---A favorite pleasure hath it been with me,  
From time of earliest youth, to walk alone  
Along the public Way, when, for the night  
Deserted, in its silence it assumes  
A character of deeper quietness  
Than pathless solitudes. At such an hour  
Once, ere those summer months were pass’d away,  
I slowly mounted up a steep ascent  
Where the road's watry surface, to the ridge  
Of that sharp rising, glitter’d in the moon,  
And seem'd before my eyes another stream  
Creeping with silent lapse to join the brook  
That murmur'd in the Valley. On I went  
Tranquil, receiving in my own despite  
Amusement, as I slowly pass'd along,  
From such near objects as from time to time  
Perforce intruded on the listless sense  
Quiescent, and dispos'd to sympathy,  
With an exhausted mind, worn out by toil,  
And all unworthy of the deeper joy  
Which waits on distant prospect, cliff, or sea,  
The dark blue vault, and universe of stars.  
Thus did I steal along that silent road,  
My body from the stillness drinking in  
A restoration like the calm of sleep  
But sweeter far. Above, before, behind,  
Around me, was all peace and solitude;  
I look’d not round, nor did the solitude  
Speak to my eye; but it was heard and felt.

Notice how Wordsworth's scene is emptied of all overt social content and reference, so that the specific features of locality, part-erased by listlessness and fatigue, by the easy habit of 'favourite pleasure', can be internalised as a visitation of enlarging distance, thus compensating for reduced self-esteem by disclosing a restorative world of spiritual joy. The later text revised as MS C alters lines 363-5 (above) to read:

> A favourite pleasure was it of my Youth
> Such is it now, dear friend, to walk alone
> Along the public Way  

(Thirteen-Book *Prelude*, II, p. 71)

But this familiar allusion to the companionship of Coleridge, within the remembrance of solitude, is not permitted to survive. For visitation as spirit-originated see also *The Prelude*, 1798-1799, ed. Stephen Parrish (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), First Part, ll. 67-80; there, 'gentle visitation' (p. 45, also pp. 93, 95) modulates by 1805 to 'gentlest visitation' (Thirteen-Book *Prelude*, I, p. 116), still hovering between active and passive sense ('visiting' a place, 'being visited' by powers there encountered or being by such powers uniquely sought out). Ponder also these thoughts from Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation; Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford, 2003): 'Coleridge is not taken out of himself, but deeper into himself. He discovers a continuous aspiration for sympathy, a longing buried within for some larger connection' but 'this discovery does not point out to a larger society but leads back instead to the domestic' (p. 160); 'If the poetics of retirement routinely pointed back to society . . . the social in Wordsworth takes an extremely attenuated and restricted form' (p. 255).

For a less favourable description, compare McGann: 'Reality is interior, the geography of the meditative mind; and the imagination's recreations of the
world (i.e. poetical works) are themselves what compensate for the losses we sustain in our everyday lives' ('The Anachronism of George Crabbe', in *The Beauty of Inflections*, p. 311; see below for reference). And yet it is a common error to construe Romantic solitude as anti-social by neglectful default, when may function as a lens rather than a closed door. All rests for its principle of value upon whether the process of visitation and conversion 'amounts to a participation between the ideal and the real' (Beckett), or represents a deluding (self-deluded) contrivance of it. Not to be fully confident that the transaction is secure may demonstrate one of Wordsworth's most painful and honourable doubts; or rather, it may be occluded self-exculpation. The question however central is infiltrated by its own Romantic preconditions, because it will regress indefinitely without resolving into stable form as a question. Compare further the brief Afterword to John Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure, 1789-1832; Aesthetics, Politics and Utility* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 194-5.

2. The matter comes to this: whether you stand most in admiration of the mind’s halt before what it cannot fathom; or of the eloquence by which it consoles itself with its own capacity to make something grand of that halt.


3. I want to answer this [the question, why was Burke so committed to the idea of the sublime] by suggesting that the Burkean sublime functions as an aesthetic underpinning to the process of constructing a middle-class ideology in Britain in the first half of the eighteenth century, and that it takes the shape it does in response to the particular discursive issues which beset that process. The sublime occasions, and is occasioned by, an illusion of original creativity: the self’s 'creation', and mastery, of what it has heard or seen, raises it in its own opinion and produces 'a sort of swelling and triumph'. The self responds to the perhaps already fictional threat with the creative labour of metaphor-making, a gesture which defends and reaffirms a sense of self, or
perhaps constitutes a new understanding of the self as an originating subject. A new model of the self is 'born', then, through its own sublime labour or the labour of the sublime. (Burke's model of the interplay between body and mind indicates that we are to read this as a celebration of the labour of the subject as much as the labour of the subjected worker; thought it celebrates labour, the sublime may also work to promote the division of labour between the mental and the manual.) The sublime thus operates as an indispensable trope through which the 'self-made man' (in philosophical and/or economic terms) is constituted. Although the sublime seems a mere dumb show, its dénouement—the emergence of the individual ('Self begot, self-raised / By our own quickening power' (Paradise Lost, V, 860-1))—bears an important ideological load.


4. The Human-nature unto which I felt
That I belong'd, and which I lov'd and reverenced
Was not a punctual Presence, but a Spirit
Living in time and space, and far diffused.
In this my joy, in this my dignity
Consisted: the external universe,
By striking upon what is found within,
Had given me this conception.

William Wordsworth, The Prelude (1805-6), VIII, 761-768; ed. Mark L. Reed (2 vols, Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), I, p. 229; 'punctual' probably with the sense 'consisting in a single point of identity', 'belonging to a precise place or moment in time'. 'conception' of course is 'bringing to birth' as well as 'a formed idea'; John Walker's Dictionary (1819 ed.) defines it thus: 'The act of conceiving, or quickening with urgency; the state of being conceived; notion, idea; sentiment, purpose; apprehension, knowledge; conceit, sentiment, pointed thought.' The 1850 version of this passage is purged of such latent animism by dropping the term 'conception'; also, 'Spirit' has lost its upper-case initial letter, no longer described as 'living'; the finally revised version is quoted as an epigraph to the penultimate chapter (LXIX) of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda (her final novel, first published in eight parts, Jan-Sept 1876),
in which denouement Wordsworth is a thematic under-presence.

5. And not seldom
   Even individual remembrances,
   By working on the shapes before my eyes,
   Became like vital functions of the soul:
   And out of what had been, what was, the place
   Was throng'd with impregnations, like those wilds
   In which my early feeling had been nursed
   And naked valleys, full of caverns, rocks,
   And audible seclusions.

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805-6), VIII, 786-794; ed. Mark L. Reed (2 vols, Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), I, p. 230. Suggestive insights into ‘vital functions of the soul’ may be found in June Goodfield, *The Growth of Scientific Physiology; Physiological Method and the Mechano-Vitalist Controversy, Illustrated by the Problems of Respiration and Animal Heat* (London, 1960). The tacit discourse of sexual being is, as often, palpably latent here, and is once more mostly purged from the corresponding 1850 text (where ‘vital functions of the soul’ has been excised and only ‘impregnations’ survives).

6. From nature doth emotion come, and moods
   Of calmness equally are nature’s gift,
   This is her glory; these two attributes
   Are sister horns that constitute her strength,
   This twofold influence is the sun and shower
   Of all her bounties, both in origin
   And end alike benignant. Hence it is,
   That Genius, which exists by interchange
   Of peace and excitation, finds in her
   His best and purest Friend, from her receives
   That energy by which he seeks the truth
   Is rouzed, aspires, grasps, struggles, [wishes, craves,]
   From her that happy stillness of the mind
   Which fits him to receive it, when unsought.

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805-6), XII, 1-14; ed. Mark L. Reed (2 vols, Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), I, pp. 304-5; here, 'horns' are perhaps twin organs of power and dignity, like the horns of a dilemma but mutually supportive. The almost-afterthought expression 'when unsought' echoes the entering 'unawares' into the mind of the Boy of Winander, and the 'by accident' in Beckett's account of Proust; all 'uncalculated and involuntary, as in theological supervenience.
7. O joy! again the farms appear.
    Cool shade is there, and rustic cheer;
There springs the brook will guide us down,
    Bright comrade, to the noisy town.

Matthew Arnold, from 'Resignation; To Fausta' (1849); *The Poems*, ed. Kenneth Allott (London, 1965), p. 87. Allott comments that 'like Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" this is a poem addressed to a favourite sister about revisiting a place and the reflections aroused by the two occasions' (p. 84).

8. Leaned on his gate, he gazes--tears
    Are in his eyes, and in his ears
The murmur of a thousand years.
Before him he sees life unroll,
    A placid and continuous whole--
That general life, which does not cease,
Whose secret is not joy, but peace;
That life, whose dumb wish is not missed
If birth proceeds, if things subsist;
The life of plants, and stones, and rain,
The life he craves--if not in vain
Fate gave, what chance shall not control,
    His sad lucidity of soul.

From 'Resignation; To Fausta' (1849); *Poems*, ed. Allott, pp. 91-2. The stance of stoical acceptance is deeply contrary to Wordsworth's underlying optimism, though it is of course also found in Wordsworth and calls forth Arnold's just admiration for 'Michael'; but acknowledging an alienation in second nature Arnold deliberately renounces any accessible bounty in nature's companionship. This is the Arnold who later averred that 'The Excursion and the *Prelude*, his poems of greatest bulk, are by no means Wordsworth's best work' (*Essays in Criticism*, Second Series, 1888). For sharp critique see Richard Bourke, *Romantic Discourse and Political Modernity; Wordsworth, The Intellectual and Cultural Critique* (Hemel Hempstead, 1993), pp. 57-64, 71-80.

9. And so we all of us in some degree
    Are led to knowledge, whencesoever led,
And howsoever; were it otherwise,
    And we found evil fast as we find good
In our first years, or think that it is found,
    How could the innocent heart bear up and live!

Jonathan Wordsworth (ed.), *The Prelude: the Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)* (London, Penguin Books, 1995), p. 213. Thus, in a contested journey towards knowledge, books and nature shall strengthen the mind in early joy, ‘And knowledge, rightly honor’d with that name, / Knowledge not purchas’d with the loss of power!’ (*The Prelude*, 1805-6, V, 426-7; Reed ed., I, p. 173); the question of *purchase* is part of the contest, its cost (Walker’s *Dictionary*, 1819 ed., defines ‘to purchase’ *int. al.* as ‘to expiate or recompense by a fine or forfeit’).

**PONDERABLE/ADVERSARY READINGS**


David Bromwich, 'The French Revolution and "Tintern Abbey"', in his *Dis-owned by Memory; Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago, 1998), Chap. 3.


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