotes from John Edwards's poem 'All Saints Church, Derby', also looking back to a lost ideal of country burial. Wordsworth judiciously edited out Edwards's anti-Catholic bias (which Snow would have found sympathetic), suggesting that Wordsworth originally conceived his aesthetic as transcending historical and sectarian contingencies. His famous celebration of

[20] Owen & Smyser, ii. 50, 53. [21] Ibid. 54.

the country churchyard presents an ideal associated with his own grave:

> A village church-yard, lying as it does in the lap of nature, may indeed be most favourably contrasted with that of a town of crowded population . . . The sensations of pious cheerfulness, which attend the celebration of the sabbath-day in rural places, are profitably chastised by the sight of the graves of kindred and friends, gathered together in that general home towards which the thoughtful yet happy spectators themselves are journeying.[22]

Though abstractly conceived, the description's expressive sympathy invited mid-century readers to read it back into late-Wordsworthian mythology. Authoritative statements give way to tender personal experience, 'sensations of pious cheerfulness' are tempered by profitable chastisement. Wordsworth's domestic vision of the dead 'gathered together in that general home' was written before his own family plot evolved: for later readers, the 'village churchyard' was identifiable as St Oswald's, lying 'in the lap of nature', sanctified by the poet's thoughts and feelings at the 'sight of the graves of kindred and friends', an exemplary text.

The lasting appeal of Wordsworth's plain grassed grave lies partly in its understatement as a monument to past greatness. The overt public memorials tend to didacticism; as Edward Quillinan complained, the *Memoirs* were 'poisoned' by 'Dr. C. W.'s High Church Dogmatism', while readers' responses to *The Prelude* are policed by the author, and public monuments say more about committees than about Wordsworth.[23] By contrast, the grave allows visitors to project onto it their own thoughts and feelings about the poet. Moreover, the natural setting and modest aesthetic realize a Romantic literary convention, in which the poet's ideal grave is a humble grassy mound, minimally marked because, 'a great poet's works are his monument, and every other must be as a molehill beside a pyramid'.[24] The anti-monumental pastoral tradition accounts for a poem such as the Revd Richard Wilton's centennial sonnet 'Gray at Grasmere (1769) and Wordsworth's Grave (1869)'. Wilton reads St Oswald's through the very phrases of Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard': 'There, in that "country churchyard" we may hail | The "heaving turf" where a great Poet slumbers.'[25] For later poets, the organic

[22] Owen & Smyser, ii. 55–6.
[23] Gill, 33. [24] Taylor, *Autobiography*, ii. 59.
[25] *Wood-notes and Church-bells* (1873), 274, ll. 9–10.

iconography of Wordsworth's grave offers a conservative model for creative renewal, drawing inspiration from a seemingly transcendent, eternal tradition.

The author of the 'Essay upon Epitaphs' has no epitaph: according to Edward Quillinan, '[Mary Wordsworth's] Husband had no wish as to his remains, but that they should rest near those of his kindred in Grasmere Church Yard; and all that the family propose to do is to mark his grave by a plain Headstone, with nothing but the name, William Wordsworth, inscribed on it; feeling that it is not for them, but for the Country, to which his fame belongs, to do him more elaborate honour.'[26] While the division between familial and national tribute is sharply drawn, Mary Wordsworth's decision appears to be influenced by the 'Essay's' advice on commemorating 'The mighty benefactors of mankind', who, continuing 'to be known familiarly to latest posterity, do not stand in need of biographic sketches . . . This is already done by their Works, in the memories of men': only their 'naked names, and a grand comprehensive sentiment' are not unworthy tributes.[27] The family's decision is a tacit acknowledgement here that Wordsworth's grave was not a purely private site; by reducing the inscription to 'naked name', the burden of making meaning shifts to the grave-visitors, who are thrown back onto their own associations. The 'epitaph' is transformed into a contemplative text, which allows every visitor to find at the grave a 'Wordsworth' of their own imaginative construction.

'THE HOME OF THE DEAD CHILDREN'

Wordsworth's grave was exclusively his only between 1850 and 1859 when it also became Mary Wordsworth's 'last home'. Wordsworth's grave is at the heart of an extensive family burial-group orientated towards the church, so that the visitor's eye moves between the family headstones and the symbol of Christian community (Fig. 10).

The location of Wordsworth's grave had been determined as early as 4 June 1812, when their 3-year-old daughter Catharine died of an

[26] EQ to HCR, 11 May 1850, *HCR* ii. 730.

[27] Owen & Smyser, ii. 57, 61. For Wordsworth's troubled attempts to compose epitaphs for fellow men of letters, see my 'Epitaphs, Effusions and *Final Memorials*: Wordsworth and the Grave of Charles Lamb', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, NS, 118 (Apr. 2002), 49–63.

Fig. 10 John Brandred, 'Wordsworth's Grave, Grasmere Church Yard' (1852)

aneurysm. In the parents' absence, Dorothy chose the plot in the churchyard adjacent to the parsonage in Grasmere where the family were then living. On 23 June, she wrote to Catherine Clarkson that Catharine 'lies at the South West corner of the church yard under a tall and beautiful hawthorn which stands in the wall. It is visible from Robert Newton's cottage, and you, my beloved friend, I dare-say have often looked at [it]. We have put a small headstone to mark her grave.'[28] The scriptural text chosen was traditional for children's graves: 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God' (Mark 10: 14). When 6-year-old Thomas died from measles on 1 December the same year, Wordsworth chose a separate plot (not standard practice for child-burials) and composed the epitaph, 'Six months to six years added he remain'd', which Mary recalled 'it took him years to produce' (an exaggeration: Dorothy noted on 10 October 1813 that 'I brought the

[28] *WL* iii. 33.

measure of the Darling's tombstone, and William was to have written out the two texts and sent them to me, but it is not done'):[29]

> Here lieth the body of Thomas, the son of
> William and Mary Wordsworth. He died on the
> 1st of December, A.D. 1812.
>
> *Six months to six years added he remain'd*
> *Upon this sinful earth, by sin unstain'd,*
> *O, blessed Lord, whose mercy then remov'd*
> *A child that every eye that look'd on lov'd,*
> *Support us; teach us calmly to resign*
> *What we possess'd and now is wholly Thine.*

The verse reads as a meditation on Catharine's text, a dialogue between Christ's tender authority and the bereaved asking for God's support. The text is carefully patterned: six lines formally recall the six years and six months of Thomas's age, there is gravity in the counterpointed 'sinful earth' and 'sin unstain'd', while the first four rhymes (all verbs) express the epitaph's tension between loss and acceptance (*remain'd, unstain'd, remov'd, lov'd*), resolved by the last couplet's submission (*resign, Thine*). Commentators have questioned why Wordsworth wrote a poem about Catharine—'Surprised by Joy' (1813)—but not Thomas, whose death profoundly affected him.[30] As an obsessive reviser for whom texts were only ever provisionally 'finished', composing epitaphs to be carved in stone was demanding, and his own Essay's admonitions of grave-inscriptions' permanence, made barely two years before, must have come back to haunt him:

> The very form and substance of the monument which has received the inscription, and the appearance of the letters, testifying with what a slow and laborious hand they must have been engraven, might seem to reproach the author who had given way upon this occasion to transports of mind, or to quick turns of conflicting passion; though the same might constitute the life and beauty of a funeral oration or elegiac poem.[31]

Wordsworth's imaginative identification with the slow deliberation of engraving on stone is profound, the very letters 'testify' to their

[29] *The Letters of Mary Wordsworth 1800–1855*, ed. Mary E. Burton (1958), 88; *WL* iii. 128.

[30] e.g., Mary Moorman, 'Wordsworth and His Children', in J. Wordsworth (ed.), *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies in Memory of John Alban Finch* (1970), 123.

[31] Owen & Smyser, ii. 60.

serious intention. The sudden insights and powerful feelings that are the raw stuff of elegiac poetry are actually antipathetic to the epitaph. Read in the context of St Oswald's, Thomas's epitaph is a 'testamentary act' of sacramental earnestness; whereas in the *Poetical Works* (1849–50) 'Surprised by Joy' is amongst the 'Miscellaneous Sonnets', Thomas's epitaph is placed with the 'Epitaphs'.

Although the proximity of these traumatic 'memorials' to the parsonage caused the move to Rydal Mount, on 12 January 1813, Wordsworth was able to look ahead: 'Brother and Sister now rest side [by side] in Grasmere Churchyard where we hope that our dust will one day mingle with theirs'; on 1 February Dorothy reflected that while coming to church at Grasmere 'will be like coming to the home of the dead Children . . . to be entirely removed from them would be a source of lingering regret, and we all wish that our Bodies may lie beside theirs'.[32] Wordsworth carefully monitored the churchyard's evolving landscape, and in 1819 used Sir George Beaumont's money to plant eight young yew trees. He recalled this regenerative act with some pride in 1843: 'Having said much of the injury done in this Church-yard let me add that one is at liberty to look forward to a time when by the growth of the Yew Trees, thriving there, a solemnity will be spread over the place that will in some degree make amends for the old simple character which has already been so much encroached upon & will be still more every year.'[33] He also protested when an incongruously large obelisk was raised overshadowing the children's graves; although the owner refused to remove the monument, it providentially collapsed during a storm and was not replaced.[34] The yews grew, as did the posthumous family. Wordsworth's inscription for the grave of Sara Hutchinson, who died in 1835, emphasizes this when it states:

> Near the graves of two young children, removed from a family to which through life she was devoted, here lies the body of Sarah Hutchinson, the beloved sister and faithful friend of mourners who have caused this stone to be erected with an earnest wish that their own remains may be laid by her side, and a humble hope that through Christ they may together be made partakers of the same blessed resurrection. She was born at Penrith 1st January, 1775, and died at Rydal 23rd June, 1835.

[32] *WL* iii. 69, 78.

[33] W. Wordsworth, *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. J. Curtis (1993), 84.

[34] See *WL* iv. 532.

The inscription constitutes a testament carved in stone, a plea to surviving family-members that the aging 'mourners'—William, Mary, and Dorothy—should lie together, near Catharine and Thomas. Every death strengthened the complex emotional ties between living and dead, and by the late 1840s the dead family was a formidable presence, entirely occupying the south-west corner of the churchyard. The pressure on space was such that in choosing Dora's grave in July 1847, Wordsworth also had to reserve space for his and Mary's plot. On Hartley Coleridge's death in January 1849, the elderly poet acted *in loco parentis* and selected his grave close by, reminding the sexton to 'Keep the ground for us,—we are old people, and it cannot be for long.'[35]

Wordsworth's thirty-eight-year proprietorial, emotional, and imaginative engagement with St Oswald's helped to guarantee his desired grave. It is a sustained and deliberate 'testamentary act', in Millgate's phrase, the shaping of a defined posthumous family identity, in which Wordsworth's public status as Poet Laureate was minimized, within a country churchyard guaranteed preservation by the historic importance of the Wordsworth circle. Yet ironically Wordsworth's aim of creating a private grave protected from public curiosity by the familial and local context, and Grasmere's geographical remoteness, was undone not only by the insatiable nineteenth-century appetite for biography, and the rise of mass tourism in the latter half of the century, but also because the churchyard grave can be read as an overdetermined and authoritative Wordsworthian text: it *is* 'The Church-Yard in the Mountains' of *The Excursion*.[36]

'MEMORIAL VERSES'

The earliest representations of Wordsworth's grave are in elegiac poems by family friends. Matthew Arnold's 'Memorial Verses. April 27, 1850', which appeared signed 'A' in the June *Fraser's Magazine*, is still the best-known tribute poem.[37] It belongs to the genre of critical elegy or 'tombeau', which Arnold facetiously described in a May 1850 letter to Clough as 'dirg[ing] W. W. *in the grand style*';

[35] *Poems by Hartley Coleridge* (2 vols., 1851), i. p. cciii.

[36] See John Strachan, 'Wordsworth's Memorials: A New Letter by Edward Quillinan', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, NS 109 (Jan. 2000), 2–4.

[37] 'A.', 'Memorial Verses. April 27, 1850', *Fraser's*, 41 (1850), 630.

however, Arnold's attendance at Wordsworth's funeral (hence the title date) gives a more than conventional force to references to the burial-place.[38] 'Memorial Verses' begins and ends with the grave's literary significance. In the opening stanza the grave figures as terminal and silencing: after the deaths of Goethe and Byron, 'The last poetic voice is dumb. | We stand to-day at Wordsworth's tomb.'[39] By contextualizing Wordsworth's death with Goethe's and Byron's, Arnold extends the poem's reach chronologically and geographically; just as by using the first-person plural he speaks also for the nation, or humanity. This economically indicates a series of losses in which the latest is terminal, and poetry appears dead (suggested by the dumb/tomb half-rhyme). After the earlier poets' shocking impact—Byron's 'fount of fiery life', Goethe's apocalyptic message '*The end is everywhere, | Art still has truth, take refuge there!*'—Wordsworth appears as a 'soothing voice' with irreplaceable 'healing power', which continues to speak:

> Keep fresh the grass upon his grave,
> O Rotha, with thy living wave!
> Sing him thy best! for few or none
> Hears thy voice right, now he is gone.[40]

In contrast to the earlier conventional and general formula 'tomb', this grave is specific, organic, and vital. The elegiac convention of pathetic fallacy is particularized in the River Rothay, which skirts the churchyard's edge. Thus although Wordsworth is 'gone', his sympathy with nature is projected in the river's 'song'; the continuing voice is still Wordsworthian. By reading the beneficial effects of Wordsworth's poetry from the gravesite, Arnold sets a precedent for self-reflexive interpretations of the grave, poet's grave as poem.

Contemporaneous, though unpublished until the 1870s, is Eliza Fletcher's 'Thoughts on Leaving Grasmere Churchyard, April 27, 1850, After the Funeral of William Wordsworth'. While Fletcher's abstract 'thoughts' ascend to Wordsworth's moral and spiritual teaching, they grow from personal experience: 'We saw him laid within the quiet grave, | Near to the yew he planted' and contemplation of nature's debt to her departed poet: 'All Nature glowed

[38] MA to A. H. Clough [May 1850], *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang (3 vols., 1996), i. 172. On 'tombeaux' see Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet* (1981), ch. 6.

[39] *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth and Miriam Allott (1979), 239, ll. 4–5.

[40] 'Memorial Verses', ll. 13, 27–8, 34, 63, 71–5.

instinct with tender love | For him, her fervent worshipper.'[41] The poem re-enacts remembered grave-meditation, emotionally heightened in the funeral context so that even the birdsong seems to 'welcome him to his last home'.

By the time Arnold's 'Memorial Verses' was published in June, Wordsworth's grave was established in public commemorations. A 'Sonnet on the Death of Wordsworth' by 'H.M.R.' printed in *The Spectator* on 25 May had fixed the grave as the focal point of the Westmoreland landscape: 'Beneath the solemn shadow he doth sleep | Of his own mountains! closed the poet's eyes | To all earth's beauty—wood, and lake, and skies.'[42] Through quotation and allusion the second quatrain describes the scenery not just as consummately Wordsworthian, but as the poet's own text, while the sestet addresses directly the poet's departed spirit, refusing to distinguish between physical landscape and literary representation: 'These, Wordsworth! thou has left', to celebrate the 'immortal train' of 'deep human sympathies' (ll. 9–11). By this logic the breeze is heard as 'a rich undying strain', the poet's song continuing through 'his own mountains': the grave is the foundation of the sonnet's unifying conceit, the focal point of a memorial dispersed across an entire region.

WORDSWORTH'S POSTHUMOUS POEM

The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem; By William Wordsworth was the first substantial official publication issuing from Wordsworth's death; the poem was on sale by 27 July, exactly three months after the funeral, giving Wordsworth first say. Millgate draws a persuasive comparison between Thomas Hardy ghost-writing his own 'Life' for posthumous publication, and Wordsworth deferring *The Prelude*; these differently disingenuous autobiographies each adopts the character of 'a projective "testament" *d'outre-tombe*, a final uninterruptible and unanswerable contribution to that long dialogue between himself and his critics in which strategic and tactical advantage had seemed always to belong

[41] *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher with Letters and Other Family Memorials: Edited by the Survivor of her Family [Lady] Mary Richardson* (1875), 284, ll. 1–2, 6–7.

[42] 'Sonnet on the Death of Wordsworth', *The Spectator*, 23 (25 May 1850), 494, ll. 1–3.

to [the critics]'.[43] Reviews indicate the strategy's success, at least in the short term: as a verse autobiography—fusing works and man—*The Prelude* was indeed 'unanswerable'; its monumental scale alone asserted authorial resistance to superficial assimilation. *The Prelude*'s deliberate posthumous publication set a trend, famously followed by Carlyle's *Reminiscences* (1881) and Trollope's *Autobiography* (1883), for having the last word. Some early readers explicitly interpreted the poem as posthumous, a Wordsworthian utterance sanctified by its author's demise, but also raising questions of whether the poem was an adequate substitute or memorial. In May 1850 Crabb Robinson's correspondent Catherine Buck Clarkson felt an urgent subjective involvement both in the poet's death and the *Prelude*'s publication, indeed she could scarcely distinguish one from the other: 'I could half fancy that people in general have felt the Solemnity of Wordsworth's death as I did nor will the feeling with me ever pass away. I shall never feel exactly as I did before—I hope that the Poem on his own Life will be got out as soon as possible lest I should not live to see it.'[44] Clarkson's vocabulary is strangely permeated with death motifs and unconscious puns, from the *passing away* of feelings to fears of her own demise; her impatience is caused by hoping that in 'the Poem on his own Life' Wordsworth left an intelligible spiritual 'message' for later generations.

Early reviews consistently read the fourteen-book *Prelude* through the lens of Wordsworth's recent death. *Fraser's Magazine* secreted the title and publication details in a footnote, and headed the review 'Wordsworth's Posthumous Poem':

> The recent death of the illustrious poet of Rydal Mount has fixed public expectation upon a work which is well known to have been long written by Mr. Wordsworth. The poem, although it had been read, at least partially, to some of his most intimate friends, was, by reason of the personal details and revelations which constituted its peculiarity, and now form its paramount interest, reserved by Mr. Wordsworth for publication after his decease.[45]

The motif of 'recent death' *fixing* readers' expectations applies broadly to death's role in setting the terms of *The Prelude*'s reception. The transfer of 'public expectation' from the 'illustrious poet' to the work released by death is dramatized, privileging autobiographical revelation. Although primitive curiosity is then recast as an intensifi-

[43] Millgate, 186–7. [44] *HCR* ii. 732.
[45] 'Wordsworth's Posthumous Poem', *Fraser's*, 42 (Aug. 1850), 119.

cation of 'The deep interest which attaches to every production of Mr. Wordsworth's genius', the autobiographical imperative overshadows poetical and critical attributes. *Fraser's* gives a chronological digest of life-events through quotations, culminating in a eulogaic summary of the poet's life and works, employing the 'raised' discourse of obituary:

[T]his remarkable production of the great poet who, full of years and of earthly honours, has been recently called to the presence of Him whose glory was ever paramount in his thoughts, and by whose Spirit his own was strengthened and sustained in the highest flights of his genius. All that was mortal of the illustrious dead now reposes amidst the beauty which inspired his living strains, and which, by association with his name, acquires a touching interest as endurable as the hills which he so long 'looked upon with tenderness,' and the streams which he loved.[46]

The 'illustrious' poet's recent death inhibits critical analysis: hence the hyperbolic but vague description 'this remarkable production', conventional sentiment and phrasing, and the retreat to biographical vagueness. Although the reviewer invokes Wordsworth's transcendent '[s]pirit', the body 'repos[ing]' in the landscape that inspired him is crucial to his rhetorical strategy. The sacred 'mortal remains' are cited tactically, justifying the evasion of the reviewer's duty to engage with the work's purpose, method and artistic success: the (euphemized) corpse asserts a *noli me tangere* prohibition against analysing the corpus. As in H.M.R.'s 'Sonnet', the landscape around the grave is transformed by its 'endurable' (in the rare sense of *enduring*) Wordsworthian associations; the allusion to 'To Joanna', one of the 'Poems on the Naming of Places', inscribes the entire scene as a dispersed Wordsworthian memorial.[47] *The Prelude* is ostensibly the subject, but the reviewer takes flight to the more legible posthumous Wordsworthian text, the grave.

Reviewers who did engage critically with *The Prelude* were under pressure to read the final work as an authoritative crowning achievement; a critical myth reflected in the editorial orthodoxy of taking the last edition revised during the author's lifetime as an authoritative text (as in the designation of Whitman's 1892 revision of *Leaves of Grass* as the 'death-bed edition'). This destabilizing influence on

[46] Ibid. 129.
[47] City-bred Joanna is 'slow to meet the sympathies of them | Who look upon the hills with tenderness'. *WWP* i. 445, ll. 6–7.

reception was exacerbated by the disjunction between the Wordsworth who had just died, and the poem's author. As R. H. Brabant commented to Crabb Robinson, 'It will serve somewhat to lighten the gloom which thousands feel at England's loss of . . . her greatest poet . . . that [Wordsworth] has left as a bequest—so large a specimen of his powers in their vigour.'[48] Such a 'specimen' had arguably not appeared since *The Excursion* (1814): the advertisement to Moxon's first edition of *The Prelude* carefully described it as 'commenced in the beginning of the year 1799, and completed in the summer of 1805', masking the substantial later revisions.[49] This work of a writer theoretically unrecognizable as the late-career seer of Rydal resists assimilation to a memorial discourse dedicated to 'the great poet . . . full of years and of earthly honours'. Gill suggests that '*The Prelude* was absorbed without damaging shock to the prevailing image of the lately dead, great poet': this easy assimilation might also be read as a sign of the active frustration of readers' desires for revelation.[50]

Reviews often quoted the poem's opening and closing passages as prophecies of Wordsworth's late-career fame now realized. The overdetermined image of Wordsworth as a religious poet by 1850 gave a marvellous prescience to Book I's '—to the open fields I told | A prophecy:—poetic numbers came | Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe | A renovated spirit singled out, | Such hope was mine, for holy services'.[51] The prophetic note is reiterated after the 'proof' of the main body of the poem. The short concluding book culminates in a confiding direct address to the then merely absent Coleridge, hoping he will soon be 'Restored to us, in renovated health', whereupon 'we may draw | Some pleasure from this Offering of my love'.[52] By 1850 this was the dead speaking to the dead, and readers knew that hopes for Coleridge's renovation had tragically failed, as had the confident prediction that after only 'a few short years of useful life . . . | Thy monument of glory will be raised' (XIV. 430, 432). However, the failures of Coleridge's life and art are muted in the

[48] *HCR* ii. 753.

[49] *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem; By William Wordsworth* (1850), p. v. As Sally Bushell notes, '*The Excursion* is frequently treated as an "epitaph" marking the death of Wordsworth's great poetic years and correspondingly placed as the final chapter of critical texts' ('Exempla in *The Excursion:* The Purpose of the Pastor's Epitaphic Tales', *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, NS 105 (1999), 16).

[50] Gill, 29.

[51] *Prelude* (1850), 5, I. 51–4.

[52] Ibid. 371, XIV. 426, 428–9.

concluding affirmation, which dissolves distinctions between speaker and addressee to celebrate 'what we have learnt to know' regardless of the world's scorn or ignorance. The poem's sustained final sentence speaks to the future, which now listens: 'Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak | A lasting inspiration', 'we will teach them how, | Instruct them how the mind of man becomes | A thousand times more beautiful' (ll. 444–5, 447–9). The prophecy (triumphantly quoted in *Fraser's*) appeared gloriously confirmed for the poem's first readers, holding in their hands the physical embodiment of a 'lasting inspiration', that advised them of the divinity of 'the mind of Man', revealed in *The Prelude* and confirmed by the popular adulation of Wordsworth.[53]

MEMOIRS: THE LAUREATE IN A SHOVEL HAT

Alan G. Hill comments that Wordsworth 'had always been opposed to biographies of poets, believing, as stated in the *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (1816), that "if their works be good, they contain within themselves all that is necessary to their being comprehended and relished"'.[54] Christopher Wordsworth recalled that 'Mr. Wordsworth, in a way very earnest, and to me very impressive and remarkable, disclaimed all value for, all concern about, posthumous fame'; Mary wrote to her son in 1850 that 'to *you* who have so often heard him speak so strongly on the subject, I need not repeat that he thought an Author's—especially a Poet's works, were the only biography the world had any right to call for'; Quillinan too recalled Fenwick's confidence that 'Mr W. did not wish for a full biography in the fashion of the times . . . he even detested the idea of it as a vehicle of impertinence.'[55] However, monitoring the posthumous biographies of friends such as Coleridge and Lamb had forced Wordsworth to confront the inevitability and alarming reality of such posthumous narratives—and the expedience of pre-emptive strike. Wordsworth censored the letters he reluctantly contributed to Thomas Noon Talfourd's *The Letters of Charles Lamb, with a Sketch of His Life* (1837), but his primary concern was the Coleridge industry.[56] He urged Coleridge's executor to halt Thomas de

[53] 'Wordsworth's Posthumous Poem', 129.
[54] *WL* viii. 281 n.
[55] *Memoirs*, ii. 466; *WL* viii. 286–7; *HCR* ii. 740.
[56] *Fenwick*, p. x.

Quincey's 1834 *Tait's Magazine* articles 'so injurious, unfeeling, and untrue', and doubted Joseph Cottle's motives in publishing his *Early Recollections; Chiefly Relating to the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1837).

These striking examples of the authority lost at death resolved Wordsworth to sabotage Barron Field's 'Memoirs of the Life and Poetry of William Wordsworth, with Extracts from his Letters to the Author'; the poet's 1840 campaign of pedantic corrections and annotations effectively censored Field. This narrow escape, plus Wordsworth's reluctant decision to prevent piracy by publishing early manuscript poems *The Borderers* and *Guilt and Sorrow* (1842), determined him to accept Isabella Fenwick's help in recording the notes on 350 poems dictated in the first half of 1843, now known as the 'Fenwick Notes'. Although the Notes had more positive stimulus from family trips to the Duddon and Wye valleys, their primary motive was prophylactic, to prevent a biographical free-for-all. Not published complete until 1975, the Fenwick Notes contributed substantially to the *Memoirs*' credibility.

With partial estrangement from Edward Quillinan (the first candidate) after Dora's death, Wordsworth had in November 1847 shifted the responsibility to his nephew Dr Christopher Wordsworth, then Canon of Westminster, to write 'such a brief memoir to be published with his Biographical Poem (after his death) as might be necessary to illustrate his Works'.[57] Friends had reservations about Christopher; he knew little about his uncle's poetry, and was a noted anti-Catholic; Crabb Robinson feared he would 'try to make W: appear as a Puseyite'.[58] Yet he was in other respects an apt instrument for Wordsworth's damage-limitation project. He had the moral credentials of a prominent Churchman and prolific theological author, and a vested interest in protecting family privacy; Wordsworth was also satisfied that they shared a negative view of authorial biography: what better safeguard than appointing a biographer who disapproved of biography?

Wordsworth envisaged the biographical notes only as integrated with *The Prelude*; indeed, forestalling family disputes about his intentions, Wordsworth recorded his nephew's authority and the notes' dependent character in two testamentary memoranda: 'my nephew Dr Chr Wordsworth has kindly undertaken . . . to prepare

[57] *WL* viii. 286. [58] Ibid. 281 n.

for publication any notices of my life that may be deemed necessary to illustrate my writings . . . my family Executors & Friends may furnish him with any information or memorandums that they may possess which he may think useful to aid him in the Work'.[59] The request for co-operation suggests an inclusive attitude towards information-gathering, but the project's scope was soon refined to 'brief personal notices . . . to be attached to my writings'.[60] The principles of *illustration* and *attachment* figure the notes as subordinate commentary; however the authorized editor broke the contract by designing the *Memoirs* as a separate publication, even intending at one point to publish with his own publisher (John Murray), not Moxon. Mary tried to reassure her son that 'I do think Chris is the most amiable Creature I ever had to deal with', but her anxiety was palpable:

> [D]epend upon it he will not act in any way contrary to our wishes and *judgement*—and he has a tender regard for *my* feelings, and for the world will not go contrary to them, when my mind is convinced.—*But* I confess I *have* been harassed by the thoughts of aught being settled contrary to the Will of y^r beloved Father—and as he used to say, the considerations of the 3 last days have *added some* nails to my coffin.[61]

Mary's emphatic 'confession' identifies the nub of her conflicted feelings: going 'contrary to the Will of y^r beloved Father'. Her invocation of Wordsworth's vernacular saying is fond but also propitiatory, as though asking permission to go against his 'Will'. Christopher Wordsworth's counter-argument that 'making a fuller biography of it [will] exclude or invalidate any that may and will come from unauthorised quarters' was in the spirit but violated the letter of the original contract: nails in Wordsworth's coffin.

As the committees gathering subscriptions for material monuments were similarly dividing into factions, Christopher Wordsworth worked with zealous expedition to publish the *Memoirs* on the first anniversary of the poet's death:

> Issued from a familiar publishing house, the two-volume *Memoirs* told their story with a massive display of authority. Christopher Wordsworth printed an autobiographical memorandum dictated by the poet in his seventy-seventh year, quoted from Wordsworth's previously unpublished commentary on his whole *œuvre*, referred to and excerpted extensively from unpublished letters and of course emphasized that he was a member of the family writing with its *imprimatur*.[62]

[59] *HCR* ii. 728. [60] *WL* viii. 287 n. [61] Ibid. 285–6. [62] Gill, 32.

However, this pose masked failings in substance, style, and critical acumen, and while the periodical press treated the book's appearance as a significant event, and served up potted biographies spiced with quotation, reviewers challenged the biographer's authority. George Brimley in *Fraser's* identified the quotations from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal and the Fenwick Notes as 'the only really valuable portion of these two volumes', drew pointedly on Thomas de Quincey's 'Lake Reminiscences' from *Tait's Magazine* (the articles Wordsworth had urged be suppressed) to indicate the paucity of vivid portraits and varied perspectives, and indulged in grumbling asides—'(in the absence of anything of the sort in Christopher Wordsworth's volumes)', '(though his nephew seems to know nothing about it)'.[63] *The Athenaeum* characterized the *Memoirs* as redundant:

> Of the only active portion of the life of the poet Wordsworth, the record, such as it is, was not long since given to the world by the author himself, in the somewhat unusual form of a posthumous poem, entitled 'The Prelude.' In that, and in his other works, indeed, the whole of this author's uneventful and contemplative life may be said to be written:—written, not only to all intents and purposes, but substantially.[64]

The identification of the poet's own 'record' as the authentic biographical text echoes Brimley's privileging of quoted primary documents. The biographer's justification of his work as simply '"a biographical commentary on the Poet's works"', is discounted as disingenuous because 'Within these modest bounds the work before us is especially limited'. *The Athenaeum*'s reviewer was more polite than Brimley, characterizing the *Memoirs*' failures impersonally: 'there is nothing to commend in these volumes on the score of critical acumen' and 'unquestioning . . . reverence . . . constitutes the key-note of the whole production'. Displacing volition from the writer to the work reduces the number of direct attacks on Christopher Wordsworth, and comments on the book's central problem: where the biographer should discreetly facilitate the telling of his subject's story, the *Memoirs* say more about the biographer than his subject. Brimley criticizes Christopher Wordsworth's failure to discriminate between his uncle and himself, uncovering a plot 'to stamp

[63] George Brimley, 'Wordsworth. Part II', *Fraser's*, 44 (July 1851), 186, 188.

[64] '*Memoirs of William Wordsworth, Poet-Laureate, D. C. L.*', *The Athenaeum*, 26 Apr. 1851, 445.

upon its subject those peculiar religious, and political opinions which belong to the biographer': the Canon has sought to: '[P]ersuade the world that this uncle was altogether such an one as himself, contemptuously indifferent to the whole secular life of his times, with its grand results, and grander hopes, and that the laurel crown which glistened greenly amid his silver locks, was, after all, nothing more than a shovel hat.'[65] Christopher Wordsworth was not purposely disingenuous, but lacking in imaginative sympathy: hence Brimley's debunking metamorphosis of the bardic laurel crown into the puritan's grim 'shovel hat', warning readers wishing to discover one Wordsworth that they would find another. The reviews agree 'these are two ponderous and unattractive volumes', a textual monument imposed on its subject, not restoring him to life; the poet's opinions 'belonged to a living, thinking man, and this man is not given us in the book'.[66] Yet Wordsworth's intentions in appointing his nephew to write the book he did not want written, were adequately fulfilled; Brimley complains, 'Dr. Christopher Wordsworth may say that he has not professed to write a life of his uncle—granted; but he has filled two octavos with matter that might have gone to the writing of his life, and has thereby played dog in the manger as regards any one else who may wish to write it.' Although Mary Wordsworth and Quillinan were aghast at the book, they understood its obstructive value; following biographers trod in their predecessor's footsteps, dependent on the *Memoirs*' extracts from unpublished manuscripts, and lacking the primary resources to differ from the family orthodoxy.

The *Memoirs*' failure as an imaginative memorial contributed indirectly to readers' quest for more satisfactory points of contact; it also disseminated the biographical significance of St Oswald's churchyard. Christopher Wordsworth quotes largely from the Fenwick Notes on the 'Epistle to Sir George Howland Beaumont, Bart.' (1842), describing Wordsworth's careful preparations for planting the yew trees in 1819, their protection with 'a substantial oak fence', and the churchyard's improved landscape:

The whole eight are now thriving, and are an ornament to a place which, during late years, has lost much of its rustic simplicity by the introduction of iron palisades, to fence off family burying-grounds, and by numerous

[65] Brimley, 'Wordsworth. Part II', 198.

[66] '*Memoirs of William Wordsworth* (Second Notice)', *The Athenaeum*, 3 May 1851, 477; Brimley, ibid.

monuments, some of them in very bad taste, from which this place of burial was in my memory quite free: see the lines in the sixth book of 'The Excursion,' beginning, '*Green is the Church-yard*.'[67]

Wordsworth's present-tense utterance alters in tone by translation from manuscript to the *Memoirs*. Wordsworth had checked Isabella Fenwick's dictation carefully for accuracy, but it is uncertain whether he envisaged being quoted verbatim; there may have been some expectation that informal notes would be recast in the third-person for posterity, or synthesized into a coherent narrative. Christopher Wordsworth's deference to the poet's recorded words is in some respects valuable; but when recontextualized and hitched to the biographer's own misconceptions, the authority of the dead poet is in danger of licensing the reduction of poetry into mere illustrations from a fictive life. Wordsworth directly addresses the reader, encouraging him/her to find or recall that particular passage of *The Excursion*; indeed, the dead poet appears to invoke his own poetry as an authority for the contested ideal of the rustic churchyard. Truth lies in the past; more particularly, the 'true' St Oswald's churchyard belongs to the past documented in his own poem.

Essentially a revisiting of the primary grave-interpretation scene of 'The Brothers' (1800), the lines alluded to from Book 6 of *The Excursion* are addressed by the Pastor to the Wanderer, describing a verdant churchyard where the graves are not monumentally marked, but organic traces meaningful only to the initiated eye and the susceptible heart, 'Ridge rising gently by the side of ridge, | A heaving surface, almost wholly free | From interruption of sepulchral stones'. No memorials, no epitaphs. The graves are:

> . . . mantled o'er with aboriginal turf
> And everlasting flowers. These Dalesmen trust
> The lingering gleam of their departed lives
> To oral record, and the silent heart;
> Depositories faithful and more kind
> Than fondest epitaph: for, if those fail,
> What boots the sculptured tomb?[68]

In fact, the 'inscriptions' endure in the intangible form of 'oral record, and the silent heart', and the absence of epitaphs is a positive virtue. The epithet 'aboriginal' (native or indigenous) suggests a

[67] *Memoirs*, i. 377–8. The notes are regularized; for original see *Fenwick*, 65–6.
[68] *WWP* ii. 202–3, ll. 6–8, 609–15.

transcendent primal nature that is also specific and local; the flowers also are 'everlasting'. However, the invisible memorial text, recording individual dead 'Dalesmen' in communal memory, depends on Wordsworth's authoritative text to interpret the churchyard's affective iconography, virtually erasing the already doubtful distinction between the authorial voice and that of his mouthpiece, the Pastor. This typifies the *Memoirs*' role in the mid-Victorian overdetermination of Wordsworth's grave as an authoritative and authentic Wordsworthian text. The *Memoirs* also details the churchyard's strong associations with family bereavement, and even Christopher Wordsworth's attempt to narrate Catharine and Thomas's deaths as pious exempla in a religious tract—Thomas's 'pleasure was to go to Grasmere Churchyard, and sweep the leaves from his sister's grave' before 'he, too, was unexpectedly taken away'—does not undermine the churchyard's clear significance as a Wordsworthian affective text.[69]

The *Memoirs* set another precedent for later biographers, by concluding at the grave. The description of Wordsworth's grave that ends the *Memoirs*' second volume goes far beyond factual signs of closure: it refigures the terminal site of William Wordsworth's life (and Christopher Wordsworth's 'Life') as a place of spiritual renovation, a conduit to *eternal* life:

His own prophecy, in the lines,

> 'Sweet flower! belike one day to have
> A place upon thy Poet's grave,
> I welcome thee once more,'

is now fulfilled. He desired no splendid tomb in a public mausoleum. He reposes, according to his own wish, beneath the green turf, among the dalesmen of Grasmere, under the sycamores and yews of a country churchyard, by the side of a beautiful stream, amid the mountains which he loved; and a solemn voice seems to breathe from his grave, which blends its tones in sweet and holy harmony with the accents of his poetry, speaking the language of humility and love, of adoration and faith, and preparing the soul, by a religious exercise of the kindly affections, and by a devout contemplation of natural beauty, for translation to a purer, and nobler, and more glorious state of existence, and for a fruition of heavenly felicity.[70]

Wordsworth's own verse is appropriated as a self-fulfilling prophecy, as though the poet had composed the narrative of his own existence;

[69] *Memoirs*, i. 379–80. [70] Ibid. ii. 507.

whereas 'To the Daisy' (1805), Wordsworth's elegy on his brother John Wordsworth's death at sea, yearns for a likeness between his brother's actual grave and his own future burial-place—it ends 'And Thou, sweet Flower, shalt sleep and wake | Upon his senseless grave'—the quotation exclusively asserts the poet's individual genius.[71] The humble daisy-marked grave is consummately Wordsworthian, opposed to the 'splendid tomb in a public mausoleum'; yet in the triumphant affirmation that Wordsworth lies 'according to his own wish', authoring his own end, Christopher Wordsworth unwittingly imposes a grand monumental construction on the humblest iconography. After the formal third-person narration that dominates the *Memoirs*, this move into a prophetic vivid present offers the grave as a site of continuing revelation and significance, a life after life. Wordsworth's authoritative burial-place reflects the heightened curiosity and homage surrounding the poet in the early 1850s, and the 'country churchyard' realizes an ideal that originates in poetry but is culturally pervasive. Generic elements (the green turf and yews) are particularized by characteristic Wordsworthian details: the 'dalesmen of Grasmere', the articulate stream, and protecting mountains. In the context of the poet's recent death, *The Prelude*'s publication, and then the *Memoirs*, traditional country churchyard iconography was literalized and updated: finally it was possible to visit the ideal poet's grave in reality. And despite the effort to interpret the 'solemn voice' breathing from the grave as that of a sermonizing didacticist urging the Christian contemplative to look forward to 'a purer, and nobler, and more glorious state of existence', the grave remained significant as a site of physical presence within a perfectly complementary landscape. When *The Athenaeum* quoted from this passage, it pointedly stopped at 'amid the mountains which he loved', passing tacit judgement on the nephew's didactic appropriation.

The *Memoirs*' conclusive grave-pilgrimage can be traced in Edwin Paxton Hood's 1856 biography, where at the end of a chapter (not the last) the speaker recalls standing in the churchyard and thinking 'this is the centre of our Poets' Land'; Hood imagines 'the rays of his genius' converging on the grave, which is described (recalling the *Memoirs*) as 'the lesson of humanity'.[72] The mountains create a natural 'amphitheatre' for the grave, where the speaker feels inspired

[71] *WWP* i. 643, ll. 69–70. [72] *William Wordsworth* (1856), 215–16.

to 'chaunt the Poet's own lines' from book V of *The Excursion*.[73] The archetypal scene of homage—the admirer reciting the poet's lines over his grave, like the Wordsworths reciting 'A Bard's Epitaph' over Burns's in 1803—mimics but literalizes the *Memoirs*' conclusion, replacing the religiosity of the 'solemn voice' with that of the admirer, 'chaunting' Wordsworth's own lines. Hood secularizes the devotional exercises of pilgrimage, substituting aspiration towards the 'more glorious state of existence', for the grave itself: 'And here in the central shrine of the Poet's Longest Theme, and by the Grave Stone where lie his remains, we close our reminiscences of the Land of Wordsworth.'

PUBLIC MONUMENTS

The grave's memorial pre-eminence is particularly apparent when contrasted with the public memorials erected in Grasmere Church and Westminster Abbey. The lists of committee members and subscribers 'are roll-calls of a good part of the English establishment, which testify to Wordsworth's standing in the worlds of Church and State'; Victoria and Albert, the Bishop of London, Members of Parliament, masters of Cambridge colleges, Gladstone, Tennyson, Arnold, and Thackeray.[74] They also testify to such projects' public and political character; subscribers' names and contributions were published, mixing motives of civic demonstration with establishment ostentation and political manœuvring. Public tributes were antipathetic to, even corrective of the grave's private, minimal, and local ethos; yet they were also tacitly judged by comparison to it, and found wanting, even anti-Wordsworthian.

In December 1850 Dr Davy and Benson Harrison had taken charge of the Grasmere subscription, arguing that local contributors were concerned that their money would be swallowed up by the slow-moving London project.[75] In January 1851 the young Pre-Raphaelite sculptor Thomas Woolner (1825–92) was commissioned for the medallion portrait and commemorative tablet for St Oswald's Church. Despite being a local project, the family had little involvement. According to Quillinan, Mary Wordsworth would not authorize any public memorial: 'Her heart is at Grasmere, and *there*

[73] *WWP* ii. 183–4, ll. 922–77. [74] Gill, 36–7. [75] See *HCR* ii. 773.

perhaps, a modest monument within the church, w[d] not displease her'; even when informed about plans for the medallion, her acquiescence could only be inferred: 'she offered no objection, but rather seemed by the manner of her silence to approve'.[76] The memorial, erected in August 1851, is a white marble tablet in the shape of a squat, stylized obelisk, with the poet's profile in relief on the base section, against a panel of grey marble. *The Art Journal* described the memorial as:

> [A]n inscription from the pen of Professor Keble, surrounded by a band of laurel, under which is a bas-relief of the poet's head. In two narrow squares on each side of the head are introduced the daffodil, the celandine, the snowdrop and violet—a conceit that is but little in harmony with sculpture. The relief has been executed with great care, and the likeness is satisfactory.[77]

Woolner's floral motifs have the merit of alluding to well-loved Wordsworth poems, providing a small affective element in an otherwise austere neoclassical design; Woolner had never met the poet, so the portrait was based 'on a cast of Chantrey's bust, borrowed from Robinson', resulting in an uncompromisingly severe profile.[78] Keble's text was not specially commissioned, but a translation of the Latin dedication to his lectures as Oxford Professor of Poetry (1839–42), *Praelectiones Academicae Oxonii Habitae* (1844).[79] The inscription reads:

TO THE MEMORY OF
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH,
A TRUE PHILOSOPHER AND POET,
WHO, BY THE SPECIAL GIFT AND CALLING OF
ALMIGHTY GOD,
WHETHER HE DISCOURSED ON MAN OR NATURE,
FAILED NOT TO LIFT UP THE HEART
TO HOLY THINGS,
TIRED NOT OF MAINTAINING THE CAUSE
OF THE POOR AND SIMPLE;
AND SO, IN PERILOUS TIMES WAS RAISED UP
TO BE A CHIEF MINISTER,

76 See *HCR* ii. 768.

77 'Tablet to the Memory of Wordsworth in Grasmere Church', *The Art-Journal*, Dec. 1851, 327.

78 Frances Blanshard, *Portraits of Wordsworth* (1959), 103.

79 See *Keble's Lectures on Poetry 1832–1841*, trans. E. K. Francis (1912).

NOT ONLY OF NOBLEST POESY
BUT OF HIGH AND SACRED TRUTH.
THIS MEMORIAL
IS PLACED HERE BY HIS FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS,
IN TESTIMONY OF
RESPECT, AFFECTION, AND GRATITUDE.
ANNO MDCCCLI.

Keble's text is in several senses a 'translation': from Latin to English, book to monument, print to carving, dedication to memorial-inscription. Although Samuel Johnson had argued that Latin was the most permanent and dignified language for memorial inscriptions, Keble had felt it necessary to justify delivering his Oxford lectures in Latin, at a time when fewer students were fluent in classical languages than ever before, let alone readers of inscriptions in a rural church. Keble's decision to dedicate the 1844 volume to Wordsworth demonstrates the indebtedness of *The Christian Year* (1827), his phenomenally popular collection of devotional verse, to Wordsworth, and acknowledges his appointment to the laureateship; the dedication's adaptation presents Wordsworth as a public figure (supported by the carved 'band of laurel'), and an Anglican figurehead. The translation from printed dedication to carved inscription is also striking: Keble's address to the living ('To William Wordsworth . . .') becomes 'To the Memory of . . .', while his ostentatious use of the modesty topos ('This tribute, slight though it be, is offered by one of the multitude who feel ever indebted for the immortal treasure of his splendid poems'), is reduced to the functional statement 'This memorial is placed here by his friends and neighbours'; a modest rider that sits oddly with Keble's raised and vaunting rhetoric.

Most readers would agree that the dedication does not translate well. While Wordsworth's portrayal as following a 'calling of | Almighty God' as 'Chief Minister' is apt for the monument's proximity to the altar (and the family pew), it is uncomfortably close to the Wordsworth of the *Memoirs*; the text's pomposity, superfluous negatives and inversions ('Failed not . . .', 'Tired not . . .'), feels out of place in a rustic church. Woolner might have heeded Tennyson's cautionary example, a parodic epitaph on the Duke of Wellington: '—who possessing the greatest military genius which the world etc. won the battles of Waterloo etc. etc. etc. etc.—who was equally great

in statesmanship as he was etc.'[80] Seldom can 'etc.' have been used to such devastating effect; substituting the banal abbreviation for the banalities of public inscriptions shows how interchangeable they are, and how the reader's eye slides over the text. Following Wordsworth's prescription in the 'Essay Upon Epitaphs', Tennyson's trenchant advice to Woolner was: 'Is Wordsworth a great poet? Well then don't let us talk of him as if he were half known. | To the Memory | of | William Wordsworth | The Great Poet. | Even that seems too much but certainly is much better than the other, far nobler in its simplicity.'

The Westminster Abbey competition, a more controversial and protracted project, was also more painful to the family. Quillinan reported: 'The less we say on the subject of the public testimonial to Mrs W. the better . . . when she does allude to it she always says—a whole length in West[r] Abbey corner—just the thing he would have disapproved of!'[81] Frederick Thrupp spent three years working on the seated contemplative figure on a pedestal, taking Haydon's life mask and drawings as sources, before its erection in the Abbey, with much trouble and expense in 1854. '[Chr. W] knows also that the Dean & Cr are most anxious to do away with the practice of erecting such memorials in the Abbey, & wd gladly get rid of many that are there. . . . In this particular instance (of W) they *could* not refuse.'[82] Thrupp requested the figure be located not in Poets' Corner, but in the baptistery, where, *The Athenaeum* complained, it is 'literally entombed': 'An inapplicable quotation from the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, alluding to the Abbey and not to the poet, is stuck up near. The statue is poetical, but conventional in costume, and the expression not so like as we could wish. The poet is represented seated on a bank,—his head bent, and one leg crossed over the other.'[83] Thrupp intended his figure to be realistic; the figure was in 'his ordinary dress, covered by a plaid, such as he was wont to do', but this could also be taken for the ubiquitous toga of public statuary.[84] The inscription (upon which the poet appears to be brooding intensely) reads:

[80] AT to TW, *TL* ii. 10. The Duke did not die for another 18 months.
[81] *HCR* ii. 751. [82] Ibid.
[83] 'Fine-Art Gossip', *The Athenaeum*, 2 Dec. 1854, 1467.
[84] Blanshard, *Portraits*, 105.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Blessings be with them—and eternal praise
Who gave us nobler loves, and nobler cares—
The Poets, who on earth have made us heirs
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays!

BORN APRIL 7 1770 DIED APRIL 23 1850
BURIED IN GRASMERE CHURCHYARD

The text is not in fact from the 'Ecclesiastical Sonnets', but the conclusion to 'Personal Talk' (1842).[85] The extract is decontextualized, and becomes an uncharacteristically generous homage to *other* poets, which, in conjunction with the contemplative figure, appears as another Wordsworthian prophecy—since he too now is one of 'The Poets'. The sonnet is less disinterested, presenting the speaker as a peaceful solitary and contemplative, happily away from the world; the extract is followed by an implied justification of the Wordsworthian ideal of the poet: 'Oh! might my name be numbered among theirs, | Then gladly would I end my mortal days' (ll. 55–6). The efficacy of the inscription depends on the reader knowing the poem well enough to supply the last two lines from memory, and sigh over the wish's fulfilment; but as *The Athenaeum*'s mistake suggests, only a minority could have managed this. The greatest assistance was given to the inscription by Wordsworth's great-grandson, who appealed for the statue to be moved from obscurity to its current place between similarly bulky figurative monuments to Campbell and Shakespeare in Poets' Corner (with Southey's wall-mounted bust over Wordsworth's head), where at least the inscription addresses its immediate context.[86] In quite different ways, Woolner's and Thrupp's memorials fall far short of the harmony created between Wordsworth's public image and his poetics at the grave in St Oswald's.

AT WORDSWORTH'S GRAVE, AGAIN

Elegists conventionally perform their worship at the grave even if the act of homage is imaginary; returning to Gill's idea that 'As the sense of the poet as a living presence faded, Wordsworth became the

[85] *WWP* i. 568, ll. 51–4.

[86] See Ch. 7, 'Shakespeare's Pen and Dickens's Will'.

published work', in fact literary pilgrims were still visiting and revisiting the grave to conjure up the poet's spirit decades later.[87] Wordsworth's grave features in many more poems written between 1880 and the turn of the century than in elegies of the 1850s.[88] Hardwick Drummond Rawnsley's sonnet 'Wordsworth's Tomb' documents the now familiar iconography, fusing features of the ideal humble poet's grave with local specifics:

> Plain is the stone that marks the Poet's rest:
> Not marble worked beneath Italian skies—
> A grey slate head-stone tells where Wordsworth lies,
> Cleft from the native hills he loved the best.[89]

Rawnsley contrasts Wordsworth's unpretentious slate with the imported Italian marble statuary that upwardly mobile Victorians favoured in their suburban cemeteries; note that the syntax allows us to read Wordsworth, too, as 'cleft' from the hills. The daisy-covered turf, the river Rothay's natural music, and the 'eloquently terse' inscription are also praised as native and characteristic. Rawnsley sees himself as working within a Wordsworthian poetic tradition, here linked with pride in local identity and Englishness. Yet ironically the very simplicity of the poet's grave-inscription stimulates his fancy that an apt public epitaph is added 'in gold beneath his title': ' "Singer of Humble Themes and Noble Thoughts" ' (ll. 13–14).

In the 1880s Wordsworth's grave was adopted as a symbol for conservative poetics, supposedly stable and transcendent aesthetic values opposed to the morbid stylistic and moral excesses attributed to Swinburne and the European influence. Like Arnold's 'Memorial Verses', William Watson's tombeau 'Wordsworth's Grave' (1884–7) adopts a grave-pilgrimage motif to argue that whereas nature, specifically the 'Rotha, remember[s] well who slumbers near', the current poetic generation forget the true Wordsworthian religion, 'bow[ing] the knee | To misbegotten strange new gods of song'.[90] The poem was 'begun at Rydal in May 1884', originating in an actual encounter, but was 'finished rather more than three years later', suggesting the need to find imaginative autonomy away from

[87] Gill, 81.
[88] See also William Allingham, 'W. W. (April 23rd, 1850)', *Life and Phantasy* (1889), 68; James Mackereth, 'In Grasmere Vale', *In Grasmere Vale and Other Poems* (1907), 81–90; Arthur J. Munby, 'Wordsworth', *Vestigia Retrorsum* (1891), 24–8.
[89] *Sonnets at the English Lakes* (1882), 62, ll. 1–4.
[90] *The Poems of Sir William Watson* (1936), 226, ll. 3–12.

authoritatively Wordsworthian territory. Watson's Wordsworth represents 'fixity' and 'faith', while contemporary readers are 'faithless' and 'vagrant soul[s]', who must return to the Wordsworthian fold (ll. 9–10, 15–16). The dead poet appears initially in the third person, respected and remote as the 'mystery' revealed in his works, before a shift to eulogistic direct address, examining the distinctive genius of the 'Poet who sleepest by this wandering wave' (l. 25). The terms of Watson's celebration of a godlike Wordsworth, the 'authentic Presence pure' who made nature sing, are drawn from the grave's locale, and inspired by the reticent headstone: 'Enough;—and wisest who from words forbear. | The gentle river rails not as it glides' (ll. 49, 137–8). Watson, however, cannot emulate the 'gentle river', imagining modern poets 'falter[ing], half-rebuked' at Nature's charges of irrelevance and artificiality, and urging a return to ideal communion, performed in the return to real time and place in the closing stanzas: the poet's grave: 'And here, at home, still bides he' (l. 165). 'Wordsworth's Grave' first appeared in the *National Review*, indicating Wordsworth's appropriation for a politically as well as poetically conservative agenda; by 1887 J. M. Sutherland celebrated Wordsworth's death-date as 'the anniverary of St. George, the patron saint of England, and of Shakespeare's birth and death'.[91]

The conviction that Wordsworth's immortal spirit continued to emanate from the site of his 'sacred ashes' reaches one logical conclusion in a sonnet Rawnsley wrote thirty-five years after 'Wordsworth's Tomb'. The pacific 'Singer of Humble Themes and Noble Thought' is nowhere to be found in 'At Wordsworth's Grave', written in the early months of World War I, and the conclusion to a sequence of 148 sonnets.[92] Here the political sonnets provide the inspiration, as Rawnsley compares the German offensive to the Napoleonic threat. The churchyard landscape appears as usual, but the river is transformed to a 'freeborn stream'. The speaker plays the part of the isolated Wordsworthian contemplative—'To-day from all the world I go apart'—but demands action instead of reflection, as is suggested by a shift from the earlier respectful third person to direct address: 'All of yourself that doth immortal seem | Comes from the grave to bear a patriot's part' (ll. 3, 5–6). Rawnsley has no time for

[91] *National Review*, 10 (1887–8), 40–5; James Middleton Sutherland, *William Wordsworth* (1887), 194.

[92] Rawnsley, *The European War 1914–1915: Poems* (1915), 219.

respectful one-sided dialogue, hectoring his hero and claiming that Wordsworth's spirit is resurrected by the nation's demand for 'brave song-banners'. Boldly invoking the opening to the sonnet 'London, 1802' (1807) 'Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour: | England hath need of thee', the speaker hails the poet, 'Wordsworth! an empire needs you at this hour', and demands his libertarian inspiration:[93]

> Oh! turn not, mighty spirit, to your rest,
> But bid us forth as happy warriors go
> With freedom's unimaginable power. (ll. 12–14)

In 1915, Rawnsley was not the only non-combatant churchman gripped by martial fervour, but spirited and daring as the challenge is, the poem testifies uncomfortably to the failures of sensibility possible for one whose love of country and love of God turns any war into a holy war. His wish to enlist even Wordsworth's peaceful grave in the fight against a 'second tyrant' (l. 10) was to suffer a terrible ironic reversal, in the 'richer dust concealed' in Rupert Brooke's 'corner of a foreign field | That is for ever England'.[94]

[93] *WWP* i. 579.
[94] '1914, V: The Soldier', ll. 2–4, *The Collected Poems* (1987), 316.