

## WORDSWORTH'S *PRELUDE*: ONE

1. What place then is left in the heart for Virtue to build on, if in any case we may dare practice on others what we should feel as a cruel and contemptuous wrong in our own persons? Every parent possesses the opportunity of observing, how deeply children resent the injury of a delusion; and if men laugh at the falsehoods that were imposed on themselves during their childhood, it is because they are not good and wise enough to contemplate the past in the present, and so to produce by a virtuous and thoughtful sensibility that continuity in their self-consciousness, which Nature had made the law of their animal life. Ingratitude, sensuality, and hardness of heart, all flow from this source. Men are ungrateful to others only when they have ceased to look back on their former selves with joy and tenderness. They exist in fragments. Annihilated as to the Past, they are dead to the Future, or seek for the proofs of it everywhere, only not (where alone they can be found) in themselves.

S.T. COLERIDGE, *The Friend* (1818); text from *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke (2 vols, London, 1969), Vol. I, pp. 39-40. For the original text of this passage in *The Friend*, N° 3, August 10, 1809, see Vol. II, p.41.

2. Recalling is something which we sometimes have to try hard and which we often fail to bring off; and very often we do not know whether we have brought it off or not. So we may claim to have recalled something and later be persuaded to withdraw the claim. But though 'recall' is a 'got it' verb, it is not a verb of finding, solving or proving. Rather, like 'reciting', 'quoting', 'depicting' and 'mimicking', it is a verb of showing, or is at least affiliated to such verbs. Being good at recalling is not being good at investigating, but being good at presenting. It is a narrative skill, if 'narrative' be allowed to cover non-prosaic as well as prosaic representations. That is why we describe recollections as relatively faithful, vivid and accurate and not as original, brilliant or acute. Nor do we call people 'clever' or 'observant' merely because things come back to them well. An anecdotalist is not a sort of detective.

GILBERT RYLE, *The Concept of Mind* (London, 1949), pp. 278-9.

3. It is at this stage that the real problem of memory in perception arises, in association with the general problem of perceptual consciousness. We want to know how, by its own vitality, and without carrying complementary material into a mythical unconscious, consciousness can, in course of time, modify the structure of its surroundings; how, at every moment, its former experience is present to it in the form of a horizon which it can reopen--'if it chooses to take that horizon as a theme of knowledge'--in an act of

recollection, but which it can equally leave on the fringe of experience, and which then immediately provides the perceived with a present atmosphere and significance. A field which is always at the disposal of consciousness and one which, for that very reason, surrounds and envelops its perceptions, an atmosphere, a horizon or, if you will, given 'sets' which provide it with a temporal situation, such is the way in which the past is present, making distinct acts of perception and recollection possible. To perceive is not to experience a host of impressions accompanied by memories capable of clinching them; it is to see, standing forth from a cluster of data, an immanent significance without which no appeal to memory is possible. To remember is not to bring into the focus of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past; it is to thrust deeply into the horizon of the past and take apart step by step the interlocked perspectives until the experiences which it epitomizes are as if relived in their temporal setting. To perceive is not to remember.

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London, 1970), p. 22. For the cognitive development of personal memory see e.g. Katherine Nelson, 'The Origins of Autobiographical Memory' (1993, with references), reprinted in Ulric Neisser and Ira E. Hyman, Jr. (eds), *Memory Observed; Remembering in Natural Contexts* (2nd ed., New York, 2000), pp. 309-18.

4.       A tranquillizing spirit presses now  
           On my corporeal frame so wide appears  
           The vacancy between me & those days  
           Which yet have such self presence in my heart  
           That some times when I think of them I seem  
           Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself  
           And of some other being.

From the 1799 draft for Part Two of *The Prelude*, first recorded in MS RV (fol. 1<sup>r</sup>) and transcribed in Stephen Parrish (ed.), *The Prelude, 1798-1799* (Ithaca & Hassocks, 1977), p. 169 (see also p. 55). This passage survives practically unaltered into the 1805-6 text (II, lines 27-33) and thence into the final version of 1850; see Jack Stillinger, 'Multiple "Consciousnesses" in Wordsworth's *Prelude*', in his *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York, 1991), Chap. 4 (pp. 69-95), p. 73; also, M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism; Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, 1971), p. 75, and (briefly also) Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism; Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 18.

5.       Since I am this self, not only by reason of what now severs me from the inner lives of other selves, but by reason of what links me, in significant

fashion, to the remembered experiences, deeds, plans and interests of my former conscious life, I need a somewhat extended and remembered past to furnish the opportunity for myself to find, when it looks back, a long process that possesses sense and coherence. In brief, my idea of myself is an interpretation of my past,--linked also with an interpretation of my hopes and intentions as to my future.

JOSIAH ROYCE, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago, 1968); first published in 1913, when T.S. Eliot was attending his seminar at Harvard; compare Zachary Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authorship* (Oxford, 1996), Chap. 1: 'Wordsworth, Revision, and Personal Identity'.

6. Imagination is the Divine Vision not of The World nor of Man nor from Man as he is a Natural Man but only as he is a Spiritual Man. Imagination has nothing to do with Memory.

WILLIAM BLAKE, Marginal Annotation (dated 1826) to *Poems* (London, 1815) by William Wordsworth; text from G.E. Bentley, Jr (ed.), *William Blake's Writings* (2 vols, Oxford, 1978), II, p. 1512. The passage annotated is the final paragraph of the 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' (1815); see W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser (eds), *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* (3 vols, Oxford, 1974), III, p. 84.

J.H. Prynne, last modified April 2006

PDF file created on 20 August 2007