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Versions of Home

1770–83

Not all Wordsworth's re-creations of his younger self were in "The Prelude." One, written down when he was thirty, in 1800, describes him as he reckoned he had been around the age of ten:

> No thing at that time
> So welcome, no temptation half so dear
> As that which urged me to a daring feat
> Deep pools tall Trees black chasms & dizzy crags
> And tottering towers I loved to stand & read
> Their looks forbidding, read & disobey
> Sometimes in act & evermore in thought . . . (*HG* 387:915–21)

If there was one theme running through the versions of his younger self which Wordsworth created, it was his refusal to obey – "Sometimes in act & evermore in thought" – the demands of others. At the age of seventy-seven, he described an incident at his grandparents' house at Penrith. He and his elder brother Richard (1768–1816) – their father called him "Dicky" – had been whipping tops:

> The walls were hung round with family pictures, and I said to my brother, "Dare you strike your whip through that old lady's petticoat?" He replied, "No, I won't." "Then," said I, "here goes;" and I struck my lash through her hooped petticoat, for which no doubt, though I have forgotten it, I was properly punished.

The attack on the painting was not the first time Wordsworth remembered behaving willfully. He recalled having "become perverse and obstinate in defying

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chastisement," which suggests a whole series of such events, and being "rather proud of it than otherwise."[1] The incident was, nevertheless, not included in "The Prelude." It led to no revelations about the development of the mind or individual; it had nothing to do with the experience of nature.

Again, Wordsworth remembered in old age that his mother Ann (1747–78) had reportedly said of him that he was "the only one of her five children about whose future life she was anxious . . . he, she said, would be remarkable either for good or for evil." That was something else that did not get into "The Prelude." As an adult, Wordsworth remembered not only having been disobedient as a child but also "very wayward and moody," with what he summarized as "a stiff, moody, and violent temper"[2] – "stiff" meaning obstinate, stubborn, not amenable to reason. That too barely gets into "The Prelude."

It is also striking that two of his best-known re-creations of childhood – both in "The Prelude" – are about stealing: removing birds caught in other people's traps, and taking a shepherd's boat. Other significant episodes in "The Prelude" describe occasions where he must have been defying any adult advice he might have been given (birds'-nesting in dangerous locations, for example, and wandering the hills "half the night"; in old age, he recalled how "*his passion*" as a child had been "*wandering*"[3]). Few people have noticed how many examples Wordsworth provided of his younger self behaving badly: of what in his thirties, with some fascination, he called his "Motions of savage instinct" (*HG* 96:914). When racing one of his brothers (probably John) and "my brother was nearly certain of success . . . I tripped up his heels."[4]

As an adult, while liking to feel that "Nature" had "dealt with me as with a turbulent stream" (*HG* 98:934–6), he also believed that what he called "the love, / The longing, the contempt, the undaunted quest" (*HG* 98:949–50) had never died down in him ("contempt" catches the eye; it might imply heroic contempt for pain or death, it more likely means "disregard" or "disobedience," as in "contempt of court"). Such things, he hoped, "Shall live it is not in their power to die" (*HG* 395:952).

The little we actually know about Wordsworth's early childhood sets these "wild appetites and blind desires" (*HG* 387:913) in an interesting context. His father, John Wordsworth (1741–83), was "an Attorney of considerable eminence," attorney-at-law, "as lawyers of this class were then called,"[5] working as steward for the Tory baronet Sir James Lowther (1736–1802), later (1784) 1st Earl of Lonsdale, later still (1797) Viscount Lowther: the richest landowner in England. Another lawyer working for Lowther in 1787 summed him up: "ancient family, immense estates, a created peerage, force of intellect, fierceness, Parliamentary

interest." John Wordsworth would have acted for him in business and legal matters, particularly in the payment and receipt of money. His letters and account books show him collecting Lowther's overdue rents: "I do my utmost to get 'em in but fear Extremities must be proceeded to."[6] Lowther was also attempting to gain control of all ten parliamentary seats in Westmorland; the process involving doing favors for some people, scaring others, and buying up, selling, and renting property to ensure that it remained in the right hands (i.e. in the hands of those who were in Lowther's pocket: freehold property ownership was one qualification for voting, the possession of "burgages" – particular parcels of land – the qualification in Appleby and Cockermouth). Elections involved bribery on a gigantic scale; in 1774, for example, John Wordsworth was responsible for getting paid a huge bill of £199.13.0. for "Victuals and Liquor consumed during the course of the poll." The fact that he kept his job for nearly twenty years shows how good he must have been at remembering and sustaining the complex network of tough- and sweet-talking relationships, and the extensive legal and financial dealings which such a job involved. Lowther, "an Intolerable Tyrant over his Tenants and Dependents," "all-grasping" and notoriously without "a spark of gratitude," would have had no hesitation about getting rid of an employee who did not serve him well.[7]

John Wordsworth was following a family tradition in working for the Lowthers. His father Richard Wordsworth (1690–1760) had done the job from 1723 down to his death in 1760, and his wealthy cousin John Robinson (1727–1802) had then handled affairs before handing the job over to the recently qualified, cheerful, and energetic John Wordsworth in October 1764. Sixteen months later, John Wordsworth (known as "Jack" within his family[8]) would marry the eighteen-year-old Ann Cookson, daughter of a well-to-do tradesman in Penrith (she brought with her a £500 marriage portion from her father), and they moved into the house Lowther provided in Cockermouth. It was "quite a swagger house for such a town," with seventeen windows in its façade: a seventeenth-century building remodeled in 1745 for Joshua Lucock, High Sheriff of Cumberland.[9] Lowther had bought it in 1761 and thought it appropriate for his representative; the house proclaimed the status of the man who inhabited it (and of the man for whom he worked).

Its garden ends in a terrace looking out over the River Derwent, from which the ruins of Cockermouth Castle (also beside the Derwent, some three hundred yards to the east) were visible. The castle ruins would have been an even better playground than the house's formal gardens for the Wordsworth children. Wordsworth, born in 1770, was the second of five; Dorothy (1771–1855), known as "Dolly," the third child, would recall how very neat the garden was while their mother and father took care of it, with a terrace walk and a privet hedge with "roses and privot intermingled – the same hedge where the sparrows were used to build

their nests."[10] In his poem "Address from the Spirit of Cockermouth Castle," Wordsworth remembered chasing sparrows and butterflies through the garden of the house and running after butterflies at the castle, as well as clambering up to gather flowers in the ruins and descending terrified into its dungeons: "a prey / To soul-appalling darkness" (*SSIP* 578:7–8).

As a prosperous family, with small children, the Wordsworths had a nursemaid as well as a maidservant and manservant; in "The Prelude" Wordsworth would recall his "Nurse's song" blending with the sound of the Derwent.[11] Little Dorothy had lessons from the local dancing-master, and in May 1777 was chosen (with Joshua Lucock, grandson of the man who had built the Wordsworths' house) to open proceedings at a ball staged to show off the children's skills: "Mr Hadwen's ball was opened by Master Lucock & Miss Wordsworth (both under 5 years old) 'who notably performed the Minuet, Cotillion, and Country Dance.'"[12] The pairing of the Wordsworth daughter with the grandson of a great local landowner and magnate suggests the circles in which the Wordsworth family moved.

Two recollections Wordsworth wrote down towards the end of his life associated his mother with church and duty. He remembered her "pinning a nosegay to my breast when I was going to say the catechism in the church, as was customary before Easter," shortly before his sixth or seventh birthday.[13] Children being catechized at All Saints, Cockermouth wore flowers – "Each with a vernal posy at his breast," Wordsworth recalled, in his sonnet "Catechizing" – but he also imagined "How fluttered then thy anxious heart for me" (*SSIP* 195:3, 8). In the family, Ann Wordsworth had a reputation for "piety and wisdom,"[14] but that may have only been a reflection of what her son later wrote about her. Wordsworth's other early memory of his mother was of telling her

> that I had been at church . . . The occasion was, a woman doing penance in the church in a white sheet. My mother commended my having been present, expressing a hope that I should remember the circumstance for the rest of my life. "But," said I, "Mama, they did not give me a penny, as I had been told they would." "Oh," said she, recanting her praises, "if that was your motive, you were very properly disappointed."[15]

She sounds nicely down-to-earth. The school her son attended in Cockermouth up to the age of nine was the Free School run by the Reverend Joseph Gillbanks;[16] not very demanding for a bright child.

But one advantage Wordsworth did have was a father who "set him very early to learn portions of the works of the best English poets by heart, so that at an early age he could repeat large portions of Shakspeare, Milton, and Spenser." His father would subsequently pay five shillings a year to the "Boys Book Club" in Hawkshead, enabling his eleven-year-old son at school there to read widely.[17] We need to qualify Wordsworth's later version of himself as a wild child, constantly out of doors, with the fact that he had always been extremely bookish; even in

"The Prelude" he would compare the way that "books and things" can "work / Gently on infant minds" with the effect of "the sun / Upon a flower" (*1805* v. 374–6). And, Wordsworth insists, even his disobedient younger self, confronting those "Deep pools tall Trees black chasms & dizzy crags / And tottering towers," did not just react instinctively to them but "loved to stand & read / Their looks forbidding, read & disobey." From the start, *reading* – in the sense of a fascinated concentration – was primary, even if he mostly preferred to do the opposite of what the reading recommended.

John Wordsworth regularly rode the county on Lowther's business, initiating and carrying through the legal actions and demanding the rents which Lowther's huge range of property interests entailed; he also became a Recorder – a part-time judge – which meant his often being away for three or four days at a time. Ann Wordsworth would have been a good deal on her own with the servants in the big house in Cockermouth; she regularly took her children the twenty-seven miles across to Devonshire Street in Penrith, where her parents William Cookson (1711–87) and his wife Dorothy (1719–92) still ran a mercer's shop which looked down into the central market place. Ann's unmarried elder brother Christopher (1745–99) lived either with his parents or further down the street; her younger brother William (1754–1820) was for the moment a student at Cambridge. The Wordsworth children would go to school in Penrith while staying there; Wordsworth attended Ann Birkett's school, where Dorothy went too, and there they met the Hutchinson girls, Mary, Margaret, Sara, and Joanna.[18]

It was probably on one of these visits that Wordsworth learned to ride, sometime before he was six. In "The Prelude" he created a frightening occasion when, out on horseback with one of the Cookson family servants, they get separated on Penrith Beacon, and – not daring to ride on by himself – he leads his horse down into a hollow, to find himself at exactly the spot where a murderer had once been gibbeted. In some terror he gets back up to the windy heights, to find just a bare pool, the old stone stump of the beacon itself, and a girl carrying a pitcher; and while desperately looking for his own lost guide becomes intensely impressed by what he later called "the visionary dreariness" of the place (*1805* xi. 311): dreariness that engenders imagination. The account was assembled from various recollections, but conveys – what may have been true – the terror of a solitary child.

What is more, following a visit to friends in London in the winter of 1777–8, Ann Wordsworth ("a Lady much respected by her acquaintance") came back unwell and – "after a long illness"[19] and attendance by the apothecary W. Harrison – died in her parents' house on March 8, 1778, "of a decline, brought on by a cold." She was just thirty. Wordsworth's own last memory of her (he was not quite eight) was of "passing the door of her bedroom during her last illness, when she was reclining in

her easy chair."[20] The children obviously did not see much of their dying mother. Ann Wordsworth was buried at St. Andrew's church at Penrith, just a short distance from her parents' house and shop.

Wordsworth wrote briefly about his mother in "The Prelude" in the early months of 1804. By then, he remembered her as having been old-fashioned – "Fetching her goodness . . . from times past" (*1805* v. 267) – but also wonderfully benign. And he was insistent that she had been for her children "the heart / And hinge of all our learnings and our loves" (*1805* v. 257–8), "hinge" in the old sense of the axis of the earth; the two poles about which the earth revolves. With her death, the children lost the center of their world. Wordsworth wrote how

> She left us destitute, and as we might
> Trooping together. (*1805* v. 259–60)

"Trooping together" makes them sound like orphans, "gathering together in a company." All they could do was rely upon each other.

But that was exactly what their new situation made impossible. Following Ann Wordsworth's death, the hard-working and constantly traveling father could do little else than split up his family. He relied upon his wife's relations to help him. On June 13, 1778, Dorothy (aged six and a half) was taken by chaise to Halifax, seventy-five miles away, to be looked after by her great aunt Elizabeth Cookson's daughter, Elizabeth Threlkeld (just thirty-three years old, almost the age Dorothy's mother would have been: Dorothy always called her "Aunt," though technically she was a cousin). Wordsworth never forgot how "My Sister and I were parted immediately after the death of our Mother";[21] Dorothy did not see her brothers for another nine years. She recalled, much later, how after her mother's death she "was never once at home, never was for a single moment under my Father's roof,"[22] and can only have seen her father when he made brief visits to Halifax. But she went on thinking of Cockermouth as "home." The two younger sons, John (1772–1805), only four, and Christopher (1774–1846), not yet three, appear to have stayed on with their grandparents and uncle in Penrith, while John Wordsworth took the two eldest boys, Richard (now ten) and William (just eight), back to Cockermouth with him, to go to school there. They would have been cared for by the servants who were often so important for middle-class children, especially for those whose father was so frequently away.

But their mother's death was a fearful blow for them all. John Wordsworth, his son thought, "never recovered his usual cheerfulness of mind";[23] and he was in no position to be more than an occasional father to his children. The little we know about him as a father nevertheless suggests a man involved with his children

so far as he could be; giving, for example, his shy third son John the nickname "Ibex" ("the shyest of all the beasts"[24]), and hurrying home to spend Christmas with them. Dorothy enviously recalled how, while she was down in Halifax, Christmas Day – also her birthday – was "always kept by my Brothers with rejoicing in my Father's house."[25] Wordsworth too linked the house with his father, calling it "my Father's House" (*1805* i. 289) and in his poem "To a Butterfly" he recalled playing in the garden with "My Father's Family" (*P2V* 203:9): perhaps the youngest children of his father's brother Richard (1733–94), a lawyer in Whitehaven.

Wordsworth commented, late in life: "Of my earliest days at school I have little to say, but that they were very happy ones." The reason he gave was characteristic: "chiefly because I was left at liberty, then and in the vacations, to read whatever books I liked." Reading what he wanted, when he wanted, was what mattered. His father's early insistence on poetry had given him a taste for it, while the Cockermouth school seems to have been undemanding, and his reading left him "at liberty to luxuriate in such feelings and images as will feed [the] mind in silent pleasure."[26] According to "The Prelude" he was entranced by a selection of tales from the *Arabian Nights* in "A little, yellow canvass-cover'd Book" (*1805* v. 483) which he prized.

Having lost their mother, after fourteen months the two eldest boys also lost their home for most of the time. At the end of May 1779 they were sent as boarders to the Grammar School in Hawkshead, a small market town some thirty miles south-east of Cockermouth, and about the same distance south-west of Penrith. The town was "a rustic spot," "Less populous with houses than with trees" (*1799* 217), but the school had a good reputation for classics and mathematics,[27] partly because of its headmaster James Peake, who had been in post since 1768. The fact that Wordsworth (just nine) went at the same time as his brother Richard (not quite eleven) may be a tribute to the fact that he was clever, and able to cope with Grammar School, but it may also have been because of their father's desire to keep the boys together, and to give them at least each other's company.

Over the next six years, up to 1785, all four Wordsworth boys were "transplanted" (*1805* i. 310) to the school in Hawkshead. Like most pupils there, they boarded with a local family, and Ann Tyson (1713–96) with her husband Hugh (1714–84) took them on. The Tysons went on looking after them after their own move, in the autumn of 1783, to Green End Cottage in the hamlet of Colthouse, half a mile outside Hawkshead; and Ann continued to do so after Hugh's death. She thus became one of the few constants in the boys' lives. In "The Prelude" Wordsworth

remembered her as "my grey-hair'd Dame" (*1805* viii. 253), the "lowly Cottages in which we dwelt" with their "warm peat fire / At evening," the card games on the "snow-white deal" of her kitchen table (*1805* i. 526, 536–7, 542), and her anecdotes and capacity for story-telling – stories which later got into his poetry.[28]

Very early in his time at Hawkshead, too, came his astonished discovery that there were "four large Volumes" of the *Arabian Nights*: "'twas, in truth, to me / A promise scarcely earthly" (*1805* v. 489–91). He persuaded a school-friend to join him in saving up for all four. But despite spending some months trying to raise the money, they never managed it.

Later on came precocious reading, of what he found in Hawkshead and in his father's library at Cockermouth. He read "all Fielding's works, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and any part of Swift that I liked; Gulliver's Travels, and the Tale of the Tub, being both much to my taste."[29] John Wordsworth purchased the four volumes of Lesage's *Gil Blas* on December 27, 1781: the translation by the novelist Tobias Smollett (1721–71) had been published in London that year, while Smollett's translation of *Don Quixote* may also have been the one Wordsworth read. He recalled in "The Prelude" going out "with rod and line" to fish on sunny days during the summer holidays, but – instead – becoming distracted by the book he had taken: "devouring as I read, / Defrauding the day's glory, desperate" (*1805* v. 507–12).

Although – in recollection, at least, and probably in reality – he had been notably self-willed before the death of his mother (hence her fears for him), his willful independence seems to have gone from strength to strength as "The pupil of a public School." Hawkshead inevitably toughened him up; he remembered being "forc'd / In hardy independence to stand up / Among conflicting passions" (*1805* xiii. 316–18), so that he remained "not yet tam'd / And humbled down" (*1805* v. 545–6) – and determined never to be so, either. But he was, too, "suffered to run wild";[30] without a mother, and hardly ever seeing his father, he enjoyed the role of the "wild unworldly-minded Youth, given up / To Nature and to Books" (*1805* iv. 281–2) he described in "The Prelude," wandering "half the night among the Cliffs / And the smooth Hollows, where the woodcocks ran / Along the open turf." "The Prelude" dates such behavior to the period "ere I had seen / Nine summers" (*1805* i. 311–17), which would mean, literally, the period just after his mother's death. The poem goes out of its way to present a child utterly uncaring of adult restrictions, "independent and sufficient for itself" and full of "natural vivacity,"[31] as in the skating episode:

> It was a time of rapture: clear and loud
> The village clock toll'd six; I wheeled about,
> Proud and exulting, like an untired horse,
> That cares not for his home. – (*1805* i. 458–61)

In 1799 he would write about "Seeking this visible world" (*1799* ii. 323) in connection with his new self-sufficience: the natural world, to the re-creating adult, becoming the child's natural home. To what extent his wildness was a kind of response to his loss, we shall never know, but it seems likely to have been linked. As he confessed later, recalling his "intimation . . . that some part of our nature is imperishable," he remembered his belief in "the indomitableness of my own spirit": "I could not conceive that I could lie down quietly in the grave and become dust": "I used to brood over the stories of Enoch & Elijah & almost to persuade myself that whatever might become of others I s[d] be translated in something of the same way to heaven."[32] Overcoming death had understandably become something of an obsession to him; unlike the "others" – he must have been thinking of his mother – *he* was not going to die. He was also determined that the "visible world" (*1799* ii. 323) was where he might escape, in spite of the way "others" let him down. The quotation with which this Chapter started almost certainly relates to this period, as does the stealing described in "The Prelude," which is especially fascinating as the behavior of the son of a lawyer, brought up by a pious mother assisted by strict grandparents, who had lost the axis of his earth.

The eldest boys' holiday times from 1779 onwards would have been spent either in Penrith with their grandparents and their uncle Christopher, all of whom we know Wordsworth came to dislike, or with their uncle Richard's family in Whitehaven. There were just occasional rapturous returns to their father and their beloved Cockermouth house, library, and garden. John and Christopher seem to have gone to live in Cockermouth with their father after Richard and William had gone to Hawkshead (John joined his brothers at Hawkshead in January 1782), and Cockermouth remained the place for celebrations.[33]

Life indoors, especially during holidays in Penrith, became a trial; this may well have been the period to which the top-whipping anecdote and Wordsworth's "violent temper" belong. Things got so bad that, on one occasion, Wordsworth – enraged "upon some indignity having been put upon me" – went up into the attics "with an intention of destroying myself with one of the foils which I knew was kept there. I took the foil in hand, but my heart failed."[34] The "miseries, / Regrets, vexations, lassitudes" of this period, he believed, became "infus'd / Into my mind" (*1805* i. 357–60).

Taking his whip to the portrait of one of his female Cookson ancestors was another kind of retaliation and perhaps another revelation of frustration. His grandmother Dorothy Cookson came from the "very ancient" Crackanthorpe family of Newbiggin Hall[35] and never let anyone forget it; in 1790, she inherited the Hall and estate, seven miles east of Penrith. The fact that, on her death in June 1792, her eldest son Christopher would change his surname from Cookson to Crackanthorpe,

as appropriate for someone inheriting the Newbiggin estate, was an indication of the power of the old name.

For the moment, anyway, the four boys were concentrated upon Hawkshead and the Grammar School. Wordsworth was there from late May 1779 until June 1787, when he was seventeen. He was lucky to be taught Latin by a man named Joseph Shaw, learning "more of Latin in a fortnight than I had learnt during two preceding years at the school of Cockermouth";[36] but Shaw left Hawkshead in 1780. Wordsworth was apparently an excellent pupil: something we would not have guessed from "The Prelude," where the account of Hawkshead is devoted entirely to the country around the town. It describes, for example, his walks round Esthwaite Water with a fellow pupil "before the hours of School" (in summer from 6.00 or 6.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m., and then from 1.00 p.m. till 5.00, and in winter from 7.30 until 4.00); but "The Prelude" says absolutely nothing about what happened at school itself – the titles of Book I and Book II both refer to "School-time," not to "School." It is Wordsworth's version of himself as "A rambling School-boy" (*1805* viii. 590) outside school hours that matters in "The Prelude": fishing and rowing on Esthwaite Water, Windermere, and Coniston in summer, skating in winter, robbing ravens' nests in spring ("mean / My object, and inglorious," he would confess[37]). In 1823, he recalled

> frequently seeing, when a boy, bunches of unfledged ravens suspended from the churchyard gates of H[awkshead], for which a reward of *so* much a head was given to the adventurous destroyer.

The local farmers believed that they preyed on lambs, and as much as 4d. was paid for each dead fledgling.[38]

One account surviving from outside "The Prelude"[39] shows him, at the age of just thirteen and known as "Bill," going with a party of slightly older boys to Yewdale Fells, at the head of Coniston Water. The group excursion was a very different kind of attempt from the one Wordsworth described in "The Prelude," in which he "hung alone" on "the perilous ridge," "Above the raven's nest" (*1805* i. 348, 343). To gain shelter, ravens commonly nest under overhanging rock, so that approaching from above – or alone – may be unwise. On the Yewdale expedition the boys joined forces, the one climbing from below being secured by a rope held by those above. Fletcher (or "Fleck") Raincock, Tom Usher, Ted Birkett, Will Tyson, Wordsworth, and Raincock's younger brother William positioned themselves above; John Benson – on the rope – tried to reach the nest from below. But he became paralyzed with terror, crag-fast on a narrow ledge. Wordsworth found himself being sent for help with William Raincock and Will Tyson, while

the three older boys stayed with poor Benson, trying to keep him calm. Only after some hours were a local man called Francis Castlehow and his fifteen-year-old son able to get Benson down. Not surprisingly, Benson never went nest-robbing again; nor did "Fleck" Raincock – the experience had been too terrifying. Was that the end of Bill Wordsworth's nest-robbing career too – except in verse?

As the nesting expedition shows, excursions did not always work out well; at the age of twelve, for example, Wordsworth had gone with "a person living in the neighbourhood of Hawkshead" for a fishing expedition to the source of the Duddon, up near the Wrynose Pass; it poured with rain all day, they had almost no luck, and the journey home was exhausting: "if the good man had not carried me on his back, I must have lain down under the best shelter I could find."[40]

Wordsworth may well have learned to skate on Esthwaite Water; we know that in 1779 he had got to know Tom Park, a boy at the Grammar School two years older than himself, who was a great skater and who also took him fishing.[41] Hawkshead was the first place where he had lived for any length of time close to a body of water, and skating ("giving my body to the wind" became his phrase for it) grew into a passion. There was an especially prolonged frost in the early spring of 1785, when "Esthwaite Water was frozen over with thick ice, and so were large areas of Windermere."[42] "The Prelude" draws on that period; the boys chased each other, in games

> Confederate, imitative of the chace,
> And woodland pleasures, the resounding horn,
> The Pack, loud bellowing, and the hunted hare.
> So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
> And not a voice was idle: with the din,
> Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud . . . (*1805* i. 463–8)

The poem, though, imposes a reminder of the remembering adult. The hills

> Into the tumult sent an alien sound
> Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,
> Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west,
> The orange sky of evening died away. (*1805* i. 471–4)

The individual consciousness which stands apart, aware of the echo "Of melancholy" – the odd hesitation of "not unnoticed" demanding to be noticed – is less likely that of the exultant boy than of the adult who makes the poetry.

Esthwaite Water was very much the center of attention for a boy "roving up and down alone" (*1805* v. 455) as Wordsworth presents himself; none of his reminiscences of Hawkshead took any notice of Richard or of his other brothers. He would

reflect in 1804 how "I was taught to feel, perhaps too much, / The self-sufficing power of solitude" (*1805* ii. 77–8), but he was the one who had done the teaching. He had been in Hawkshead less than a month, so that it was still "a dream of novelty" (*1799* i. 262), when, at twilight on June 18, 1779, out for a walk, he noticed a pile of clothes on the far shore, left by a man bathing. The next day a search started, "with grappling-irons, and long poles," for the body, that of James Jackson, a local schoolmaster:

> At length the dead man 'mid that beauteous scene
> Of trees, and hills, and water bolt upright
> Rose with his ghastly face. (*1799* 259:277–9)

According to his account in "The Prelude," young as he was, Wordsworth did not feel disturbed; he had already imagined such things "among the shining streams / Of Fairy Land" (*1805* v. 476–7). This is hard to believe: the horror of "bolt upright" and "ghastly face" is unforgettable, and in 1804 he would write about the "terrors" (*1805* i. 357) of his early life. Every time he went round beloved Esthwaite, too, the young Wordsworth would have been aware of the remains of a gibbet near the lake-head, where – he wrote in 1811 – "Part of the Irons & some of the wood work remained in my memory,"[43] as if his consciousness had actually been penetrated by the wood and iron.

What is clear is how well-educated a boy he was becoming. The pupils at Hawkshead learned Latin, mathematics, writing, and – later on – Greek; by December 1785, the Wordsworth boys were also having dancing and French lessons.[44] The headmaster at Hawkshead was first succeeded by Edward Christian (a friend of the Wordsworth family) and then, in 1782, by the Rev. William Taylor, only thirty-one years old, a specialist in "metaphysics and mathematics" but also remarkable for "a great stock of general reading." And it was Taylor who got Wordsworth to write poetry, not just to study the Latin verse all the pupils were obliged to cope with.[45] Wordsworth recalled how the "first verses I wrote were a task imposed by my master; the subject, 'The Summer Vacation;' and of my own accord I added other verses upon 'Return to School.'" Taylor gave the subject to more than one pupil; a poem "On the Vacation" survives, by Charles Farish, a boy three years ahead of Wordsworth.[46]

When Wordsworth wrote his poems (which do not survive) is unclear; one contemporary said that he was thirteen, but the summer of 1784 appears equally likely, with the follow-up verses of "Return to School" apparently written when

he was living at Whitehaven.[47] The poetry which he wrote for himself came later. But when he was just thirteen and a half, the lives of all the Wordsworth children changed again – and irrevocably.

Notes

1. *WP* iii. 372. Still to be whipping tops, RW was probably no more than thirteen or fourteen; WW would then have been eleven or twelve.
2. *WP* iii. 372: see too *Robinson* ii. 488, 487.
3. *FN* 79.
4. *Memoirs* ii. 464.
5. *WL* i. 546; *WP* iii. 371.
6. James Boswell, *Boswell: The English Experiment 1785–1789*, ed. Irma S. Lustig and Frederick A. Pottle (New York, Toronto, and London, 1986), p. 104; JW1 to Lowther, June 10, 1781, Cumbria Archives, D/LONS/L1/1/90.
7. Alexander Carlyle, *Anecdotes and Characters of the Times*, ed. James Kinsley (1973), p. 213; Hugh Owen, *The Lowther Family* (Chichester, 1990), pp. 284, 296.
8. See e.g. WLMS Shepherd Bundle 6/4, 5: "I am / Dear Jack / Yrs Affectionately / Rich.[d] Wordsworth."
9. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Cumberland and Westmorland (The Buildings of England)* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 109; *Wordsworth House and Garden, Cockermouth*, (National Trust, 2007), p. 4. The county boundaries vanished with the creation of Cumbria in 1974; WW was born in Cockermouth (Cumberland), went to school in Hawkshead (Lancashire), and settled in Grasmere (Westmorland).
10. *WL* i. 616 (DW was recalling WW's "The Sparrow's Nest," *P2V* 212–13).
11. *1799* i. 3. Before decimalization in 1971, the pound sterling (£.) was the equivalent of 20 shillings; the shilling (s.) was the equivalent of 12 pence (d.). A price could therefore have three elements, e.g., £1.2.6. Prices below a pound here appear as 19 shillings or 19s. 6d.; the penny could be further divided into half-pence or 4 farthings. The guinea was £1.1.0. (1 pound, 1 shilling), often a unit for fees.
    JW1 employed a maid called Amy at £4 a year and a manservant named Duncan Campbell at £8.8.0. Two nurses called Betty and Sally Lowthian (from 1778) cared for the children; Betty was paid 2s. 6d. but Sally (responsible for the household at Cockermouth) was paid a guinea a week (WLMS 7/74, WLMS Shepherd 12/1). On JW1's death a payment of £27.7.2. was made to "Sally in full" (WLMS Shepherd 12/1).
12. *The Cumberland Chronicle and Whitehaven Public Advertiser*, May 3, 1777. Joshua Lucock Bragg (?1772–1809), as he became, had been baptized in Cockermouth on February 1, 1772 and DW had been born December 25, 1771, so both were over five.
13. *WP* iii. 371; Easter 1778 was after Ann Wordsworth's death; in 1775, WW would only have been four.
14. *Memoirs* i. 32.

15. *WP* iii. 371–2. Public penance at that date was usually imposed because a woman had given birth to an illegitimate child; in a white sheet, bare headed, with bare legs and feet, she had to sit through a sermon, an occasion for the general improvement of the congregation.
16. Incumbent of the Parish Church of All Saints, 1778–95.
17. *Memoirs* i. 34; Thompson 54–5.
18. I have used the form "Sara" for Sara Hutchinson, and "Sarah" for Sarah Coleridge, although both women (and their family and friends) used both forms.
19. *The Cumberland Chronicle and Whitehaven Public Advertiser*, March 14, 1778.
20. *WP* iii. 372; "a decline" probably means consumption, though Moorman argues for pneumonia (i. 18). See WLMS/1/2/3, "Apothecary": "W. Harrison – to 8° Mar. 1778 - - 4.8.10," the bill paid July 12, 1778.
21. JW1 paid 5 guineas "towards her conveyance etc." and then £118.16.10. over the next five years (WLMS 7/68); *FN* 1.
22. *WL* i. 663. Cf. DW's 1828 reference to the walled-in front courtyard of the Cockermouth house as "my Father's Court" (*DWJ* ii. 401).
23. *WP* iii. 371.
24. *WL* i. 562–3.
25. *WL* i. 663.
26. *WP* iii. 372; *WL* ii. 287.
27. *Reading* i. 162.
28. See e.g. *FN* 18, 86.
29. *WP* iii. 372.
30. *WL* ii. 285.
31. *WL* ii. 285, 288.
32. *WP* ii. 50; WLMS 7/10; *FN* 61.
33. The fireplaces were updated around 1780 by the addition of "elegantly carved overmantels" (*Wordsworth House and Garden*, p. 4).
34. *WP* iii. 372. A foil was a short dueling sword with a blunted edge, tipped with a button; inappropriate for suicide, even without the button.
35. *Memoirs* i. 30.
36. *WP* iii. 372.
37. *1805* i. 340–1; WW's 1823 reminiscence (see below) demonstrates the "object."
38. *WP* ii. 246; "The practice seems to have been general throughout Lakeland during the eighteenth century" (Derek Ratcliffe, *The Raven: A Natural History*, 2008, p. 21).
39. Thompson 211–14.
40. *FN* 31.
41. Thompson 109, 204–5; Park fell through the ice on Esthwaite Water on December 18, 1796 and drowned.
42. *WL* i. 275; see too *1805* i. 480; both perhaps with reference to John Dryden's translation of the *Aeneid* vii. 553 ("Give to the wanton Winds their flowing hair"); Thompson 108.
43. *WP* ii. 333.
44. Thompson 92; Mr. W. T. Mingay was paid £5.4.0. "for teaching R^{d} W^{m} John & Christ^{r} to dance" (WLMS Shepherd 12/2).

45. *Reading* i. 162 ("metaphysics" probably meaning theoretical or speculative philosophy); WW, "not having been educated at one of the Public Schools" (*WL* iii. 125), had not learned to write Latin verse.
46. *WP* iii. 372; he thus began as "the poet of the school" (*Memoirs* ii. 306); *EPF* 420; see Thompson 311–18.
47. Reed i. 298; WW recorded that the verses "were written after walking six miles to attend a dance at Egremont" (Moorman i. 57), 5 or 6 miles from Whitehaven.