Wordsworth's Self-Composure

Abstract: This essay examines William Wordsworth's attraction to fractious and perplexing selfhood. Attending to the often overlooked riches of the Cornell edition of Wordsworth's poetry, I argue that the poet's sense of the self is more than a straightforward aspiration towards organic creation. Recent scholarship has cast Wordsworth's processes of revision as an effort to create continuity between his past and present selves. Memory, in this respect, becomes an instrument to invest back into original moments of creation. It is my contention that Wordsworth is instead fascinated by a self that cannot be drawn together neatly. I also consider the psychological contexts of Wordsworth's writing. Contemporary theorisations of memory were sometimes too quick in reforming the fragmentary aspects of memory into a positive state of unity. Wordsworth's poetic and compositional practices, then, challenge the stricter divisions in the eighteenth century between undesirable and splintered forms of selfhood and the more unified kinds of self, which usually rely on fulfilling a *telos*. Teleological views of selfhood, in Wordsworth's eyes, are insufficient to account for the contingencies and happenstance that are natural and attractive aspects of experience. As this essay suggests, his practice of revision often thrives on the unpredictable elements of composition and drawn on by an attraction to the unknown.

Memory can be a slippery faculty. Wordsworth was well aware that the distortions of recollection are far reaching. In *The Prelude*, the 'quiet stream of self-forgetfulness' is more than mere absence of mind. Welding 'self' to forgetting, the phrase more revealingly suggests that lapses in memory involve not only forgetting what we have done but also the kind of person we once were.[1] Descriptions of rivers and streams, for instance, aren't simply Wordsworth's latest update of the Heraclitean credo that 'you cannot step twice into the same stream'.[2] They have a more refined employment in his poetry as models of the changing self. In another moment of pointed self-reflection, the poet recalls, 'I saunter'd, like a river murmuring | And talking to itself'.[3] If the image of the river suggests a mind of unending process, subject to the pressures of change but fortified by constancy, then that 'like' reveals a mind still unsure about its own identification, as if this is but one model of the self that is being tested out.

Evidence of the self fragmenting can be found in the smallest details of Wordsworth's writing. Take that murmuring sound above, one to which Wordsworth is often drawn. He

hears ‘Perchance, a roar or murmur’ in *The Excursion*, remembers ‘the murmur and the murmuring sound’ in ‘Nutting’, and speaks of the ‘sweet inland murmur’ in ‘Tintern Abbey’.[4] The very word is a compact echo of self-communion and self-confrontation. Its changed stress as the word repeats itself alerts us to the rift between what the eye and ear would each ask our mind to believe. While Matthew Arnold would later see a debilitating facet of modern poetry in its ‘dialogue of the mind with itself’, Wordsworth is instead attracted to the creative possibilities of a mind not quite at one with itself.[5]

This essay argues that self-division as a method of self-revision is a defining strength of Wordsworth’s compositional and poetic practice. Although critics have discussed revisionary processes in Wordsworth, the riches of the Cornell edition of his work have yet to be fully explored. Moreover, the few scholars who have combined editorial approaches to the compositional phases of the poet’s work with literary-critical approaches have tended to limit their discussions to particular poems.[6] Instead, I seek to use the draft stages of Wordsworth’s work to make a wider claim about how the poet’s self-making is tangled up with questions of art-making. My contention is that Wordsworth’s fixation on the fractious nature of textual revision articulates his sense of selfhood as discontinuous, as he revels in fractures and rifts between now and then.

The following introductory section outlines some critical issues regarding textual revision in Wordsworth – and in Romantic revisionism. My argument then has two sections: the first considers the beginnings of self-making, suggesting that its foundations through revision are not as stable as they might seem. Section two examines Wordsworth’s attraction to distraction and open-endedness, which lead the self on to new forms. Looking closely at his textual revision in this way, together with other kinds of self-revision, I offer a more complex picture of Wordsworth’s self-making and poetic technique than previous accounts, while interrogating long-standing claims about Romantic revision.

Wordsworth in the Edit

Editorial theories of *The Prelude* have usually tried to reconcile Wordsworth's extensive revisions with the notion of composing a single poem. Geoffrey Hartman's evolutionary model of the text sees its development as reflecting the poet's 'vision of Creation or of the *continuous* act of Creation.'[7] Accordingly, Hartman sees revision as confirming, rather than corrupting, Wordsworth's original intentions for the poem. Although Stephen Parrish similarly sees each version as 'a vertical slice cut through the continuum of text for a given poem', he also claims that the poet's 'creative powers began slowly to fade', leading to increased anxieties over his poems, 'compulsively putting in and taking out'.[8] His description conceives revision as a string of variations on a theme, where incessant additions and subtractions do little to reshape the poem into something new. These assessments of Wordsworth's revisionary decisions make it seem as if they serve a directionless process, or that there's a limit to what revision can achieve before its effects become surplus to requirement.

Talk of compulsion brings to mind how Ernest de Selincourt once described Wordsworth's revisions as 'an obsession'.[9] Descriptions of 'compulsion' and 'obsession' envisage the poet in the grips of something uncontrollable, unmeasured even. As a response to the poet's changes to *The Prelude*, de Selincourt describes his 'ideal' version of the text in his 1926 edition:

> The ideal text of *The Prelude*, which the lover of Wordsworth may construct for himself from the material here presented to him, would follow no single manuscript. It would retain from the earliest version such familiar details as have any autobiographical significance. Of purely stylistic changes from that text, it would accept those only which Wordsworth might have made (and some he would certainly have made), had he prepared the poem from the press in his greatest period, changes designed to remove crudities of expression, and to develop or clarify his original meaning: but it would reject

> those later excrescences of a manner less pure, at times even meretricious, which are out of key with the spirit in which the poem was first conceived and executed. Most firmly would it reject all modifications of his original thought and attitude to his theme.[10]

Before de Selincourt published his edition, only the 1850 version of the poem had been available. The first edition noted that *The Prelude* 'was commenced in the beginning of the year 1799, and completed in the summer of 1805', glossing over the following thirty-four years of alterations.[11] For de Selincourt, these later revisions corrupt the original 'spirit' of the text, and in order to rescue that original 'spirit' he published the 1805 text on pages facing the 1850 version, presenting the earlier poem as the superior text. Praise is due, in de Selincourt's eyes, where revisions lead to concision and clarification. Part of *The Prelude*'s triumph, he argues, is that it had 'a unity *springing directly from the poet's own mind* and personality'.[12] Note, however, the recourse to a language of organic inspiration, as de Selincourt credits this kind of composition with creating a unity – an effect that the editor's own tidying up of the poem has enhanced. This account of the poem's composition also suppresses the extensive revisions that went into the creation of the 1805 text – revisions which, as I will go on to suggest, are more closely allied with expansion and discontinuity than they are with refinement and uniformity.

The Norton Critical Edition (1979) would include the 1799 *Prelude* as a form of the poem in its own right. Like de Selincourt, the Norton editors treat the texts as composing a 'sequence'. Each of the 'three poems', they write, 'has its distinctive character and poetic qualities': 'to read them in sequence provides an incomparable opportunity to observe a great poem composing and recomposing, through a long life, his major work'.[13] Accordingly, the Norton editors present the poem as the work of a continuous poetic mind, even if that mind has changed significantly over time. 'Three poems', 'three complete versions', 'entirely [. . .]

self-sufficient': it's as if each version of *The Prelude* could be plotted as points on a timeline of the 'major work'.[14]

Whereas de Selincourt's and the Norton editions focus our attention on the outcome of revision, the Cornell edition reveals to full effect how early Wordsworth resisted letting his process of composition settle into neat grooves of thought. The editors state that their twofold aim is to 'bring the early Wordsworth into view' and to provide the first 'complete and accurate record of variant readings' of his earliest drafts to their final publication. To achieve this ambition, they offer 'clean, continuous "reading texts"', which strip away 'all layers' of subsequent revision, followed by facsimiles and transcriptions of the most critical manuscripts.[15] If de Selincourt and the Norton editors are keen to present the different versions as a record of Wordsworth's 'changing intentions' across time, the Cornell edition shows how the event of composition itself was central to how he worked towards, not necessarily arriving at, a sense of self.[16] In this respect, what I hope to demonstrate is that manuscripts do not offer necessarily accretive versions of a text; rather, they reveal a vital process of testing out possible selves without committing to any one of them.

Taken together with a close attention to a writer's revisions as he or she composes, textual details show how revision is not just something that happens, and might be analysed, *between* drafts. It is something a writer stages *within* them. To attend to revisions at this point in a writer's process would be to eavesdrop on the most exposed moments of creation. Wordsworth himself felt that to 'write fragments of verse is an embarrassing practice':

> [I]n Poetry it is apt to betray a writer into awkwardness, and to turn him out of his course for the purpose of lugging on these ready-made pieces by the head and shoulders. Or do you simply mean, that such thoughts as arise in the progress of composition should be expressed in the first words that offer themselves, as being likely to be most energetic and natural? If so, this is not a rule to be followed without cautious exceptions. My first

> expressions I often find detestable; and it is frequently true of second words as of second thoughts, that they are the best.[17]

Following this logic, Wordsworth sees the 'progress of composition' as an upward curve, where 'first expressions' are pre-emptively dismissed. But what about third or fourth thoughts? Is this to say that all previous thoughts are made redundant as new ones come to light? Even if the writer's 'first thoughts' are, at times, provisional, then they still play a significant part in the generation of later developments. Wordsworth's final remark, that it is 'frequently true' that 'second words' like 'second thoughts are the best' chimes with other aspects of his poetic theories, such as his suggestion that poetry 'takes its origin from emotional recollected in tranquillity'.[18] In the passage above, 'likely', 'often', and 'frequently' invite further reflection. As we will see below, however, there is reason to doubt whether Wordsworth's theoretical writings on composition are corroborated by his practice.

Reductive views of Wordsworth's revisions as fostering continuity between selves persist. In Keith Hanley's eyes, the poet's 'denial and concealment of change' is carried out through the very 'alterations' he makes to his work.[19] As *The Excursion* might have it, 'changes slowly wrought' are 'in their process imperceptible'.[20] Stephen Gill, meanwhile, has defended the poet's revisions in *Wordsworth's Revisitings*, arguing that 'there is scarcely a Wordsworth poem of any weight that does not tap into the limitless imaginative resource' of retrospection. 'Revisiting', however, is not 'about the poet's continual return [. . .] to his own past but to his past in his past writing'. These returns, he argues, underpin the poet's belief that 'affinities had been preserved between all stages of the life of man'.[21] Yet it shouldn't be taken for granted that continual acts of retrospection are a bid for continuity with the past. Indeed, Wordsworth is frequently drawn back to the enticements of that which *cannot* be remembered.

It's worth noting that when the poet first drafted the opening to *The Prelude* he spoke of 'The time of unrememberable being', which precedes the *OED*'s first recorded instance of 'unrememberable' by five years.[22] Here, not to be able to remember, which is usually characterised as a cognitive defect, is attributed a positive valence. Prominent narrative techniques in *The Prelude*, like the 'spots of time', likewise put to the test linear models of self-making even in the later drafts of the poem. 'There are in our existence spots of time', Wordsworth writes, by which 'our minds [. . .] Are nourish'd, and invisibly repair'd'.[23] He does not dispose these 'spots' in a linear fashion, as if they were key points on a timeline that lead up to the present day. In other words, they are not a metaphor for cause and effect. They are more like shifting coordinates on a map of selfhood. 'Points have we all of us within our souls', as he noted earlier in the poem, 'Where all stand single' sounds increasingly less like a series of events which lead to a final self.[24] Indeed, the coiled syntax makes it seem as if these points control our sense of ourselves. They have something over all of us as much as we possess them in our past.

A few studies of Romantic revisionism have started to challenge the fiction that writers in this period aspired to spontaneity and organic inspiration. Zachary Leader's *Revision and Romantic Authorship* contests the image of an 'extemporizing, otherworldly, autonomous author' through his close attention to how writers revise their first thoughts.[25] His evident hostility to the textual primitivism of the Cornell Wordsworth leads him to see the poet's emphasis on re-visitation as a way of arguing for the integrity of his later self. 'Literary revision proper and return or re-vision', he argues, 'are connected to poetry-making, both are restorative, establishing unity and continuity in the face of loss and change'.[26] But this presumes that loss and change, in Wordsworth's eyes, are irrevocably bad, a premise this essay disputes. Hannah Sullivan briefly questions 'the romantic creed of antirevisionism' and the period's 'disdain for second thoughts'. Yet she reinforces this boundary between

modernist and pre-modernist attitudes to revision by stating that this creed persists 'for most of the nineteenth century', which she sees as an 'inhospitable' environment for revision, as implied by its numerous 'metaphors of organic form'.[27] Wordsworth's own admission that he often finds his 'first expressions' detestable is a check on this lingering misconception. Moreover, by attending to the Cornell edition of Wordsworth's poems, I cast new light not only on this poet's particular compositional practice but Romantic revisionism as a more complex phenomenon than mere aspiration toward 'organic form'.

The Romantics themselves are partly responsible for this wariness of pre-modernist revision, whose theories of their own writing are at odds with how they actually composed. Take, for instance, Percy Bysshe Shelley's comparison in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), as he likens 'the mind in creation' to a 'fading coal'. Original inspiration wanes over time, 'which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to a transitory brightness'.[28] Second thoughts betray a kind of belatedness, and revision can only exacerbate this period of imaginative recession. And yet, Shelley's composition of 'Mont Blanc', or Wordsworth's earlier compositional habits, unveil an awareness of revision's cognitive and imaginative advantages. Revision is not simply something that tracks altered thoughts; it is something to be thought with.

Textual revision is much like autobiography. It is intrinsically retrospective, as a writer looks back on past impulses and intuitions. Like autobiography, it usually seems to carry out a tidying up of the past. But this line of thought presupposes but one perspective of self-making. A recent theorist of selfhood, Galen Strawson, has contested the longstanding claim, as summarised by Alasdair MacIntyre, that 'the only criteria for success or failure in a human life as a whole are the criteria of success or failure in a narrated or to-be-narrated quest'.[29] Strawson rejects the claim that creating personal narratives of this kind are the only way to

find meaning. Instead, he finds value in the notion of 'thin subjects', short bursts of selves that are composed of experience rather than simply possessing it:

> an isolated one-second-long experientially unitary episode of experience occurring in a brain, followed and preceded by periods of complete experiencelessness. This experience-existence necessarily involves subjectivity-existence, and this subjectivity-existence necessarily involves subject-of-experience-existence, on the present terms. This subject-of-experience-existence is an undeniably actual concrete feature of reality, and it's what is picked out by the term 'thin subject'.[30]

Since nothing is more 'actual' than experience, it is not to the detriment of these discrete moments, which Strawson calls selves, that they are durations of experience. Selfhood is an experience we possess and undergo, a predicament writers encounter head-on in the act of composition as they strive to make good on a set of designs and discover they've been led astray by recalcitrant influences in the act of composition. Moreover, if a self is identical to experience, then it is unable to be sustained through 'periods' of unconsciousness, and so it becomes singular and distinct. To complete some kind of narrative 'quest', and the shaping narrative that a selfhood might gain from its completion, is not presumed to be a defining factor in Strawson's account of the self.

We can see something of the episodic self in some of Wordsworth's draft lines from 1800, which cast life as a 'trail' of moments:

> I look into past times as prophets look
> Into futurity a [?thread ?trail] of life runs back
> Into dead years, the [?faculty ?fantasy] of thought
> The lyric spirit of philosophy
> Leads me through moods of sadness to [?and] delight.[31]

Even as the poet describes how this 'trail' runs into 'dead years', the syntax naturally urges us on to fragmentary, but more vital, 'moods' as successive enjambments and anaphoric *into*s draw us deeper into the buried layers of the mind. Fabric then leads onto self-fabrication, as a possible revision from 'sadness to delight' to mixed feelings of 'sadness *and* delight' also swerves off a teleological path of self-making. Whatever else they are, moods are temporary; we might be fully aware when we are in one, but we also know it will pass. In these lines, a quest for 'delight' is no longer the final step in achieving a sense of self. Instead, the splintering of the self takes centre stage.

Wordsworth's take on autobiography aspires to be less a redemption of life than a reflection of it – more finely attuned to the granular surface of experience. In revision he finds various ways of accommodating the inconsistencies he comes up against in his personal life in the shaping rhythms of his verse. Matthew Bevis notes that '*The Prelude* is a study in its maker's fabrication of the past as a means of holding himself together'. And yet, the self must also 'hesitate over its need to turn emotional chaos into story' and acknowledge how the 'unnatural self is part of the natural one'.[32] Straining to hold himself together might be the very thing that causes the poet to fall apart. Part of *The Prelude*'s technical and compositional achievement is precisely in composing the self which embraces division of the poet's identity, not its continuity. This lack of cohesion can, in fact, provide a critical, imaginative resource at the start of composition.

Self Origins

One of Wordsworth's most recurrent concerns relates to the question of how – and where – the self might even start. In his early manuscripts, he often grapples with the prospect of presenting a view of selfhood that has no discernible beginning:

Hard task to analyse a soul in which
Not only general habits and desires
But each most obvious and particular thought
Not in a mystical & idle sense
But in the words of reason deeply weigh'd
Ha
[?]th no beginning. – [33]

'Soul' would later become 'mind' in 1850, as Wordsworth turns his attention to more cerebral than supernal conceptions of the self. The closer he gets to the origins of selfhood, here, the more elusive they appear. That dash meanwhile suggests that the 'mind' has not only no beginning, but no end. It's felicitous, perhaps, that 'Hath no beginning' coincidentally begins with a slip of the pen, and so prevents the start of the poet's thoughts on this subject from having a stable origin of their own. Even when he casts his mind back to the origins of his living self and textual self, he finds himself in the middle of a process of revision already in motion.

The poet's first jottings of *The Prelude* come into view toward the end of a co-authored bricolage of prose fragments, German declensions, and an essay on morals. (We can see both the poet's own and his sister's writing in these pages). Three pages in from the back of the notebook we find an offset 'was it for this' at the top of the page. While later versions of the poem would delay the poet's critical question ('was it for this…?') until line 272 in 1805, the Wordsworth of the 1798 draft confronts his past self head-on:

was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers,
loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song
And from his alder shades and rocky falls
t
And from his fords and shallows send }
a voice

To intertwine my dreams, for this
didst thou
O Derwent – travelling over the green plains
didst thou beateus str
~~Giving ceaseless music to the~~
Near my sweet birth-~~place to the night~~
and day
To more than infant softness. . .[34]

What 'this' is cannot be pinned down either grammatically or semantically. Even if the Cornell editors offer 'trances of thought' as the 'original antecedent' to this word, the order of composition cannot be finally determined.[35] Or, perhaps, 'this' is a self-referential remark, gesturing to the act of writing itself. 'It' is just as suspect, if not more so. These ambiguities are never wholly resolved, and the indeterminacy at the moment Wordsworth chooses to start writing goes to the heart of the poem as process. His conscious decision to begin midline registers not only the spontaneity of the poet's first efforts but an acknowledgement of the elusive origins of his textual self.

'Each man is a memory to himself', Wordsworth notes in *The Prelude*'s third book: *to* himself, not of himself?[36] There's a kind of self-examination implicit within his phrasing as well as a hint of self-distancing. What we are witnessing is closer to an unfolding event of selfhood, far from the more straightforward hindsight we might expect autobiography to involve. If we take a phrase like 'Once again I see | These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows' from 'Tintern Abbey', we might notice how syntax comes to stage this emergence of selfhood on the page. That's because the line's sudden doubletake, in that self-revision from 'hedge-rows' to 'hardly hedge-rows', is a heightened moment of the broader encounter in syntax between the moment-by-moment events of experience and patterns of organized thought.[37] So when Wordsworth describes elsewhere how 'My own voice chear'd me, and, far more, the mind's | Internal echo of the imperfect sound', his poem is not so much working

with a sense of self-recognition but persistent self-estrangement.[38] Past voices and selves might be the poem's subject at hand, but there's a feeling that the poet encounters even his own past second-hand.

This self-consciousness spills into a pun in *The Prelude*'s opening, as the speaker's phrase 'Composed my thought' discloses a knowing awareness of the poem's own composition. It's interesting that 'thought' is singular before it is pluralised later. Here, it is something distinct and composed of discrete particles like a line of his blank verse. But even as this seems to be the case, the scaffolding effects of form shudder:

> ~~Give ceaseless music didst thou beauteous~~
> stream
> Give ceaseless music to the night & day
> Which with its steady cadence tempering
> Our human waywardness compose
> my thought

A 'steady cadence' does not bring harmony to disparate thoughts but gives form to one strand of thought. 'Tem*per*ing' plays a variation on the iambic pattern: are we to hear three syllables or truncate the word to two ("tem*p'ring*")? The line enacts a tussle between metrical rule and wayward spoken syllables as if straining to contain the unruly events of life. Wordsworth's revisions and rhythm collude here to allow us to imagine how the composition of the self works by fragmentary means, in which small moments of patterned, more unified, experience jostle with the contingencies of real life.[39] A writer's sense of his own development doesn't necessarily follow a simple trajectory: an upward curve from probation to proficiency.

When Wordsworth theorises more broadly about how his own writing takes shape, he describes a meticulous form of contemplation in which an original emotion is recreated in his mind:

> The emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar 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.[40]

'Similar' and 'generally' introduce covert but vital admissions that the poet isn't quite able to describe how composition really happens. Even as the poet seems as if he's working up to deliver a set of psychological principles, small concessions such as this hold back from establishing a rule for what recollection does. In fact, we see him moving away from, rather than towards, conclusive thoughts at moments of revision such as: 'when it chanced | That pauses of deep silence mockd my | skill | Then, often, sometimes in that silence'.[41] These subtle qualifications continue to sneak doubt in through the back doors of his writing.

So far I have been arguing that the splintered origins of Wordsworth's textual self provide him with a way of confronting the similarly confounding beginnings of his living memory. This section now considers how an unstable starting line for selfhood is worked into other patterns of revision across his work. His deft employment of images of fragmentation, together with his handling of tenses, begin to suggest that even when experiences have passed into memory they are not made less perplexing by more recent moments of selfhood.

Halfway through 'Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth notes, 'I cannot paint | What then I was', which seems to confirm the strangeness of and estrangement from composing his current self as he borrows words that belong to someone else.[42] His phrase elides the Roman poet Horace's idea of *ut pictura poesis* ('as is painting so is poetry') with his ode *non sum qualis eram*, 'I'm not as I was'.[43] To come closer to self-understanding, it seems, does not then lead to a kind of resolution, as if to the join the dots between past and present. Instead, it might come as a jolt of recognition at the impenetrability of selfhood. And yet, this

inscrutability becomes a source of imaginative strength. It's appropriate that Wordsworth might well have known one of his most significant rivers, the Wye, by its other name, *Vaga*: 'wandering' is certainly an appropriate name for a locus so central to his ruminations on the 'winding course' of memory in 'Tintern Abbey'.[44]

For the poet to analyse the 'mind that hath no beginning' is not only to allow himself to play amateur psychologist. It is also a question of style. What we can glean of selfhood in Wordsworth's draft writing brings into focus similar perplexities in the final versions of his poems. In 'Tintern Abbey', verbal tenses become part of the poet's broader investigation into the permeable membrane between past and present selves:

> How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
> O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods,
> How often has my spirit turned to thee!
>
> And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
> With many recognitions dim and faint,
> And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
> The picture of the mind revives again:[45]

As James Chandler has written of the poet's recollections, a 'past experience is interpreted in terms of a present experience which is itself informed by what has preceded it.'[46] Selves feed into each other, like a bewildering figure of eight. Each 'have' in these lines converts past tenses into moments of recollection that continue to cast their shadows over the present. In other words, what Wordsworth really means here is 'How often have I turned to thee *and still turn*', even if that 'I' is not quite the same 'I' who turned last time. 'Unremembered pleasure' might fuel a sense of expectation throughout this poem, but it is characteristic of Wordsworth to take pleasure in a self that remains finally unknowable.[47]

Movements of the mind across time in this way not only move with psychological models of Wordsworth's age; they provide a poetic reimagining of them. These contemporary discussions are sometimes quick to reform separateness into a more positive state of unity. For a start, John Locke's influential theory of the mind as a *tabula rasa* offered a picture of the mind as a singular and passive entity:

> All ideas come from sensation or reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: – How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from Experience. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself.[48]

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Locke's theory came increasingly under fire. The growth of the mind was no longer seen as a blank canvas becoming a finished picture. James Harris remarked in *Hermes* (1751) that the product of our senses can have 'nothing more than *a sort of dead capacity*'. Something else, another faculty, is needed to carry out a kind of mental landscaping, a 'lopping and pruning', as he puts it, so that its 'dormant Powers' can be activated.[49] Thomas Reid would identify this faculty as memory, which allows us to discern motion, for instance, and conceive of time.[50] Our ability to make connections is underwritten by processes of revision, even if these connections do not at last cohere.

Metaphors of dormancy proved to be a sustainable currency in further discussions of the unconscious. Thomas De Quincey, one of Wordsworth's earliest and most incisive readers, observed that the poet 'brought many a truth into life both for the eye and for the understanding, which previously had slumbered indistinctly for all men'.[51] Slumbering truths as a motif resonate across De Quincey's writing, but it's especially significant for the image of the palimpsest. 'What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain?', the

writer asks.[52] If the kind of effacement characteristic of the palimpsest is only partial, then it permits former states to be recalled, and so presents a version of memory in which dissolution underpins the malleability of self-composition.

While De Quincey established a lasting interest in the palimpsest as a deft and adaptable model of psychological, social, and historical connections, he was preceded in this by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, another of Wordsworth's primary influences. 'I have in vain', he says, 'tried to recover the lines from the palimpsest tablet of my memory.'[53] For Coleridge, then, the palimpsest offers a model of failed recovery; for De Quincey, the image is rehabilitated to show how the 'mysterious hand writings' of past experiences 'are not dead, but sleeping'.[54] In respect of a writer's self, Josephine McDonagh argues, the palimpsest model 'brings about the dissolution of the writer's construction of himself as a subject'. It 'problematizes and undermines the wider notion of the subject', she continues, 'as it is constructed at a particular historical moment.'[55] And yet, to undermine something is not automatically the same as problematising it; McDonagh's description picks up on a predictable wariness over the way in which the palimpsest both razes and retains the past sits uneasily amid more longstanding models of a subject's continuity over time. For Wordsworth, however, the palimpsest refashions the textual 'trail' of his life into an innovative form of divided selfhood.

If poets and psychologists of the period were similarly interested in the traces of former thought, then the palimpsest is a neat instance of psychological and poetic worlds colliding:

> The trace of successive handwriting, regularly effaced, as had been imagined, have, in the inverse order, been regularly called back: the footsteps of the game pursued, wolf or stag, in each several chase, have been unlinked, and hunted back through all their doubles.[56]

So while these inscriptions might develop successively, their final existence is far from sequential. The same is true for the former, or submerged, meanings of individual words, which don't quite drop away but rather take a back seat as new ones step into the foreground. In manuscripts, new ideas, like the latest sense of a word, seem to bury all that's gone before. Ideas that are only half-deleted, however, snag against this continual erosion, as the page retains traces of a text's earlier form. Take a phrase in Wordsworth like '~~Even there where sorrow is not time brings on | Its own composing weight~~'.[57] These lines are not exactly 'disowned'; they are options kept in play. Wordsworth's manuscripts do not simply record a sequence of versions of a text. They are more like the latent impressions of the palimpsest, and so are closer to a halfway oscillation between selves in the making.

An early version of one of *The Prelude*'s most suggestive passages of self-making envisages a multiple existence of selves that resemble a disjointed palimpsest:

> *A tranquillizing spirit presses now*
> *On my corporeal frame: so wide appears*
> *The vacancy between me and those days,*
> *Which yet have such self-presence in my mind*
> them
> *That, sometimes, when I think of ~~it~~, I seem*
> *Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself,*
> *And of some other Being.*[58]

'When I think of it' in the former version is emended to thoughts of 'them': a subtle revision of grammar, but a substantial change of emphasis. The separateness of his selves is less a by-product, or an after-thought, of his meditation than it is his central concern as he trains our focus on the 'vacancy' that divides them.[59] Vacant space is often a concept and a technique that Wordsworth finds attractive for analysing the development of both his textual self and personal recollections. Inserting commas in this draft, Wordsworth magnifies the medial

caesura which sunders the cluster of consciousness ('Two consciousnesses') assembled in this moment of thought, from the distinct consciousness that the vacancy between moments of recollection goes on to create. Here, the poet might then disagree with what Charles Taylor has described as 'the supposition that I could be two temporally succeeding selves'.[60] For Wordsworth, these selves are not consecutive but coexistent. As De Quincey's portrayal of the palimpsest shows, 'every design' of one's past life array themselves 'not as a succession, but as part of a coexistence'.[61]

Endlessly Distracted

To hold multiple selves in mind might be a sign of a divided attention. Lapses in attention are usually synonymous with distraction, a phenomenon that was met with suspicion in Wordsworth's period as it generally is now. The *OED* records an accumulation of instances in the eighteenth century where 'distraction' is associated with, or symptomatic of, 'mental derangement'.[62] 'Attention', meanwhile, was seen as a desirable quality. Dugald Stewart, philosopher and Wordsworth's contemporary, claimed that 'attention' was foremost a 'voluntary act'. Without it, 'the ideas and perceptions which pass through the mind, seem to leave no trace behind them'.[63] They *seem* not to, but that doesn't mean that they don't. Writing about distraction, Matthew Bevis has observed that the state might not simply be 'another name for attention *shifted* ('I was looking at this, then I looked at that')'.[64] It's helpful to remember here that distraction originates in the Latin *distrahare*, 'to draw in different directions'. Distraction, then, can allow for the mind's accommodation of multiple perceptions at the same time. Even if prior thoughts allow others to take centre stage, they are not wholly dismissed. Like distraction, Wordsworth's revision is an outward movement of the mind, not a return to its origin.

Distraction offers a model of self-revision which is enhanced, not sabotaged, because of self-division. The word 'distraction' appears only once in Wordsworth's corpus. When it arrives, however, it is used to striking effect, as the poet notes that *The Prelude* itself began in 'distraction, and intense desire'.[65] The poem itself was a distraction from *The Recluse,* the great philosophical work Coleridge was urging him to write. 'Distraction' and 'intensity' do not normally go hand-in-hand, but their juxtaposition reveals that 'distraction' is not always a cognitive blunder to be overcome. Unlike attention, distraction is not something that is on its way out – rather it is a sign that the mind is letting something else in. It's a stimulant of thought and feeling.

Dorothy Wordsworth's description of her brother at work sheds further light on the importance of distraction to his compositional process: 'after a certain time the progress is by no means proportioned to the labour in composition, and if he is called from it by other thoughts, he returns to it with ten times the pleasure, and his work goes on proportionally more rapidly.'[66] Her account recalls the poet's own description of 'distraction', and similarly emphasises the restorative effects of divided attention. Distraction mid composition is not so much an inevitable hurdle in the writing process as it is a way of inducing self-division that enables the poet's work to quicken its pace.

Wordsworth went in search of distraction as a way of confronting the difficulties of composition. Adam Nicolson explores how 'the sense of difficulty overcome' was a theme of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's retreat in 1797: their poetry, he argues, 'was not a culmination or a summation, but had its life at the beginning of things [. . .] emergent, unsummoned, encountered in the midst of difficulty'.[67] As Wordsworth felt his way toward a new kind of poetry, he was also searching for a new kind of selfhood, a search which is more easily and more effectively discernible in his manuscripts. For the poet once observed that 'in struggling

with words' we are 'led to give birth to and dwell on thoughts'.[68] Parallel revision and experimental composition while at the manuscript stage was how Wordsworth created a self (or selves) in the process of writing. Pondering over the smallest details of his writing was not ornamental; it was the origin of further thought.

Distraction might also be a good way of rethinking the periods of unconsciousness that Strawson discerns in our experience of selfhood. These periods, during which we lack a firm grasp on our experience, echo the divisive 'vacancy' Wordsworth discerns in his *locus classicus* of self-making. Only after he has regained consciousness of the experience of his own self-making, following the void of experience between now and 'those days', does he become aware of his multiple selves. Strawson's concept of 'thin subjects', refers to the idea that a subject cannot exist if it is not the subject of experience: 'there can't actually be a *subject* of experience, unless some experience exists for it to be a subject *of* at that time'.[69] This isn't the most helpful proposition when a subject sees moments of vacancy as part of self-making. According to Strawson, if a subject is not fully in charge of its experience, then it cannot be a true subject. Manuscripts embody periods where a writer is also not wholly in charge of his or her experience. These ongoing compositional states afford a kind of textual unconsciousness, and so might be able to accommodate subjects in the making during these periods of experiencelessness. They are not invested in where the self has been nor where it ends up.

The poet's endless process of composing the self is sustained by the discontinuities that arrive in moments of distraction. In allowing for the possibility of distraction, manuscripts also lay the foundations for disjointed composition. Stephen Gill, in the most recent assessment of Wordsworth's editors, maintains that the poet had a very clear sense of his own textual identity as he 'exercised authority' over his work 'and controlled the creation

of his poetic identity, his version of the canon, so to speak, not only by publishing some poems [. . .] but also by refusing to republish some'. The Cornell edition, he writes, 'destroys the identity of the version of the poems to which the poet gave his final authority' and 'effaces the order in which he wanted them presented'.[70] And yet, as I have been arguing, earlier Wordsworth is often more interested in a self he could not wholly control. If he did exercise some kind of authority then this might be discerned in his awareness that retaining the self in a desired form isn't always feasible. Some forms of his revision reflect how self-making might be achieved because of – not as the cost of – self-forgetfulness.

If *The Prelude*'s language is capable of tracking the movement of thought, then Wordsworth's revisions also embody how discontinuity not only hinders thought but is capable of reviving it. Whereas Shelley, for instance, is keen to go back to the original sight of Mont Blanc that he recorded in his notebook, Wordsworth's personal experience of crossing the Alps isn't so inspiring. When he set out with his friend Robert Jones on 14th August, 1790, from Martigny to the Italian border, they had already arrived in Italy by the 17th. Their disbelief at this predicament was only allayed when they turned to other travellers to confirm their crossing.[71] The very experience of the walk had distracted Wordsworth and Jones from the idealised glory of their joint venture; but the poet's retrospective composition of the scene shows him investigating his own distractedness.

The 1804 draft of this scene is dense with its own inaudible – though not invisible – crossings in the movements from line to line that allow the voice to pass over potential gaps without breaking stride. Crossings-out, however, show how critical these fault lines were to the passage's composition, as Wordsworth traversed his own textual path and realised that he hadn't ended up where he expected:

~~length~~

~~At [?] a Peasn~~ pas
[?underneath]
Underneath the [?cope] of a rude outhouse
~~At length we [?waitin h~~ere]
Had [?waited] there a Peasant
chanced to
pass
From who we learnd that we had
missed our [?road]
within
Which lay ~~along~~ the rivers [?bed] [?]
a few steps &
For ~~a short way~~ [?] then along [?its]
course
In short that all ~~the road~~ b **efore**
us [?hence]
Was downward, or to ~~give the~~

[26r]

brief
give ~~at once~~
The substance of this was
A
alps wer [?crossd]
After a little scruple & short pause
Of
[?] a rude [?shed] befor we [?in] this
spot
Had waited long a peasan [?chancd][72]

A 'little scruple & short pause' might as well be describing the poet in the act of penning these fragments. Immediate revisions and compositional lacunae are profuse, while the hesitant trail of relative clauses, conjunctives, and summative phrases ('In short') stage the writer's strains to manage contested moments of self-making – and therefore multiple possibilities of articulation – as his mind is drawn away from any particular moment of original inspiration. Wordsworth's later elaborations, in Keith Hanley's eyes, intimate the '"sudden blank of Soul, that shock" of having previously seen the famous Mont Blanc': 'the shock of his alienation in language'.[73] That's an interesting way of putting it – his 'alienation *in* language' not '*from* his language'? It's a subtle difference, but one that radically shifts the emphasis from the way in which the expectations of his living self don't exactly match up

with the experience embodied in the poem, to a sense that it is through the process of writing that Wordsworth discovers a new sense of self. These revisions aren't simply a visual record of the poet trying to figure out the movements of his own mind. They are an ongoing process of multiple selves working at cross purposes.

Uncertainty is central to Wordsworth's high hopes for the task of an author: to 'creat[e] the taste by which he is to be enjoyed' and to employ his genius 'in such a manner as to produce effects hitherto unknown.'[74] Revision is not solely a way of diagnosing the 'effects hitherto unknown' that frustrate the intentions of the author; it is also a way of preserving them. As I have been arguing, the palimpsest and distraction models of self-fabrication allow only a partial erasure of the past. In this respect, the effect of Wordsworth's revision isn't so much *a* to *b*, as *a* plus *b*. Competing forces at work within the poet's revisionism draw on the past but with an eye to the future, making the division of the self across time inevitable. It is one way the poet prevents the self from being reducible to an identifiable series of events and influences. Wordsworth reengineers what he cannot know about his self into his very technique of self composition.

'Scarcely has there been a poet with what could be called a learned eye, or an eye *extensively* learned, before Wordsworth', De Quincey thought.[75] A playful revision of phrasing, but an 'eye *extensively* learned' acknowledges a critical shift in emphasis that goes to the centre of Romantic revision. Poetic talent is not an innate instinct – a gift the poet is born with – but a carefully honed craft. Wordsworth's revisions are not simply the product of 'considerate and laborious work'. They self-consciously reflect upon the writing process:

Meanings at which I hadrdly hinted thoughts
And forms of which I scarcely had produced
A monument and arbitrary sign

that considerate and laborious work
In That patience which admitting no neglect
By doth
That slow creation which imparts to speach
Outline & substance even till it has give
A function kindred to organic power
The vital spirit of a perfect form
resting not till
it has
givn [76]

This work is far from over. As the last six words seem to peter out on the page, they echo the abiding perseverance they describe. 'Perfect form' isn't finally reached, and Wallace Stevens' illustration of the 'edgings and inchings of final form' captures perfectly the sense and presentation of the inching forward of this draft's ending.[77] It's this kind of self-postponement, in which the speaker acknowledges that he doesn't know what kind of self he is in the midst of creating, that generates new 'meanings' at which he has 'hardly hinted'.

As he continues to find that 'words of reason deeply weighed | Hath no beginning' and also no end, Wordsworth assimilates his fissured selfhood to a protean compositional style. As I have been arguing, Wordsworth discovers that the origins of his self are not only disparate; they are imperceptible. During those periods where the poet comes to revise his work and finds traces of his former selves in his own writing, he becomes aware of their coexistence before being drawn onto new possibilities of conceiving our selves. This endless reinvention is not just the result but the source of his self-making.

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[1] Wordsworth, *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L Reed, 2 vols. (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991), ii. p. 69. References to the *Thirteen-Book Prelude* are to this edition by volume and page number.

[2] Plato, 'Cratylus', *Cratylus; Parmenides; Greater Hippias; Lesser Hippias*, ed. and trans. H. N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), §402a: δὶς ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν ἂν ἐμβαίης.

[3] Wordsworth, *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ii. p. 65.

[4] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, eds. S. Bushell, J. A. Butler, M. C. Jaye (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 129; *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797–1800*, eds. J. Butler and K. Green (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 220; *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 116.

[5] Matthew Arnold, *Poems*, new ed. (London: Longman, 1853), p. vi.

[6] See, for instance, Ruth Abbott in 'Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the "strain of words | That shall be life": "Home at Grasmere" on "Religious Musings" in Dove Cottage Manuscript 28', *Textual Practice* 28 (2014), pp. 901–28. Sally Bushell has argued that the study of the compositional phases of Wordsworth's writing 'illustrates the value of interpreting revision and self-revision as a meaning vitally alive within the text at every level' in 'Composition and Revision', in *William Wordsworth in Context*, ed. Andrew Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 27-37: 35.

[7] Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 254 (Hartman's emphasis).

[8] Stephen Parrish, 'The Whig Interpretation of Literature', *Text* ix (1988), pp. 343–51: 346; Parrish, 'Editor as Archeologist', *Kentucky Review* iv (1983), pp. 3-14: 7. See also Ernest de Selincourt's judgement on the 'less inspired writings of his later years', which subdue the more innovative qualities of Wordsworth's earlier work when he was at 'the fullness of his powers'; *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, eds. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 2nd rev. ed. (1959; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. ix and xix.

[9] Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (eds.), *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-1949), I. p. vi.

[10] Ernest de Selincourt (ed.), *The Prelude, or, Growth of a Poet's Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), pp. l-li.

[11] Edward Moxon (ed.), *The Prelude, or, Growth of a Poet's Mind: An Autobiographical Poem* (London: Edward Moxon, 1850), p. 5.

[12] de Selincourt (ed.), *The Prelude*, p. xxvii. Emphasis added.

[13] Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (eds.), *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850* (New York & London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979), p. ix.

[14] Wordsworth, Abrams, Gill (eds.), *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, p. ix.

[15] Mark L. Reed (ed.), *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, i. p. v.

[16] The Norton editors use this phrase in their preface; see Wordsworth, Abrams, Gill (eds.), *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, p. xiii.

[17] To R. P. Gillies, 22 Dec. 1814, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), iii. p. 179.

[18] Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 756.

[19] Keith Hanley, 'Crossings Out: The Problem of Textual Passage in *The Prelude*', *Romantic Revisions*, eds. R. Brinkley and K. Hanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 103–35: 103.

[20] Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, p. 120.

[21] Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth's Revisitings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 10 and 1. More recently, Jane Stabler has made a similar suggestion that as we pore over a poet's manuscripts, 'we can begin to recognize the ways in which a particular mind works and reworks the same ground' in an 'organic process' or 'continuing labour'; 'Revision and Self-Citation', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. D. Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 388–40: 392.

[22] Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1798–1799*, ed. Stephen Parrish (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 115.

[23] Wordsworth, *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ii. p. 209.

[24] Wordsworth, *Thirteen–Book Prelude*, ii. p. 140.

[25] Zachary Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authority* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 315.

[26] Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authority*, pp. 53–4.

[27] Hannah Sullivan, *The Work of Revision* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 31. Stabler takes issue with this assertion in 'Revision and Self-Citation', p. 388.

[28] P.B. Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations, and Fragments*, ed. M. Shelley (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1840), p. 56.

[29] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981), pp. 203–4. This idea has its roots in Aristotle's idea of *eudaimonia* ('happiness'), where the highest end of life is to be *eudaimon*, a state of being that unites all subsidiary goals such as good health and prosperity: τέλειον δή τι φαίνεται καὶ αὔταρκες ἡ εὐδαιμονία, τῶν πρακτῶν οὖσα τέλος ('Happiness, therefore, being found to be something final and self-sufficient, is the End at which all actions aim'); *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham, rev. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), §1097b.

[30] Galen Strawson, *Selves: An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 325.

[31] DCP, MS Verse 42 (interleaved copy of Coleridge's *Poems*, 1796), in *Wordsworth's Experiments with Tradition: The Lyric Poems of 1802*, ed. Jared R. Curtis (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 42. These lines were used by Wordsworth in an early stage of the composition of 'Michael'. The Cornell editions adopt the following symbols in their reading texts and transcriptions:

[ ] Gap or blank in the manuscript.

[? Peace] Conjectural reading.

[?] Illegible word.

~~[?]~~ Illegible word deleted.

have[d]} An overwriting: 'd' is written on top of 've' in this example.

[32] Matthew Bevis, *Wordsworth's Fun* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 234.

[33] MS. RV, *1798–99 Prelude*, p. 187.

[34] MS. JJ (DC MS. 19), *The Prelude 1798–99*, p. 115.

[35] Stephen Parrish (ed.), *The Prelude 1798–1799*, p. 6.

[36] Wordsworth, *Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ii. p. 49.

[37] Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 116.

[38] Wordsworth, *Thirteen–Book Prelude*, ii. p. 15.

[39] A similar disagreement troubled theories of the sublime, as Jonathan Lamb has observed, which could not be pinned down as 'the coincidence of a loose circumstance with the rule that authorizes its appearance' or the result of 'the excessive accumulation of contingent particulars that evade all regulation'. See 'The Sublime', *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, iv, *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and C. Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 394–416: 413.

[40] Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), i. p. 148 (*PrW*).

[41] Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1798–1799*, p. 87.

[42] Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 118.

[43] Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. N. Rudd (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 218. Translation is my own.

[44] Richard L. Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Readings on Poetry*, 2nd ed. (London: R. Hunter, 1816), p. 3.

[45] Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 117–8.

[46] James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 212.

[47] Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 117.

[48] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689; repr. Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), p. 73.

[49] James Harris, *Hermes: Or a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Language and Universal Grammar* (London: H. Woodfall, 1751), p. 392. Harris' italics.

[50] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 325-6. See also the chapter 'Of Memory' more broadly.

[51] Thomas De Quincey, *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, 4th ed., 16 vols. (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1880), v. p. 250.

[52] De Quincey, *Works*, xvi. p.18. Sarah Dillon sees this instance as establishing the 'substantive concept of the palimpsest' in 'Reinscribing De Quincey's palimpsest: The significance of the palimpsest in contemporary literature and cultural studies', *Textual Studies* xix (2005), pp. 243–263: 243.

[53] S. T. Coleridge, *The Major Works*, ed. H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 41. Thomas Reisner notes the common interest of the image in Coleridge and De Quincey in 'De Quincey's Palimpsest Reconsidered', *Modern Language Studies* 7 (1982), pp. 93–5: 94.

[54] De Quincey, *Works*, xvi. 20–21.

[55] Josephine McDonagh, 'Writings on the mind: Thomas De Quincey and the Importance of the Palimpsest in Nineteenth Century Thought', *Prose Studies* 10 (1987), pp. 207–224: 210.

[56] De Quincey, *Works*, xvi. pp. 16–17.

[57] MS. RV, *The Prelude 1798–99*, p. 169.

[58] MS. A (DC MS. 52), *Thirteen–Book Prelude*, ii. p. 516. Italicised text is Dorothy Wordsworth's transcription, while the roman font is William Wordsworth's revision.

[59] For David Bromwich, this passage shows how 'for Wordsworth the moments of a life may have as much distance separating them as the moments of different lives', meaning that the 'work of memory is to associate virtually separate selves and not to recollect the shadows of a self already unified'; *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 149.

[60] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 51.

[61] De Quincey, *Works*, xvi. pp. 19–20. For a more sceptical view of this kind of self-making, see Stephen J. Spector's claim that the 'inscription of memory within a tropological construction of language leads De Quincey inexorably to undermine the activity to which he, as an autobiographer seems committed – the construction of himself' in 'Thomas De Quincey: Self-effacing Autobiographer', *Studies in Romanticism* 18 (1979), pp. 501–520: 501.

[62] 'distraction *n.*', §5, *OED Online*.

[63] Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (London: A. Straham and T. Cadell in the Strand, 1792), pp. 120–1.

[64] Matthew Bevis, 'In Search of Distraction', *Poetry* (2017) [accessed 05/06/2020], https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/144656/in-search-of-distraction.

[65] Wordsworth, *The Fourteen–Book Prelude*, ed. W.J.B. Owen (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 269.

[66] Dorothy Wordsworth to Lady Beaumont, 15 Feb. 1807, in *Collected Letters*, ii. p. 135.

[67] See Adam Nicolson, *The Making of Poetry: Coleridge, the Wordsworths and their Year of Marvels* (London: William Collins, 2019), p. 2.

[68] Quoted in *The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth*, ed. M.L. Peacock (New York, Octagon, 1969), p. 169.

[69] Strawson, *Selves*, p. 329. Strawson's italics.

[70] Stephen Gill, 'Wordsworth and His Editors', *Essays in Criticism* 69 (2019), pp. 1–15: 6, 11.

[71] John Worthen, *The Life of William Wordsworth* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), p. 56.

[72] MS. WW (DC MS. 34), ff. 25v–26r, *Thirteen–Book Prelude*, ii. pp. 254–55.

[73] Hanley, 'Crossings Out', p. 118.

[74] Wordsworth, *PrW*, iii. pp. 80, 82.

[75] De Quincey, *Works*, v. 264. De Quincey's emphasis.

[76] MS. 33, *The Prelude 1798–99*, p. 163.

[77] Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, eds. F. Kermode and J. Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1966), p. 417.