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Wordsworth's Spots of Time in Space and Time

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With rare exceptions, William Wordsworth uses the word "spot" to designate a geographical place. His spots often are exceptionally good locations. They include the pre-Napoleonic French "Spot rich in all things that can soothe and please" ("October 1803" 8), the "green spot, so calm and green" and "the deep and quiet spot" of *Peter Bell* (365, 376), the "chosen spot" in "I know an aged man" (21), the "calmest fairest spot on earth" of *The Recluse* (1.73), the "favoured spots" that he distinguishes from the rest of the "whole earth" in the 1805 *Prelude* (10.701), the "pregnant spot of ground," the "dear appropriated spot," and the "hallowed spot of earth" in *The Excursion* (5.371, 945; 6.802), and many more.

Wordsworth's spots are also places where natural or human pleasure or pain has occurred, and they are invested with the events that have occurred there. They include the "spot [. . .] made by Nature for herself" in the *Poems on the Naming of Places* ("To M.H." 15) and the "natal spot" of the briar-rose in "The Waterfall and the Eglantine" (23). Human "Passion rivets to the spot" in *Descriptive Sketches* (298); Margaret's overgrown cottage garden has become a "cheerless spot," and her cottage is a "wretched spot" in *The Ruined Cottage* (60, 487); and the place where Martha Ray spends her days crying, "Oh misery," in "The Thorn" is "The spot to which she goes" (92; also 91, 97, and 99). And so on.

"Spot" is a common word in Wordsworth's poetry. It is plain speech, entering the language by 1200 CE, when it meant "moral stain, blot, or blemish; a stigma or disgrace" (*OED*), a meaning that resonates in Margaret's, Martha Ray's, and many other Wordsworthian spots. Its semantic range expands to include "A small space or extent of ground; a particular place or locality of limited extent" around 1400. In Wordsworth's time, as now, the word often connotes spiritual, mental, bodily characteristics: a spot on one's face, on one's reputation, etc. Wordsworth, though, places these characteristics *onto* or *into* the land.

Critical accounts of Wordsworth's "spots of time" emphasize other issues than their complex placedness. Often they prioritize the trauma that has occurred at (or in relation to) the spots, as when Geoffrey Hartman shows that Wordsworth "raise[s] himself from his obsession with specific place" to deal with a Nature that assumes a "tutelary" role after he has violated it (212-4); or as when Peter Larkin shows that "Wordsworth's 'spots of time' occupy a fault-line between trauma and aspiration" (30). They highlight contradictions and conflicts in Wordsworth's formulation of "spots of time," as when Eugene Stelzig calls the phrase "famous[ly] paradoxical" (533); or as when Alan Richardson observes that "'spots *of* time' is an oxymoron: an enigma designed to halt the reading process and challenge conventional categories of literary experience" (15; also Wedd 225-6).

But Wordsworth's contemporaries might have seen in the phrase language that is apposite to common 18th century expressions of spatial-temporal connections. In 1990, Jack Stillinger observed that the American educator Emma Willard used the phrase "spots of time" in her 1822 *Ancient Geography, as Connected with Chronology* and that, while she could not have read Wordsworth's lines on the spots, first published in 1850, her "sentences are a veritable anthology of Wordsworthian concepts" (Willard vii; Stillinger 71). Because of the similarity between Willard and Wordsworth, Stillinger "propose[s] that somewhere [. . .] there exists a pre-Wordsworthian discussion of spots of time in geographical or geographical-historical terms" (72). Along these lines, I propose that Wordsworth's "spots of time," which first appeared in the 1799 two-part *Prelude*, emerge from his decade-long contact with representations, conceptualizations, and theorizations of space and the precursors of space-time.

In the "spots of time" passages, Wordsworth engages with the space-oriented writings and conversations of figures such as Isaac Newton, David Hartley, the Common Sense philosopher Thomas Reid, and Tom Wedgwood. Wordsworth had read Newton's *Opticks* and *The Principia* by 1790 (Wu 106-7) and encountered Newton's conception of space as *absolute*. Absolute space is physical space that is independent of the body (and the mind) that occupies it. According to *The Principia*, "Absolute space, in its own nature, without regard to anything external, remains always similar and unmovable" (6).[1] "Place," Newton says (with equal absolutism), simply "is a part of [absolute] space which a body takes up" (7).[2] From this conception of absolute space, post-Newtonians including the early Romantics mainly move in two directions: toward an idea that space – and time, too – is not an absolute "*thing* [. . .] in which bodies are located" but instead is an abstract and *ideal* "system[. . .] of *relations* holding between things" (McDonough; Janiak); or toward a *materialist-associationist* idea of the same *relational* space and time.

Gottfried Leibniz, among others, had developed the first of these ideas in the early 18th century, arguing that space is "something merely relative, as time is[. . . ;] an order of coexistences, as time is an order of successions" (para 4). John Locke, among others established the second of the ideas, saying that an understanding of space and time derives from sensory experiences: "we get the *Idea* of Space," he writes, " both by our Sight, and Touch; which, I think, is so evident, that it would be needless, to go to prove, that Men perceive, by their Sight, a distance between Bodies [. . .]: Nor is it less obvious, that they can do so in the Dark by Feeling and Touch" (167). "[O]ur *Idea of Place*," he adds, "is nothing else but . . . a relative Position of anything" (171).

Hartley, Reid, Wedgwood, Coleridge, and others whose ideas of space and time play into Wordsworth's writing, position themselves in relation to such conceptions. While drawing occasionally from the idealist line of thinkers that extends from Leibniz through George Berkeley to the post-Hartleian Coleridge, Wordsworth's representations of space and time throughout the 1790s, leading to and beyond the 1799 "spots of time," align him with Hartley's, Wedgwood's, and Reid's thinking.[3]

In prioritizing the physical placedness of spots, Wordsworth is consistent with contemporary practices. Late 18th and early 19th century geographers write of "spots of ground" frequently enough that the phrase becomes an informal part of the contemporary geographical lexicon, and they also often describe of "spots of land," "spots of earth," and "spots of the globe." The phrase "spots of time," though, is very rare. When Willard uses it, though, she shares Wordsworth's concerns with Hartleian association, his rootedness in contemporary spatial theories and geographical and navigational practices, and his interest in the interplay of the spatial and the temporal. She introduces her *Ancient Geography, as Connected with Chronology* by commenting that "every person possessed of historical knowledge, must be sensible that there are in his mind certain points of time, from which, like eminences in a road, he can look abroad and discover the remarkable objects there existing together; and that, were it otherwise, his knowledge would run into one confused mass. [. . . In this book] we erect these eminences for the pupil, that thus they may be made at proper intervals, and that by contemplating them in early youth, the impressions may be permanent. We plant him as it were on one of these spots of time; we detain him upon it till he has collected every important fact, and we oblige him to delineate it in a manner sensible to the eye, and giving him ever after a command of the whole at a single glance" (vii).

An anonymous 1832 poem *The Fallacies of Hope* also uses the phrase "spot of time," though it lacks the associative recursiveness and temporal complexity of Wordsworth's and Willard's usages: "The present's all, on that lone spot of time / We stand as on an isle in some strange clime, / From which the future's severed from the past, / As if that moment were time's first and last" (42). The phrase "spot of time," to the extent that it appears at all in the years prior to the 1850 publication of *The Prelude*, appears

in religious contexts, as in the 17th century Presbyterian clergyman John Flavel's influential description of "opportunity" as a "golden Spot of Time" (1.569).[4]

The *general* spatialization of time, on the other hand, is common. For instance, the phrase "space of time" – which Wordsworth uses in both poetry and prose, as in the 1805 *Prelude* (9.745) and the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (751) – appears also in the writing of many, if not most, of his contemporaries – from Coleridge to Charlotte Smith to P.B. and Mary Shelley to Byron – as well as in specialized geographical discourse. But the particular placing of time – like the particular timing of place that occurs in the language of longitudinal and latitudinal minutes and seconds – appears mostly in the practice and discourse of land and sea navigation. In instructing sailors how to "find the longitude of a ship at sea by a chronometer," for instance, Andrew Mackay says in 1793 that "the difference between the time at the place of observation and the time at Greenwich, will be the longitude of the place in time" (1.204). Likewise, an 1817 seaman's guide to determining longitude instructs, "The difference between the mean time at the place of observation and that at Greenwich, as shown by the chronometer, will be the longitude of the place in time" (Ward 83). This language was sufficiently common to be included in the entry on longitude in the 1797 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (12.683). At the end of the 18th century, but rarely after that, the phrase "place in time" thus establishes a human's position in the world. As is clear from the usage of the phrase, that position is relational, situational, dependent on different designations of simultaneous time: Greenwich time versus the time of the "place of observation." It is the same moment at Greenwich and at the point of observation, and it is, say, eleven o'clock at Greenwich and five o'clock at the place of observation.

Throughout the late 1790s and into the 1800s, Wordsworth read literature that includes direct or indirect references to the place or the space of time and the time of place or space. Along with works on topography and geography like James Clarke's *Survey of the Lakes of Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire* (1789), Jedidiah Morse's *American Geography* (1789), and Peter Heylyn's *Cosmographie* (1657), he knew various accounts of picturesque touring and sea voyage narratives. Books he read include frequent spatial measurements of time, measurements that involve primarily spatial notions of temporal extension: various lengths of time.

Beyond his reading, Wordsworth would have discussed space and time with other members of his family, his close circle of friends, and his extended acquaintance. On the occasions when he saw his sailor and ship-captain brother John, they would have discussed John's voyages if not the processes of navigation. Coleridge as well would have heightened Wordsworth's awareness of sea narratives and relevant historical and contemporary philosophical discussions. They began collaborating on a poem about a circumnavigation – *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* – after a mid-November, 1797, reading of George Shelvocke's *Voyage Round the World* (1726); and they hoped to sell the poem to John Aiken who, aside from editing *The Monthly Magazine*, had published a popular *England Delineated* (1788), a *Survey of the Counties of Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire, West Riding of Yorkshire, and the Northern Part of Staffordshire* (1797) and later would publish a global *Geographical Delineations* (1807) (Wu 126). Two months earlier, in mid-September, 1797, Wedgwood visited Alfoxden for five days, bringing his own interests in space and time (Litchfield 51; Moorman 1.332-3). Despite Wedgwood's rigorous Lockean materialism, his "impact on Wordsworth," as Stephen Gill notes, "was considerable" and "Wordsworth's own conception of how the mind worked" derived from the same sources as Wedgwood's (131). Although he published little, Wedgwood, engaging with central questions concerning spatiality, wrote an *Enquiry into the Origin of Our Notion of Distance*.

Published in 1817, twelve years after Wedgwood's death, the *Enquiry* draws from Hartleian ideas of association. Wedgwood demonstrates that a temporally pre-existing familiarity with a class of objects enables humans to recognize similar objects at a spatial distance. He provides examples that suggest that his, Wordsworth's, and Coleridge's ways of thinking about space informed each other. He says that "A shepherd," who is familiar with sheep both as a class of animals and in their particularities, will be able to "select a particular sheep from a numerous flock. A seaman will descry a vessel on the bounds of the horizon, discern its size, shape, and rigging, determine of what national make it is, and whether it be for war or commerce, when a landsman, if he sees any thing, can discover only a black spot. The shepherd and the seaman may be inferior to other men in their natural powers of sight, exercised upon objects with which they are not peculiarly conversant; but in their own department they have a store of correct and assimilated ideas, which immediately rise at the call of the faintest perception, and lend to it their fullness and vivacity" (Wedgwood 7-8).

The shepherd-sheep relationship might reverberate with the relationship between the "only

[human] creature in the wild" and "the homeward shepherd [who] dim appear[s] / Far off" in *Salisbury Plain*, from which Wordsworth in 1798 selected the *Lyrical Ballads* version of "The Female Vagrant" (66, 50-51).[5] The seaman discerning the "size, shape, and rigging" of a vessel that others might perceive as "only a black spot" certainly reverberates with Coleridge's simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar ship of Death and Life-in-Death that, as it approaches, seems at first to the Ancient Mariner to be "a little speck / And then it seem'd a mist: / It mov'd and mov'd, and took at last / A certain shape" (141-4).

In developing his thoughts, Wedgwood draws from Reid's 1785 *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Meteyard 294-5; also Vickers 90). Reid writes, "Nearness and distance are relations equally applicable to time and space. Distance in time, and distance in place, are things so different in their nature, and so like in their relation, that it is difficult to determine whether the name of distance is applied to both in the same or an analogical sense" (312). Like Wedgwood after him, he closely addresses distances "in place." He uses an example that many Romantic poets also use when writing about distance: a church steeple or spire. He says, "when I see a spire at a very great distance, it seems like the point of a bodkin; there appears no vane at the top, no angles. But when I view the same object at a small distance, I see a huge pyramid of several angles with a vane on the top. Neither of these appearances is fallacious. Each of them is what it ought to be, and what it must be, from such an object seen at such different distances. These different appearances of the same object may serve to illustrate the different conceptions of space, according as they are drawn from the information of sight alone, or as they are drawn from the additional information of touch" (264).

Again, such spatial analysis reverberates with the experience of the traveler in *Salisbury Plain*, as "the distant spire / That fixed at every turn his backward eye / Was lost, tho' still he turned, in the blank sky," and with the experience of the female vagrant, who remembers "the miserable hour, / When from the last hill-top, my sire surveyed, / Peering above the trees, the steeple tower, / That on his marriage-day sweet music made" (*Salisbury Plain* 39-41; "Female Vagrant" 55-58). And Reid's analysis reverberates again with *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, where the mariner's ship, sailing beyond the horizon, "drop[s] / Below the kirk" (26-7; also 471). Experientially, the spire is a different thing depending on whether the characters are close or they are far. In Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poems, increasing distance from the spire is associated with the loss of social and religious guidance along with a loss of physical detail, and the poems indicate that, within Wordsworth's and Coleridge's worlds, both losses are true, both real (Wiley 18-33).

Reid's analysis extends into Wordsworth's "spots of time" passage as well. In the analysis and in the passage, a single place, a single spot, has two (or more) appearances, depending on one's relation to it, one's distance from it in space and time, and "Neither of these appearances is fallacious." In the 1799 *Prelude*, Wordsworth first defines and exemplifies the "spots of time" in explicitly and figuratively spatial terms. He says,

> There are in our existence spots of time
> Which with distinct preeminence retain
> A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
> By trivial occupations and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds –
> Especially the imaginative power –
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired. (1.288-94)

Adding to the initial spatial emphasis, in 1805, Wordsworth says that this "virtue" (now a "renovating" instead of "fructifying" one) "enables us to mount / When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen" (11.260, 267-8). While this virtue "chiefly lurks / Among those passages of life in which / We have the deepest feeling that the mind / Is lord and master, and that outward sense / Is but the obedient servant of her will," the language that Wordsworth uses to describe it is dominantly physical (of the "outward sense"), rooted (etymologically and otherwise) in sensory experience of the spatial world (11.269-73).

That said, these spots, which are "scattered everywhere" (1805 *Prelude* 11.275), are as locatable in – and affected by – what Reid calls the "distance of time" as "distance in place"; and time, as Wordsworth represents it, is as much of the inward as the outward sense. The spots are explicitly more than places: they are time-places. As early as 1799, after the initial definition, the spots become, as if synonymously, "moments" that "chiefly seem to have their date / In our first childhood," moments that, as Wordsworth exemplifies them, come from "an early season" of his life (*Two-Part Prelude* 1.295-7).

Wordsworth situates his two examples of "spots of time" in physical places in the Lake District and does so with precise physical detail that would enable anyone familiar with the places to recognize them and anyone unfamiliar with them to picture them in geographical and topographical particularity. In the first "spot" example, young Wordsworth and his "guide" "rode toward the hills" (1.303, 301),

and then, Wordsworth, upon dismounting, led his horse "down the rough and stony moor" and "at length / Came to a bottom" where he found the "spot" where, he says, a man once was gibbetted (1. 306-8, 313-4). Leaving the "spot" and "reascending the bare slope," he saw a pool "beneath the hills" and a "beacon on the summit" of an "eminence," as well as, "more near," a girl with a pitcher on her head (1.315-17, 325). All of this passage, stripped of its temporal qualities in my account, describes "in truth / An ordinary sight" of a physical place (1.319-20). Such is the case also with the second "spot" example. Here, Wordsworth "went forth" through "the fields" to "a crag, / An eminence, which from the meeting-point / Of two highways ascending overlooked / At least a long half-mile of those two roads" (1.332-8). He went "Up to the highest summit," where he watched for the carriage that would carry him and his brothers home from school for the Christmas holidays (1.341).

Within these examples, Wordsworth grounds even the most figurative terms from his initial definition of the "spots of time" in physical places. Even the "distinct preeminence" of the "spots of time," for instance, fixes to the "eminence" on which the beacon stands and the "eminence" from which Wordsworth watches for the carriage. If there were no more to the "spots of time" than their physical placedness, though, they would remain unremarkable. But in representing placedness as inseparable from the workings of time, Wordsworth shifts and shakes the ground. As Reid notes, "it is difficult to determine whether the name of distance is applied to both [place and time] in the same or an analogical sense," and Wordsworth's poetry of spots indicates that in the gap between sameness and analogy he has seen a quality of the "visionary" that exceeds human representation in "Colours and words" (1.320-1). Wordsworth represents himself as determinedly located but – through time – also disoriented and reoriented in his location. Wordsworthian space is relational – figured by place-to-place relations – and, within his combination of space-time, place (a spatial spot) also is relational, relating to itself over an extent of time. The places of his two "spots of time" occur in narrative time and, more to the point, in the shifting temporal perspectives of the narrator himself: that is, in his past childhood experience, in his past-to-present memory of that experience, and in his present consideration of the meaning of such experience. The first "spot of time" refers also to a deeper past, a past beyond the experience of the child: the "former time" when the murderer was hung – an event nearly erased from the physical place ("The bones were gone, the iron and the wood; / Only a long green ridge remained / Whose shape was like a grave"), though the hanging still colors the narrator's situation in the place (albeit in "Colours [. . .] unknown to man") (1.308, 311-13, 321). In the other resonant event at this spot – the narrator's encounter with the "girl who bore a pitcher on her head / And seemed with difficult steps to force her way / Against the wind" – time seems to slow and the place seems to thicken and resist motion (1.317-19). The narrator has "lost [his] guide" – lost his geographical orientation – and yet in losing his sense of place has found something extraordinary in it: that is, found what is "fructifying" (and later "renovating") (1.323).

Again in the second "spot of time" passage, time disorients and reorients, relating a place to itself over an extent of time. The passage begins "the day before the holidays," and the young Wordsworth's anticipation of what is to come spatially and temporally (of the carriage that is to take him home from school) transforms this also ordinary set of circumstances into an extraordinary time-place (1.330-1). The "beforeness" of excitedly waiting for the carriage becomes, in time, a new, mournful "beforeness": Wordsworth says, "Ere I to school returned / That dreary time, ere I had been ten days / A dweller in my father's house, he died" (1.349-51). From this new temporal perspective, Wordsworth can reconsider the time-place of the spot where he awaited the carriage – "That day so lately passed, when from the crag" he looked forward in time and space – and the physical particulars of his earlier circumstances now transform in his mind (a transformation that continues to the present "time") (1.356, 371).

In the 1805 *Prelude,* Wordsworth adds a passage that highlights both the permanence and the variability of place. "I am lost," he says in relation to the first spot of time, though he still sees "something" of the power of his childhood experience of the place (11.330-1). He tries to return mentally to the spot but it is no longer accessible: "the hiding-places of my power / Seem open; I approach, and then they close" (13.336-7). While Wordsworth celebrates the staying power of the spots of time as his mind experiences them, geographically and temporally he is, as he says at the end of the 1805 spots passages, still "travel[ling] in [. . .] dim uncertain ways" (11.391), ways that he frames through the language and concepts of contemporary philosophical theories and accounts of spatiality.

Wordsworth engages with these theories and accounts also in other *Prelude* passages that readers often categorize among those representing "spots of

time." More than fifty years ago, Jonathan Bishop wrote a list of these passages, including the stolen boat episode, the meeting with the Discharged Soldier, the dream of the Arab, the sight of the Drowned Man, the encounter with the Blind Beggar, the crossing of Simplon Pass, and the ascent of Mount Snowdon (45). These passages often involve surprising figurations of space and place, as in the stolen boat episode, where "a huge cliff, / As if with voluntary power instinct, / Uprear[s . . .] its head" as Wordsworth rows away from a "rocky steep, till then / The bound of the horizon" (1799 *Prelude* 1.107-10), and as in the Snowdon ascent, where "a huge sea of mist [. . .] usurp[s]" the "real sea" as Wordsworth emerges from a fog on the mountainside (1805 *Prelude* 13. 43, 51, 49). In such passages, Wordsworth is often lost geographically and mentally, as when he and Robert Jones learn that they have unwittingly crossed Simplon Pass, leading Wordsworth to say, "I was lost as in a cloud" (1805 *Prelude* 6.529), and as when, "lost / Amid the moving pageant" in London, Wordsworth encounters the Blind Beggar and feels "As if [he has been] admonished from another world" (1805 *Prelude* 7.609-10, 623).

As Hartman observes, Wordsworth's "Nature is in opposition to the idea of a single or fixed or intransitive place of power," but Hartman sees such an "opposition" as contributing eventually to a Wordsworthian "movement beyond specific place [that] is [nonetheless] often accompanied by renewed localizations" (86, 178). As a review of contemporary conceptualizations of space and placedness indicates, though, Wordsworth in the "spots of time" passages, as elsewhere, is representing a complex kind of "specific place" rather than moving "beyond" it, or, rather he is showing how *beyondness* is a quality of "specific place."

NOTES

[1]Newton also acknowledges "relative space" – "Relative space is some movable dimension or measure of the absolute spaces" (7) – but subsumes it within the absolute.

[2]In the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth comments on "the great Newton's own ethereal self" (3.270). He also describes a Cambridge "statue [. . .] / Of Newton with his prism and silent face" (3.58-9); and in the 1850 version he includes two more lines, which seem to praise Newton until the final, damning word: Newton with his prism is "The marble index of a mind for ever / Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone" (3.62-3).

[3]Wordsworth certainly would add the aural to Locke's visual and tactile sources of spatial understanding. See, for instance, "To Joanna," where echoes give Wordsworth and Joanna their *place*. The event that occurs in this place, leading Joanna to draw near to Wordsworth as if "To shelter [herself] from some object of her fear" indicates that Joanna may be experiencing what will become for her a "spot of time" (76).

[4]In a formulation that others would repeat well into the 19th century, Flavel writes, "Opportunities are the golden Spots of Time, and there is much Time in a Short Opportunity, as there are many Pieces of Silver in one Piece of Gold"; opportunities "are the golden Spots of Time, like the Pearl in the Oyster-shell, of much more Value than the Shell that contains it"; and "Opportunity is the golden Spot of Time, the sweet and beautiful flower, growing upon the Stalk of Time" (1.316, 483, 569).

[5]Wordsworth was working on *Salisbury Plain* again in May, 1798 (Reed 236).

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"The Reign of Nature"; or, Mr Bryant's Wordsworth

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In 1825, William Cullen Bryant arrived in New York as reviews editor for the *New York Review and Athenaeum Magazine*, already a man with a mission. Seven years earlier, at twenty-four, he had informed *The North American Review* that poetry in the New World was hopelessly moribund; Timothy Dwight's ponderous *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785) was "remarkable for its unbroken monotony," Joel Barlow's *Columbiad* (1807) was "utterly destitute of interest," and Philip Freneau was dismissed as a "a writer of inferior verse." All three exemplified a poetic culture addled by "sickly and affected imitation" (Bryant 5: 50, 51, 54) As indeed (in all candour) they did. Now, aged thirty-one, Bryant delivered four authoritative lectures on poetry at the New York Athenaeum, lauding the new poetry of the Old World. His mission was the reformation of American poetry and his campaign theme, in effect, "close thy Pope, open thy Wordsworth." The poetry of "Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge, Byron, Southey, Shelley and others," he told his audience, is "bold, varied, impassioned, irregular, and impatient of precise laws, beyond that of any former age." It exhibits "the freshness, the vigor, and perhaps also the disorder, of a new literature" (Bryant, 5: 31–2). Twelve years later, Emerson's belated "American Scholar" lecture will demand a new poetry with "an original relation to the universe," which (Emerson implies) would necessarily be American. Bryant by contrast, candidly acknowledged—at least in private—how *Lyrical Ballads* had already liberated him from what Emerson would call the "courtly muse." "I shall never forget," Richard Henry Dana famously writes, in Hazlittian vein:"with what feeling my friend Bryant, some years ago, described to me the effect produced upon him of meeting for the first time with Wordsworth's ballads. He said that upon opening the book, a thousand springs seemed to gush up at once in his heart, and the face of Nature, of a sudden, to change into a strange freshness and life. He had felt the sympathetic touch from an according mind, and . . . instantly his powers and affections shot over the earth and through his kind" (Dana, 148)

Bryant's father gave him a copy of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1810, a year or so before Bryant Jr. began to produce his and the first authentically American Romantic poems. When some of these—including "Thanatopsis," "Inscription for the entrance to a wood" and "Waterfowl" were published together in the *North American Review* in 1817, the effect of a new language was comparable to that of the debut of Ted Hughes with *Hawk in the Rain* in 1957. One editor told another: "you have been imposed upon; no one on this side of the Atlantic is capable of writing such verses."[1]