VI.—Aristotle, Horace, and Wordsworth

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This article is summarized in the concluding paragraph.

Wordsworth does not welcome investigation of his sources. The difficulties he encountered in the composition of his autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, may have entered into his discouraging similar attempts;[1] if he found it a difficult task to unravel the strands of his own mental fabric, he may well have feared the result of such

[Reference is made to the following editions of Wordsworth's poems, prose, and letters: *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford, 1916); *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, edited by Nowell C. Smith (London, 1905), hereafter referred to as "Smith"; *Letters of the Wordsworth Family*, edited by William Knight (3 vols. Boston, 1907), hereafter referred to as "Knight"; and three editions of the letters by Ernest De Selincourt: *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 1787–1805 (Oxford, 1935), hereafter referred to as *Early Letters; The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years* (Oxford, 1937), hereafter referred to as *MY;* and *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years* (Oxford, 1939), hereafter referred to as *LY*. A valuable collection is an unpublished dissertation in the Cornell University Library, *Literary Criticism in William Wordsworth*, by Everett Morrison Hankins, dated June, 1941. In *The White Doe of Rylstone, By William Wordsworth: A Critical Edition*, by Alice Pattee Comparetti (Ithaca, New York, Cornell Univ. Press, 1940), the introduction and notes contain valuable information concerning Wordsworth and Aristotle. For acquaintance with the two books mentioned above, I am indebted to Professor Lane Cooper.

For Aristotle, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, ed. by Ingram Bywater (Oxford, 1909), is used. For Horace, the edition by Charles E. Bennett and John C. Rolfe (Boston, 1901) is used. A valuable source of information about Wordsworth's indebtedness to Horace is *The Influence of Horace on the Chief English Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, by Mary Rebecca Thayer (New Haven, Conn., Yale Univ. Press, 1916; now published by the Cornell Univ. Press). Miss Thayer lists thirty-one unquestionable traces of Horace, and eleven probable traces of Horace, found in Wordsworth's works, exclusive of the letters.]

[1] Who . . . shall point as with a wand and say
"This portion of the river of my mind
Came from yon fountain?"

Wordsworth's suggestions made to Walter Scott about editorial practice are enlightening as to his attitude: "A correct text is the first object of an editor; then such notes as explain difficult or unintelligible passages, or throw light upon them; and lastly, which is of much less importance, notes pointing out passages or authors to which the Poet has been indebted, not in the piddling way of a phrase here and a phrase there (which is detestable as a general practice), but where the Poet has had essential obligations as to matter or manner." *Early Letters* 541.

inquiry by another. His belief that the poet before entering upon composition should think long and deeply, and his conception of poetry as arising from emotion recollected in tranquillity, both imply modification and combination of the raw materials he had taken into his mind. Anyone who tries to discover the sources which entered into the poet's thought and issued in its expression must consequently expect to find his literary timber worked into mental furniture which betrays a varied origin.[2] Authors of ability inferior to Wordsworth, such as Poe or Lowell, have a habit, if one may alter the figure, of bolting their food without having chewed it sufficiently to help digest it; this food often lies heavily upon their mental stomachs as an unassimilated classical quotation, which shows by its lack of similarity how alien it is to the body which encloses it. In Wordsworth, on the contrary, a single source usually is so thoroughly assimilated as to be not readily distinguishable, combined as it is with other elements. One may not, therefore, assert categorically of any statement which does not contain an actual reference to or quotation of his source, exactly whence each idea therein was derived. In the following discussion, which is an attempt to indicate how much of Wordsworth's thinking had its origin in Aristotelian or Horatian sources, I shall try to show the various ideas of these critics which are woven into the pattern of his mind.

Wordsworth's assertion of intimate acquaintance with the works of Horace is amply attested by his education, by the testimony of friends, and by numerous echoes in his works. These reminiscences of Horace, which occur throughout his long life, indicate also his abiding interest in the Roman poet.[3] For his acquaintance with Aristotle, the evidence is less definite. Aristotle was not, like

[2] Smith 15: "Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced upon any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply." *Ibid.* 25: "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity; the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on."

[3] See Mary Rebecca Thayer, *The Influence of Horace on the Chief English Poets of the Nineteenth Century* 53–64. In writing to the classically proficient Walter Savage Landor, Wordsworth asserts: "My acquaintance with Virgil, Horace, Lucretius, and Catullus is intimate." *LY* 70.

Horace, master of the inevitable phrase, and the Greek of the *Poetics* is too difficult for it ever to become a popular text-book. Moreover, Aristotle's critical terms, variously translated, have become the stock in trade of later writers; many who employ them are unaware of their origin. Another difficulty lies in the fact that Wordsworth, perhaps because he lacked an adequate library, relied heavily upon the brilliant memory of Coleridge, who in at least one instance demonstrably led him astray. His acceptance, in the year 1800, of Coleridge's mistaken rendering of Aristotle, indicates slight acquaintance in his earlier years with the *Poetics*.[4] The fairly numerous passages which are Aristotelian in his later essays and letters are fairly strong evidence that at some time subsequent to 1800 he came to know the *Poetics* at first hand.

Where Aristotle and Horace treat the same subject, they are in substantial agreement; in other matters, they are complementary. One may, therefore, fuse their ideas on literature into one system.[5] The parts of this system with which Wordsworth shows familiarity are discussed in this paper.

For both Wordsworth and Aristotle, the principle of artistic imitation is fundamental. Wordsworth's synonym for μίμησις is "imagination." [6]

> Imagination . . . has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a word of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws.

Imagination and fancy, he declares, are requisite to the production of poetry; they modify, create, and assimilate; [7] a good subject is "eminently poetical . . . because it is creative." [8]

Wordsworth in three instances takes a position which indicates his acceptance of the basic principles expressed in the introductory chapters of the *Poetics*. First, he employs Aristotle's distinction between epic poetry and the drama. In epic poetry, however much the poet may put into the mouth of the speaking agents, he is the

[4] See note 12, below.

[5] See "The Poetics and the *Ars Poetica*" in my *Return to the Fountains: Some Classical Sources of American Criticism* (Durham, North Carolina, Duke Univ. Press, 1942) 6–12.

[6] Smith 157. Aristotle discusses artistic imitation in the *Poetics*, chapters 1–4, 1447^{a} 8–1449^{b} 20.

[7] Smith 151.

[8] Smith 50.

"source from which everything flows." In the drama, the poet does not appear at all, and the action is conducted entirely through what the agents say and do; "music," he adds in Aristotelian vein, "being admitted only incidentally and rarely."[9] Secondly, his statement that the drama is "that species of composition of which action and motion are essential" is in agreement with Aristotle.[10] Finally, he follows Aristotle again when, in discussing poetry, he declares that "metre is but adventitious to composition."[11]

Upon this Aristotelian principle as a foundation, Wordsworth rears a framework that is also in accord with that of the *Poetics*. In his ninth chapter, Aristotle had been at great pains to mark the boundaries between poetry, or artistic imitation that chiefly uses words, and history, or matter of fact. The ideas of this chapter are of great importance to Wordsworth. In the year 1800, he writes:[12]

> Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophical of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion.

Wordsworth is, it is true, led slightly astray here, in all probability by Coleridge; and yet, although the statement exaggerates Aristotle's idea, it is not a contradiction. Others of Wordsworth's remarks are quite in harmony with the attitude taken in this chapter by Aristotle. He once expresses the fear lest his *Eccle-*

[9] Smith 152. The "incidental" use of music which he mentions is an echo of *Poetics* 6, 1449^{b} 28–31: *λέγω δὲ ἡδυσμένον μὲν λόγον τὸν ἔχοντα ῥυθμὸν καὶ ἁρμονίαν καὶ μέλος, τὸ δὲ χωρὶς τοῖς εἴδεσι τὸ διὰ μέτρων ἔνια μόνον περαίνεσθαι καὶ πάλιν ἕτερα διὰ μέλους.* A letter written in 1815 to Robert Southey indicates that Wordsworth's idea of epic poetry came through Renaissance and earlier English channels: "Epic poetry, of the highest class, requires in the first place an action eminently influential, an action with a grand or sublime train of consequences; it next requires the intervention and guidance of beings superior to man, what the critics, I believe, call machinery; and lastly, I think with Dennis that no subject but a religious one can answer the demand of the soul in the highest class of this species of poetry." That Renaissance criticism is on his mind is indicated by his immediate application of this summary to Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.

[10] *LY* 355. *Poetics* 2, 1448^{a} 1: *ἐπεὶ δὲ μιμοῦνται οἱ μιμούμενοι πράττοντας. . . .*

[11] Smith 46. *Poetics* 1, 1447^{a} 28–9: *ἡ δὲ [ἐποποιία] μόνον τοῖς λόγοις ψιλοῖς ἢ τοῖς μέτροις καὶ τούτοις εἴτε μιγνῦσα μετ' ἀλλήλων εἴθ' ἑνί τινι γένει χρωμένη τῶν μέτρων <ἀνώνυμος> τυγχάνει οὖσα μέχρι τοῦ νῦν.*

[12] Smith 25. *Poetics* 9, 1451^{b} 5–7: *διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἡ δ' ἱστορία τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον λέγει.* Cf. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (New York, 1906) 237.

siastical Sonnets "suffer as poetry from the matter of fact, there being unavoidably in all history, except as it is a mere suggestion, something that enslaves the fancy." [13] He sees also that the effect of the scientific spirit upon poetry may be akin to that of history: [14]

> Much confusion has been introduced into criticism by this contradistinction of Poetry and Prose, instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science.

The reason he gives for having written his *Lyrical Ballads* combines the principle of artistic imitation, or imagination, with the doctrine of poetic universality.[15]

> The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, primary laws of our nature.

Poetic truth is indeed "truth, and of the highest order"; [16] it is

> the gleam,
> The light that never was, on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the Poet's dream.[17]

Like Aristotle, however, he admits that poetry does not always transcend nature in expressing the universal. Aristotle concedes the possibility of history that is also universal; in *The Excursion*, Wordsworth writes of

> Nature . . . who sometimes undertakes,
> For the reproof of human vanity,
> Art to outstrip in her peculiar walk.[18]

Together with universality, Aristotle requires unity in an artistic imitation. This principle, too, looms large in Wordsworth's thought. He echoes several of Aristotle's terms. He asserts that a sonnet, an epitaph, and "every other legitimate composition"

[13] *LY* 65.
[14] Smith 21, note.
[15] Smith 13–14.
[16] Smith 92.
[17] *Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm* 14–16.
[18] *The Excursion* 6.301–303. *Poetics* 9, 1451[b] 29–32: *κἂν ἄρα συμβῇ γενόμενα ποιεῖν οὐθὲν ἧττον ποιητής ἐστι· τῶν γὰρ γενομένων ἔνια οὐδὲν κωλύει τοιαῦτα εἶναι οἷα ἂν εἰκὸς γενέσθαι καὶ δυνατὰ γενέσθαι, καθ' ὃ ἐκεῖνος αὐτῶν ποιητής ἐστιν.*

must possess "the three requisites of a legitimate whole, a beginning, a middle, and an end." An epitaph by Chiabrera is "a perfect whole, there is nothing arbitrary or mechanical, but it is an organized body, of which the members are bound together by a common life and all are justly proportioned." [19] Plot he defines after the formula set by both Aristotle and Horace, as "things done by design," in a necessary sequence. His dislike of the improbable and the supernatural is also in harmony with that of his predecessors. Nothing, he insists, should detract from "that species of credibility upon which it [the action] rests." [20] Like Aristotle, he prefers in poetry a probable fiction to a less probable fact.

> The appropriate business of poetry, . . . her privilege, and her duty, is to treat of things not as they *are*, but as they *appear;* not as they exist in themselves, but as they *seem* to exist to the *senses*, and to the *passions*.

We find him declining to use for his *White Doe of Rylstone* the factual records furnished by Walter Scott; he "followed (as I was in duty bound to do) the traditionary and common historic records." [21] Equally strong is his objection to the use of the supernatural.[22]

The Poem of Peter Bell, as the Prologue will show, was composed under a belief that the Imagination not only does not require for its

[19] *LY* 652–653; Smith 136. *Poetics* 7, 1450[b] 26–34: ὅλον δέ ἐστιν τὸ ἔχον ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσον καὶ τελευτήν. ἀρχὴ δέ ἐστιν ὃ αὐτὸ μὲν μὴ ἐξ ἀνάγκης μετ' ἄλλο ἐστίν, μετ' ἐκεῖνο δ' ἕτερον πέφυκεν εἶναι ἢ γίνεσθαι· τελευτὴ δὲ τοὐναντίον ὃ αὐτὸ μετ' ἄλλο πέφυκεν εἶναι ἢ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολύ, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ἄλλο οὐδέν· μέσον δὲ ὃ καὶ αὐτὸ μετ' ἄλλο καὶ μετ' ἐκεῖνο ἕτερον. δεῖ ἄρα τοὺς συνεστῶτας εὖ μύθους μήθ' ὁπόθεν, ἔτυχεν ἄρχεσθαι μήθ' ὅπου ἔτυχε τελευτᾶν, ἀλλὰ κεχρῆσθαι ταῖς εἰρημέναις ἰδέαις. *Ars Poetica* 151f.:

> Atque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remiscet,
> Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet unum.

Cf. Smith 153; Henry Alford, *Life, Journals, and Letters* (London, 1873) 61.

[20] *LY* 193. *Poetics* 9, 1452[a] 3–7: τὸ γὰρ θαυμαστὸν οὕτως ἔξει μᾶλλον ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης, ἐπεὶ καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τύχης ταῦτα θαυμασιώτατα δοκεῖ ὅσα ὥσπερ ἐπίτηδες φαίνεται γεγονέναι. *MY* 610. *Poetics* 24–25.

[21] Smith 169; *MY* 458e. Cf. Gilbert Murray, *The Classical Tradition in Poetry* (Cambridge, 1927) 131–132.

[22] Letter prefacing *Peter Bell, Poems* 236. *Ars Poetica* 191–192: Nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus Inciderit. *Poetics* 15, 1454[a] 33–[b]8: χρὴ δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἤθεσιν ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν τῇ τῶν πραγμάτων συστάσει ἀεὶ ζητεῖν ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ τὸ εἰκός, ὥστε τὸν τοιοῦτον τὰ τοιαῦτα λέγειν ἢ πράττειν ἢ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ εἰκὸς καὶ τοῦτο μετὰ τοῦτο γίνεσθαι ἢ ἀναγκαῖον ἢ εἰκός. φανερὸν οὖν ὅτι καὶ τὰς λύσεις τῶν μύθων ἐξ αὐτοῦ δεῖ τοῦ μύθου συμβαίνειν, καὶ μὴ ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ Μηδείᾳ ἀπὸ μηχανῆς καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἰλιάδι τὰ περὶ τὸν ἀπόπλουν. ἀλλὰ μηχανῇ χρηστέον ἐπὶ τὰ ἔξω τοῦ δράματος, ἢ ὅσα πρὸ τοῦ γέγονεν ἃ οὐχ οἷόν τε ἄνθρωπον εἰδέναι, ἢ ὅσα ὕστερον ἃ δεῖται προαγορεύσεως καὶ ἀγγελίας· ἅπαντα γὰρ ἀποδίδομεν τοῖς θεοῖς ὁρᾶν. ἄλογον δὲ μηδὲν εἶναι ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν, εἰ δὲ μή, ἔξω τῆς τραγῳδίας, οἷον τὸ ἐν τῷ Οἰδίποδι τῷ Σοφοκλέους.

exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but that, though such agency be excluded, the faculty may be called forth as imperiously, and for kindred results of pleasure, by incidents within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life.

Like Horace, Wordsworth insists that the selection of a suitable theme is a necessary step toward successful writing. Much of Gray's success, he feels, is attributable to his felicitous choice of subjects; and he advises Edward Quillinan, his son-in-law, to look for the best subjects if he would succeed in poetry.[23]

Two of the steps the poet must take in order to secure unity of plot are, first, to make an outline, and, secondly, to select the episodes with care. These directions, emphasized by Aristotle, receive also great stress from Wordsworth. He regrets that Coleridge never seemed to have in mind the complete plot of *Christabel.* As for the choice of episodes, four of the powers listed by Wordsworth as requisite to the production of poetry contribute to success in this matter. They are imagination and fancy, which modify, create, and associate; invention, which composes characters out of the materials furnished by observation; and judgement, which decides how, where, and in what degree each of these faculties shall be exerted. The result of the action of these four powers is an artistic imitation.[24] In a famous letter to Lady Beaumont, Wordsworth clearly demonstrates and explains his method.[25]

Who is there that has not felt that the mind can have no rest among a multitude of objects, of which it cannot single out one individual

[23] *Ars Poetica* 38–40:

> Sumite materiam vestris, qui scribitis, aequam
> Viribus, et versate diu quid ferre recusent,
> Quid valeant umeri.

LY 1142. On October 18, 1842, Wordsworth wrote to his son-in-law, Edward Quillinan: "The subject [of Henry Taylor's drama, *Edwin the Fair*] is most unfortunately chosen, and it is still more unfortunately treated—in fact, it has betrayed the Author." Cf. *LY* 897.

[24] *Poetics* 17, 1455^{a} 34–^{b}2: *τούς τε λόγους καὶ τοὺς πεποιημένους δεῖ καὶ αὐτὸν ποιοῦντα ἐκτίθεσθαι καθόλου, εἶθ' οὕτως ἐπεισοδιοῦν καὶ παρατείνειν. Ars Poetica* 42–45:

> Ordinis haec virtus erit et Venus, aut ego fallor,
> Ut iam nunc dicat iam nunc debentia dici,
> Pleraque differat et praesens in tempus omittat;
> Hoc amet, hoc spernat promissi carminis auctor.

Smith 150–151, 159. For Wordsworth's conception of the action of a poem, see Comparetti, *The White Doe of Rylstone* 1–5.

[25] Smith 51–52.

whereupon may be concentrated the attention, divided among or distracted by a multitude? After a certain time, we must either select one image or object, which must put out of view the rest wholly, or must subordinate them to itself while it stands forth as a head.

Quoting a passage for consideration, he then analyzes the specimen in a way reminiscent of Dante's method in the *Vita Nuova*, clearly showing how he has achieved unity in the midst of multiplicity.

According to both Aristotle and Wordsworth, the agents also are products of artistic imitation; as we have seen, Wordsworth assigns to the inventive faculty the task of composing characters out of elements supplied by observation. He does not consider valid Aristotle's generalization which makes the greatly renowned or famous the most suitable tragic agents, but prefers the ordinary Cumberland shepherd, professing to find in him adequate capacities for tragic suffering.[26] He nevertheless concedes the value of the traditional or historic theme, provided that it receive poetic, not merely historical, treatment. He admires Livy's boldly imaginative rendering of

> those bold fictions that, by deeds assigned
> To the Valerian, Fabian, Curian race,
> And others like in fame, created Powers
> With attributes from History derived,
> By Poesy irradiate.[27]

His preference for humble, rustic agents is based on his belief that such characters display "our elementary feelings" in a state of greater simplicity than can be found elsewhere, in which state they may be more accurately studied and imitated.[28] When he prefers such characters, he is praising that universality which Aristotle finds desirable in the agents; and the same idea is expressed in the wish that his poems shall contain

not transitory manners, reflecting the wearisome unintelligible obliquities of city life, but manners connected with the permanent objects of nature and partaking of the simplicity of those objects. Such pictures must interest when the original shall cease to exist.[29]

[26] In *Poetics* 9 and 15, Aristotle tacitly assumes that tragedy will generally draw its agents from men of elevated rank or great fame. See note 19 and *Poetics* 15, 1454^{b} 8–9: ἐπεὶ δὲ μίμησίς ἐστιν ἡ τραγῳδία βελτιόνων. . . . Smith, 13–14; *Early Letters* 221–222; *LY* 127. Cf. *Early Letters* 262 (in which he quotes Quintilian 10.7.15); *The Excursion* 6.538–557.

[27] *Musings near Aquapendente* 277–284.

[28] Smith 14.

[29] *Early Letters* 221.

He praises the universality of Burns's agents; we read Burns, he says, with all the pleasure of recognition. This is in harmony with Aristotle's requirement that the agents be true to type.[30] That he believed in Aristotle's further demand that the agents be individuals, no one can doubt who knows Wordsworth's own practice. And in a letter to Edward Quillinan he condemns the hero in a tragedy they have been reading on the ground that "he is a piece of incongruity—nay, of impossibility throughout." [31] His Idiot Boy he describes as essentially of the comic type indicated by Aristotle, "by no means disgusting in his appearance, quite the contrary." [32]

Wordsworth's poetic diction also shows the influence of the *Poetics*. The language which he employs, and which he defends in his Prefaces, is so markedly different from the poetic diction of his earlier days that he has been accused of that meanness which Aristotle condemns. Such faults in his language are, however, the exception rather than the rule. In his Prefaces, he recommends the language of ordinary men purified of what he considers its defects; his ideal is the Aristotelian standard of clarity without meanness. The devices he uses to avoid meanness are, moreover, those mentioned by Aristotle: an admixture of unusual words, and carefully chosen metaphors. His strange words are partly archaic forms, partly words drawn from the local, Cumberland dialect, both of which are types noted for use by Aristotle.[33]

[30] *Poetics* 15, 1454ª 22–24: *δεύτερον δὲ τὸ ἁρμόττοντα· ἔστιν γὰρ ἀνδρεῖον μὲν τὸ ἦθος, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἁρμόττον γυναικείῳ τὸ ἀνδρεῖον ἢ δεινὴν εἶναι.* *Early Letters* 222.

[31] *Poetics* 15, 1454ª 26–28: *τέταρτον δὲ τὸ ὁμαλόν. κἂν γὰρ ἀνώμαλός τις ᾖ ὁ τὴν μίμησιν παρέχων καὶ τοιοῦτον ἦθος ὑποτιθείς, ὅμως ὁμαλῶς ἀνώμαλον δεῖ εἶναι.* *Ars Poetica* 119–127. *LY* 1142.

[32] *Poetics* 5, 1449ª 32–37: *ἡ δὲ κωμῳδία ἐστὶν ὥσπερ εἴπομεν μίμησις φαυλοτέρων μέν, οὐ μέντοι κατὰ πᾶσαν κακίαν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ ἐστι τὸ γελοῖον μόριον. τὸ γὰρ γελοῖόν ἐστιν ἁμάρτημά τι καὶ αἶσχος ἀνώδυνον καὶ οὐ φθαρτικόν, οἷον εὐθὺς τὸ γελοῖον πρόσωπον αἰσχρόν τι καὶ διεστραμμένον ἄνευ ὀδύνης.* Smith 9–10. In connection with Wordsworth's knowledge of the Aristotelian treatment of the agents, two passages from Aristotle's works, though not from the *Poetics*, deserve brief mention. One is in a letter, written in 1805 to Sir George Beaumont under the stress of his brother's recent death at sea. In it, he transcribes a passage from an unnamed review, which, he says, is "from Aristotle's synopsis of the virtues and vices." It is drawn from the *Περὶ ἀρετῶν καὶ κακιῶν* (Knight 3.389). The second occurs in a letter published in *The Friend* (Smith 63f.); it is an analysis of the characteristics of youth that apparently derives from *Rhetoric* 2.12. There is no reason to suppose that Wordsworth had read either of these treatises of Aristotle.

[33] *Poetics* 22, 1458ª 18–23: *λέξεως δὲ ἀρετὴ σαφῆ καὶ μὴ ταπεινὴν εἶναι. σαφεστάτη μὲν οὖν ἐστιν ἡ ἐκ τῶν κυρίων ὀνομάτων, ἀλλὰ ταπεινή· παράδειγμα δὲ ἡ Κλεοφῶντος*

Wordsworth is as deeply impressed as Aristotle by the poetic importance of metaphor; both consider it a gift which is the sine qua non of the poet. Wordsworth's Wanderer in *The Excursion* had received

> A precious gift; for, as he grew in years,
> With these impressions would he still compare
> All his remembrances, thoughts, shapes, and forms;
> And, being still unsatisfied with aught
> Of dimmer character, he thence attained
> An active power to fasten images
> Upon his brain; and on their pictured lines
> Intensely brooded, even till they acquired
> The liveliness of dreams.

A number of his letters contain discussions of the proper use of metaphor. English poetry, he complains, had for decades been failing to draw its images directly from external nature. And a mixture of metaphors is intolerable to him.[34]

Horace also supplied Wordsworth with his principles of poetic diction, especially with his distrust of new-coined words.

> *Joying* for *joy*, or *joyance*, is not to my taste, indeed, I object to such liberties upon principle. We should soon have no language at all if the unscrupulous coinage of the present day were allowed to pass, and become a precedent for the future. One of the first duties of a writer is to ask himself whether his thought, feeling, or image cannot be expressed by existing words or phrases, before he goes about creating any new terms, even when they are justified by the analogies of the language.[35]

ποίησις καὶ ἡ Σθενέλου. σεμνὴ δὲ καὶ ἐξαλλάττουσα τὸ ἰδιώτικον ἡ τοῖς ξενικοῖς κεχρημένη· ξενικὸν δὲ λέγω γλῶτταν καὶ μεταφορὰν καὶ ἐπέκτασιν καὶ πᾶν τὸ παρὰ τὸ κύριον. Smith 13–15. For Wordsworth's footnotes explaining the use of rare or local words and peculiar expressions, see *Poems* 133, 148, 160, 175, 177, 180, 238, 272, 341. These are a few among many.

[34] *Poetics* 22, 1459ᵃ 4–8: ἔστιν δὲ μέγα μὲν τὸ ἑκάστῳ τῶν εἰρημένων πρεπόντως χρῆσθαι, καὶ διπλοῖς ὀνόμασι καὶ γλώτταις, πολὺ δὲ μέγιστον τὸ μεταφορικὸν εἶναι. μόνον γὰρ τοῦτο οὔτε παρ' ἄλλου ἔστι λαβεῖν εὐφυίας τε σημεῖόν ἐστι· τὸ γὰρ εὖ μεταφέρειν τὸ τὸ ὅμοιον θεωρεῖν ἐστιν. *Ibid.* 17, 1455ᵃ 22–26: δεῖ δὲ τοὺς μύθους συνιστάναι καὶ τῇ λέξει συναπεργάζεσθαι ὅτι μάλιστα πρὸ ὀμμάτων τιθέμενον· οὕτω γὰρ ἂν ἐναργέστατα [ὁ] ὁρῶν ὥσπερ παρ' αὐτοῖς γιγνόμενος τοῖς πραττομένοις εὑρίσκοι τὸ πρέπον καὶ ἥκιστα ἂν λανθάνοι[τὸ] τὰ ὑπεναντία. *The Excursion* 1.139–148; Smith 159–160; 184–185; *LY* 158–159, 274, 355. Wordsworth's diction has been studied in great detail by Lane Cooper in "Matthew Arnold's *Essay on Wordsworth*," *Evolution and Repentance* (Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell Univ. Press, 1935) 1–17; "The Making and Use of a Verbal Concordance," *ibid.* 18–53; "Some Wordsworthian Similes," *Aristotelian Papers* (Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell Univ. Press, 1939) 3–17; and "The Verbal 'Ornament' (Κόσμος)," *ibid.* 101–128.

[35] Horace permits the coinage, from the Greek, of new words *si forte necesse est*, but they must be *parce detorta*. The privilege, moreover, is *licentia sumpta pudenter*.

The diction of poetry is, in short, as much an artistic imitation, a product of the imagination, as any other element in the poem.

Since Wordsworth did not devote himself to the drama so much as to other literary species, one does not meet in his poetry many reminders of Aristotle's peculiarly dramatic criticism. In his letters, however, occur scattered bits of dramatic comment which indicate his familiarity with this part of Aristotle's critical findings. He shows in a general way a conception of a cathartic effect which is produced by literature as well as by the other arts.[36] He is doubtful of the dramatic value of stories the scene of which is laid in distant climes, "as if the tale had been told for the sake of the imagery only." His objection is tantamount to Aristotle's rejection of the type of play in which spectacle is treated as if it were more important than plot. He does, however, admit the force of the Aristotelian defence of the exotic scene on the ground that it allows the author freedom from some degree of restraint.[37] He mentions a situation in one of Fletcher's plays as constituting "a fine reverse."[38] And the only instance in which he quotes the Greek text of the *Poetics* is a bit of dramatic criticism:[39]

> In the plays of Euripides, politics come in as a disturbing force: Homer's characters act on physical impulse. There is more *introversion* in the dramatists: whence Aristotle rightly calls him *τραγικώτατος*.

Wordsworth's conception of the poet likewise owes many of its details to Aristotle and Horace. To Wordsworth, the poet is the *vates sacer*, the prophet and priest who derives his light from heaven. In addition to Horace's use of the Latin term, Wordsworth certainly was aware of its adoption by Italian and English critics from

See *Ars Poetica* 48–53. Aristotle, while mentioning the use of "strange words" (γλῶτται), prefers that style achieve dignity through the use of "lengthened, curtailed, and altered forms of words," which are basically familiar. Cf. *Poetics* 22, 1458ª 34–ᵇ5: *οὐκ ἐλάχιστον δὲ μέρος συμβάλλεται εἰς τὸ σαφὲς τῆς λέξεως καὶ μὴ ἰδιωτικὸν αἱ ἐπεκτάσεις καὶ ἀποκοπαὶ καὶ ἐξαλλαγαὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων· διὰ μὲν γὰρ τὸ ἄλλως ἔχειν ἢ ὡς τὸ κύριον παρὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς γιγνόμενον τὸ μὴ ἰδιωτικὸν ποιήσει, διὰ δὲ τὸ κοινωνεῖν τοῦ εἰωθότος τὸ σαφὲς ἔσται.*

[36] *Poetics* 6, 1449ᵇ 27–28: *[τραγῳδία] δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν.* *Early Letters* 527; Smith 15–16.

[37] *Poetics* 6, 1450ᵇ 16–20: *ἡ δὲ ὄψις ψυχαγωγικὸν μέν, ἀτεχνότατον δὲ καὶ ἥκιστα οἰκεῖον τῆς ποιητικῆς· ἡ γὰρ τῆς τραγῳδίας δύναμις καὶ ἄνευ ἀγῶνος καὶ ὑποκριτῶν ἔστιν, ἔτι δὲ κυριωτέρα περὶ τὴν ἀπεργασίαν τῶν ὄψεων ἡ τοῦ σκευοποιοῦ τέχνη τῆς τῶν ποιητῶν ἐστιν.* Cf. *ibid.* 25, 1460ᵇ 32–1461ª 4. *LY* 346–347; Smith 208.

[38] *Poetics* 11, 1452ª 22–24: *ἔστι δὲ περιπέτεια μὲν ἡ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον τῶν πραττομένων μεταβολὴ καθάπερ εἴρηται, καὶ τοῦτο δὲ ὥσπερ λέγομεν κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ ἀναγκαῖον.* *LY* 193.

[39] *Poetics* 13, 1453ª 23–30; Smith 254.

the time of the Renaissance. Both at the beginning and at the end of *The Prelude*, these two functions of the poet are prominently displayed. "The poet," he wrote in 1800 to John Wilson, "ought to travel before men occasionally as well as at their sides." Horace's corollary, that the poet, being a prophet, cannot compose without inspiration (*invita Minerva*), is also Wordsworthian doctrine. Many times in his letters he mentions his dependence upon a "fit of inspiration" in order to commence or to finish a poem.[40]

Wordsworth agrees with Horace in reprehending the author who believes his claim to genius sufficient excuse for irrational or irregular conduct.[41] He mentions also John Dennis's division of poetic passion into two kinds, "imaginative and enthusiastic, and merely human and ordinary." Whether he has also in mind Aristotle's statement that poetry is produced by the highly endowed man rather than by the madman cannot definitely be determined.[42]

"All good poetry," writes Wordsworth, "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." He is as insistent as Horace upon the fundamental need of sincerity in the poet. In his second essay

[40] *Odes* 4.9.25–28. *The Prelude* 1.50–54; 13.301–305; Smith 7. Cf. *Odes* 4.8.27; *Ars Poetica* 400; and *Poems* v:

> If thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven,
> Then, to the measure of that heaven-born light,
> Shine, Poet! in thy place, and be content.

See also *Ars Poetica* 385–386:

> Tu nihil invita dices faciesve Minerva,
> Id tibi iudicium est, ea mens.

Smith 15; *The Prelude* 8.365–376; *MY* 6, 30, 427, 713, 760; *LY* 47–48, 136, 161, 323, 348, 1231.

[41] *Ars Poetica* 295–301; *MY* 746f.

[42] *Poetics* 17, 1455[a] 32–34: *διὸ εὐφυοῦς ἡ ποιητική ἐστι <μαλλον> ἢ μανικοῦ· τούτων γὰρ οἱ μὲν εὔπλαστοι οἱ δὲ ἐκστατικοί εἰσιν.* I have followed here the reading of Alfred Gudeman, *Aristoteles* Περὶ Ποιητικῆς (Berlin and Leipzig, 1934). Such an interpretation was preferred by Castelvetro, whom Dennis may be following. See Gudeman's Commentary *ad loc.* 307–309, and Allen Gilbert's note to this passage in *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden* (New York, Am. Book Co., 1940) 117f. *MY* 617: "Poetic passion (Dennis has well observed) is of two kinds: imaginative and enthusiastic, and merely human and ordinary." Wordsworth has evidently been reading John Dennis's "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry," chapter four of which discusses the Vulgar Passion and the Enthusiastick Passion. Dennis says that the Vulgar Passion, which is moved by objects themselves or by ideas in ordinary life, is preferable in poetry, since all men are moved by it. He adduces this as Aristotle's reason for preferring tragedy to the epic; since tragedy uses objects throughout, it has a distinct advantage over the epic. See E. N. Hooker, *The Critical Works of John Dennis* (2 vols. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939, 1943) 1.338–339.

Upon Epitaphs, after mentioning some of the principles that should guide in their composition, he adds:

> These suggestions may be further useful to establish a criterion of sincerity, by which a writer may be judged; and this is of high import. For, when a man is treating an interesting subject, or one which he ought not to treat at all unless he be interested, no faults have such a killing power as those which prove that he is not in earnest, that he is acting a part, has leisure for affectation, and feels that without it he could do nothing.

As late as 1844, he wrote:

> Now I believe . . . that no man can write verses that will live in the hearts of his fellow creatures but through an over powering <*sic*> impulse in his own mind.[43]

That objectivity which Aristotle commends in the poet is also desired by Wordsworth. Homer and Shakespeare, he asserts, can reach every variety of thought and feeling without bringing in their own individuality; for this reason he places them at the head of his first class of poets. In *The Prelude*, he mentions the "juvenile error" about the French Revolution which had led him to consider how British judgment had been affected by events in France. Of this notion, he remarks:

> But this is passion over-near ourselves,
> Reality too close and too intense,
> And intermixed with something, in my mind,
> Of scorn and condemnation personal,
> That would profane the sanctity of verse.

In 1840, he wrote to Barron Field: "One last word in matters of authorship: it is far better not to admit people so much behind the scenes, as it has lately been fashionable to do." [44] Although he called *The Prelude* an "autobiographical poem," he gave it for a

[43] *Ars Poetica* 99–111; Smith 108: *MY* 731; *LY* 1231. Cf. Smith 125–126; *LY* 537; and E. L. Griggs, *Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (2 vols. London, 1932) 1.70–71: "Wordsworth complains, with justice, that Southey writes *too much at his ease*—that he seldom 'feels his burthened breast

Heaving beneath th' incumbent Deity.'"

[44] *Poetics* 24, 1460[a] 5–11: *Ὅμηρος δὲ ἄλλα τε πολλὰ ἄξιος ἐπαινεῖσθαι καὶ δὴ καὶ ὅτι μόνος τῶν ποιητῶν οὐκ ἀγνοεῖ ὃ δεῖ ποιεῖν αὐτόν. αὐτὸν γὰρ δεῖ τὸν ποιητὴν ἐλάχιστα λέγειν· οὐ γὰρ ἐστι κατὰ ταῦτα μιμητής. οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄλλοι αὐτοὶ μὲν δι' ὅλου ἀγωνίζονται, μιμοῦνται δὲ ὀλίγα καὶ ὀλιγάκις· ὁ δὲ ὀλίγα φροιμιασάμενος εὐθὺς εἰσάγει ἄνδρα ἢ γυναῖκα ἢ ἄλλο τι ἦθος, καὶ οὐδέν' ἀήθη ἀλλ' ἔχοντα ἤθη. The Prelude* 11.57–61; Smith 248–249; *LY* 998.

sub-title, "The Growth of a Poet's Mind," not "The Growth of My Mind." Apparently he felt that the poem was an objective account of his mental and emotional self, or sufficiently generalized in its import to deserve the name of poetry, or possibly he felt it to be both.

Horace's description of the poet as a man of special gifts (to which, we have seen, Aristotle agrees) who has been carefully trained in their practice, meets with Wordsworth's complete approval. He hopes that his collection of miscellaneous sonnets shows the workmanship that results from "simple Nature trained by careful Art"; in Aristotle's phrase, the product of artistic imitation by a gifted, well-trained artist. In *The Excursion*, he exlaims:

> Oh! many are the Poets that are sown
> By Nature; men endowed with highest gifts,
> The vision and the faculty divine;
> Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse,
> (Which, in the docile season of their youth,
> It was denied them to acquire, through lack
> Of culture and the inspiring aid of books,
> Or haply by a temper too severe,
> Or a nice backwardness afraid of shame).

Here, behind the reminder of Gray's *Elegy* (and Wordsworth professed to be able to discover from Gray's poetry most of Gray's sources), one may see the Horatian imprint. Not long after *The Excursion* had been published, he writes:

> Do not let any Body persuade you that any quantity of good verses can be produced by mere felicity; or that an immortal *style* can be the growth of mere genius. "Multa tulit fecitque" must be the motto of all those who are to last.

In 1834, he responds as follows to a request for criticism:

> It would be insincerity were I to omit adding that there is here and there a want of skill in *workmanship*, which I believe nothing but continued practice in the art can bestow. I have used the word *art*, from a conviction which I am called upon almost daily to express, that poetry is infinitely more of an art than the world is disposed to believe.

Ten years later, he writes to Isabella Fenwick of a poem submitted for his criticism by F. W. Faber:

> It is a mine of description, and valuable thought and feeling; but too minute and diffusive and disproportioned; and in the workmanship very

defective. The Poem was begun too soon and carried out too rapidly before he had attained sufficient experience in the art of writing, and this he candidly and readily admits.[45]

Not even Horace emphasized more strongly than Wordsworth the need that the poet follow the best models. Constantly he supports his own poetic practice by reference to Milton and Spenser. He urges a friend: "Keep, I pray you, to the great models." He refers with approval to Sir Joshua Reynolds's notion that an

> accurate taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, . . . is an *acquired* talent, which can only be produced by thought and a long-continued intercourse with the best models of composition. . . . If Poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgment will be erroneous; and, . . . in many cases, it necessarily will be so." [46]

Upon no topic related to the poetic art does Wordsworth say more than upon the studies of poets. His curriculum is also Horace's: books first, afterwards men. With books, Wordsworth couples nature. In *The Prelude*, he clearly indicates his attitude towards literary study. Although in later years he expresses dissatisfaction with the inadequate attention he had bestowed upon books while at Cambridge, he yet insists that he did not slight reading: "that were to lack all sense." Harper warns us not to take at face value his deprecation of his Classical studies at the university, since his works afford ample evidence to the contrary. The summer following Wordsworth's first year at Cambridge was spent in travel rather than in the customary reading; and he is convinced that whatever casual knowledge of mankind he gained during those idle months was a poor exchange for books. He was not yet ready to observe "manners put to school."

> Far better had it been to exalt the mind
> By solitary study, to uphold
> Intense desire through meditative peace.

Let books and nature, he says, be the early joy of children. During a year of residence in London, he frequents the theatre, and delights in the crowded streets, "well pleased to note Among the crowd all specimens of men." When, however, he leaves the city, his chief

[45] *Ars Poetica* 408–415; *Miscellaneous Sonnets* 3.39.12–14; *The Excursion* 1.77–85; *MY* 731; *LY* 700, 1230. Cf. *MY* 713–714; *The Prelude* 8.365–376.

[46] *Ars Poetica* 265–274; *Sermones* 1.10.72; *MY* 610; *LY* 475; Smith 39. Cf. *LY* 586, 1113–1114.

regret is his separation from the bookstalls on the streets. "Fellowship with venerable books" was a principal source of distinction in the democratic part of England where he had spent his youth; as other sources of this distinction, he mentions acquaintance with the evidences of God found in nature and the love of liberty. In *The Excursion*, which is in some sort a sequel to *The Prelude*, the Wanderer commends the Solitary for his possession of both the Horatian branches of instruction:

> You have seen,
> Have acted, suffered, travelled far, observed
> With no incurious eye; and books are yours,
> Within whose silent chambers treasure lies
> Preserved from age to age; more precious far
> Than that accumulated store of gold
> And orient gems, which, for a day of need,
> The Sultan hides deep in ancestral tombs.
> These hoards of truth you can unlock at will.

Immediately thereafter, the Wanderer insists that the mind needs both these kinds of provender:

> He, whose hours
> Are by domestic pleasure uncaressed
> And unenlivened; who exists whole years
> Apart from benefits received or due
> 'Mid the transactions of the bustling crowd;
> Who neither hears, nor feels a wish to hear,
> Of the world's interests—such a one hath need
> Of a quick fancy and an active heart,
> That, for the day's consumption, books may yield
> Food not unwholesome.

"Love Nature and Books," he writes to Thomas DeQuincey; "seek these, and you will be happy; for virtuous friendship, and love, and knowledge of mankind must inevitably accompany these, all things ripening in their due season." He notes the culmination of these qualities in Charles Lamb, who possessed

> Knowledge and wisdom, gained from converse sweet
> With books, or while he ranged the crowded city streets
> With a keen eye, and overflowing heart.

Like Horace, who recommended the *Socraticae chartae* for poetic matter, Wordsworth advises:

> Remember, first read the ancient classical authors; then come to us; and you will be able to judge for yourself which of us is worth reading.

Wordsworth's considerable reading of Plato indicates that he took literally Horace's recommendation of the dialogues as food for the poet.[47]

Horace's insistence upon care in execution (*limae labor, et mora*) is exemplified throughout Wordsworth's career. He spent the last three decades of his life largely upon the revision of his earlier poetry; and such poems as he did produce during those latter years were subjected to painstaking re-examination. His care is illustrated in his handling of the epitaph which he composed for Charles Lamb. He writes:

> On the other page you have the requested Epitaph. It was composed yesterday—and by sending it immediately, I have prepared the way, I believe, for a speedy repentance—as I do not know that I ever wrote so many lines without some retouching being afterwards necessary.

Within the week, he writes twice to Moxon, his publisher, "retouching" it; and for this epitaph nearly four months of correspondence are required to satisfy his meticulous taste. His letters record similar experiences with other poems. In one instance, after writing a sonnet, he writes six letters to the same correspondent, two of them on the same day, with numerous substitutions and corrections. In a letter to William Rowan Hamilton, he writes of

> workmanship, the art by which the thoughts are made to melt into each other, and to fall into light and shadow, regulated by distinct preconception of the best general effect they are capable of producing.[48]

[47] *Ars Poetica* 312–318; *The Prelude* 3.363–364; George McLean Harper, *William Wordsworth* (2 vols. New York, 1916) 1.67; *The Prelude* 4.297–306, 5.421–425, 7.219–221, 9.27–33, 234–238; *The Excursion* 4.562–570, 576–587; *Early Letters* 370; *Written after the Death of Charles Lamb* 12–14. Harper quotes a letter written in 1799 by Coleridge to Thomas Poole (1.372–373): "Wordsworth was affected to tears at the thought of not being near me—wished me, of course, to live in the North of England near Sir Frederic Vane's great library. . . . Wordsworth was affected to tears, very much affected. But he deemed the vicinity of a great library absolutely necessary to his health, nay, to his existence." On Wordsworth's reading, see also *Early Letters* 51, 61, 264; *MY* 346, 487, 842; *LY* 1285; *The Prelude* 13.355–360, 14.312–313.

[48] *Ars Poetica* 289–291; *LY* 761, 1013, 1033, 382. Cf. *MY* 6 and 713, and Harper, 1.411: "The great poem [*Michael*], apparently so simple in construction and so free from artifice in verse, cost Wordsworth immense toil. . . . The great calm of this and other poems was not attained without vast expense of emotion." This last sentence reminds one of *Ars Poetica* 240–243:

> Ex noto fictum carmen sequar, ut sibi quivis
> Speret idem, sudet multum frustraque laboret
> Ausus idem: tantum series iuncturaque pollet,
> Tantum de medio sumptis accedit honoris.

Another statement harmonizes with Horace's plea that the young author delay publication (*nonum prematur in annum*):

> I am the last man to press publication upon any one, and I think it for the most part very prejudicial to young writers.[49]

Wordsworth desires criticism to be objective, based upon sound principles, a requirement that is axiomatic with Aristotle and Horace. The man who refers readers to the ancient classical authors as standards leaves us in no doubt what those critical principles are. His belief is partly the fruit of bitter experience. After the publication of his first volume of poems, his sister Dorothy writes to a friend:

> I regret exceedingly that he did not submit these works to the inspection of some Friend before their Publication, and he also joins with me in this Regret. Their Faults are such as a young Poet was most likely to fall into and least likely to discover, and what the Suggestions of a Friend would easily have made him see and at once correct. It is, however, an error he will never fall into again, as he is well aware that he would have gained considerably more credit if the Blemishes of which I speak had been corrected.

He could himself serve as an Aristarchus to his friends. In a letter written in 1816, he says:

> Should it appear that the specimen you send of your poem requires additional care and exertion, I shall not scruple to tell you so.[50]

In his conception of the purpose of poetry, Wordsworth is a true classic. Although from time to time his emphasis wavers between the *utile* and the *dulce*, his final position is that taken by Horace, that poetry should give profitable pleasure; profit receives the subordinate position. In 1800, his first Preface opens with mention of the quality and quantity of pleasure "which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart." Seven years later, he asserts to Lady Beaumont that the function of his poems is

> to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to

[49] *Ars Poetica* 388; *LY* 185. Cf. *LY* 458, 761, 1013.

[50] *Ars Poetica* 438–452, 353–359; *Early Letters* 85, 489; *MY* 713–714; *LY* 134, 282–283, 340; Knight 3.98, 110. Cf. Knight 3.33, 72; R. W. Emerson, *English Traits* 19–24; E. V. Lucas, *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb* (3 vols. London, 1935) 1.179, 240, 246–247, 2.51; Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, edited by Henry Reed (2 vols. Boston, 1851) 2.313.

think, and feel, and, therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform, long after we (that is, all that is mortal of us) are mouldered in our graves.

A year later, he desires "either to be considered as a teacher, or as nothing." In 1812, he expresses the desire to contribute by the completion of his literary projects "to the innocent gratification, and perhaps the solid benefit of many of my countrymen." In 1815, his dedicatory poem to *The White Doe of Rylstone* affirms:

> He serves the Muses erringly and ill,
> Whose aim is pleasure light and fugitive;

yet in the same stanza he calls the poem a "moral strain" that aspires to give solace to the sorrowful. The Horatian attitude toward which he has been working appears in the next year, in a letter written to a friend of Burns. In it, he declares that poetry has "the right of imparting solid instruction through the medium of unalloyed pleasure." His works and letters of later date show little change from this characteristically Roman attitude.[51]

Finally, we find in Wordsworth a full realization of the dissatisfaction which every poet, including Horace, expresses about his poetry. After he has finished *The Prelude*, he writes to Sir George Beaumont:

> I have the pleasure to say that I finished my poem about a fortnight ago. I had looked forward to the day as a most happy one. . . . But it was not a happy day for me; I was dejected on many accounts; when I looked back upon the performance it seemed to have a dead weight about it, the reality so far short of the expectation.

The only way he can account for Shakespeare's low estimate of his writings is that, although they were so great, they were so infinitely below what the dramatist felt they ought to have been.[52]

Of the attempt to discover Wordsworth's indebtedness to classical literary criticism as embodied in the works of Aristotle and Horace, this seems to be the end. The weight of the evidence

[51] *Ars Poetica* 333–346; Smith 11, 7, 48; *MY* 170, 486; *The White Doe of Rylstone, Dedication* 57–58 (*The White Doe of Rylstone*, edited by Alice Pattee Comparetti, 135); Smith 217. Cf. *Poems Chiefly of Early and Late Years, Prelude* 20–23; Smith 51–52; *LY* 813, 1018–1019.

[52] *Ars Poetica* 25–31; Knight 1.190; Smith 256.

indicates his first-hand knowledge, and recurrent use, of Horace's teachings from his youth up. As for Aristotle, although in his younger days he apparently knew the *Poetics* at second hand, in later days, presumably after the publication of his Prefaces, he became acquainted directly with this fundamental critical work. His criticism indicates his agreement with the principles advocated by both the classical critics; even when, as in his choice of humble characters for his poems, he went counter to the accepted interpretation of the *Poetics*, he was nevertheless motivated by Aristotle's principles concerning the agents. Wordsworth's debt to Aristotle and Horace was great, and he was generally conscious of the sources whence so much of his literary creed had been drawn.