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1
The Return of the Visible and Romantic Ekphrasis: Wordsworth in the Visual Art Culture of Romanticism

Wordsworth is often identified with a deep iconoclastic scepticism regarding sight and visual phenomena. In *The Prelude*, he refers to the eye as 'The most despotic of our senses' and recalls a time when it had 'gained / Such strength in me as often held my mind / In absolute dominion' (1805, XI, ll. 171–176). As he continues by saying that he would 'Gladly' 'endeavour to unfold the means / Which Nature studiously employs to thwart / This tyranny' (ll. 176–180), Wordsworth encourages the identification enabling W. J. T. Mitchell, for instance, to state that 'the first lesson we give to students of romanticism is that, for Wordsworth ... "imagination" is a power of consciousness that transcends mere visualization. We may even go on to note that pictures and vision frequently play a negative role in romantic poetic theory'.[1] One reason among many why the eye is a touchy subject in Wordsworth is no doubt that from January 1805 and for the rest of his life he suffered from attacks of severe inflammation of the eyelids that made him hypersensitive to light and inhibited poetic composition.[2] Yet, while his bad eyes thus put a strain on composition, they also undoubtedly caused Wordsworth to become increasingly aware and appreciative of the gift of seeing, and consequently contributed to the foregrounding of the visible and the turn to descriptive and ekphrastic writing in the later career: a turn that was coterminous with what Alan Liu calls the later Wordsworth's 'effort to criticize the flight of imagination' resulting in predominantly '*dis*imaginative work' that revises the early visual scepticism which informs much of the Great Decade poetry.[3]

Another contributing factor to the later Wordsworth's turn to ekphrasis and his increasingly positive sense of the visual was that the Romantic period saw an unprecedented interest in works of plastic art,

which translated into a widely held desire among leading poets to render them and their effects in the medium of language. As Herbert Lindenberger points out,

> The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries mark not only the first sustained attempt to theorize the arts as a whole but also a systematic effort, continuing to our day, to break down long-established borders between the various arts as well as borders between the individual genres constituting each art form.[4]

Excepting the problematic Blake, whose 'composite works' may best be characterised as media events rather than examples of ekphrasis, Keats is the best-known ekphrastic poet of the period and has been studied most closely as such.[5] In James Heffernan's *The Museum of Words*, Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron also garner attention as ekphrastic poets, and as criticism is beginning to recognise, the women poets of the age were often ekphrastically inclined.[6]

Among reasons to explain the increase in the number and popularity of ekphrastic poets and poems in the Romantic period should be counted the excavations of ancient works of art at Herculaneum (1738) and Pompeii (1748); the founding of the Royal Academy (1768) which in 1798 allowed artists exhibiting at the annual show to give quotations in the catalogue instead of, or in addition to, titles;[7] the appearance of the modern art museum (British Museum, 1759; Louvre, 1793; National Gallery, 1824), exhibition halls (e.g. British Institution, 1805) and auction houses (Southeby's, 1740; Christie's, 1762), where works hitherto kept in private collections were made increasingly available to the public; the cultivation of engraving as an art form that enabled more people to see and own reproductions of both classical and contemporary works (Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery was founded in 1789; in 1802 the Society of Engravers was founded); and (as noted by Lindenberger) the rise of the discourse of aesthetics that aimed to describe the nature and effect of art reflected for instance in the founding in 1817 of the first specialised art journal in Britain, *The Annals of the Fine Arts*, where Keats and Wordsworth's ekphrases were published along with critical essays on the sister arts.[8]

The Romantic period in other words saw the first signs of the democratisation of art and a number of efforts to make it public. This was noted by a contributor to the *Annals of the Fine Arts*, who in 1819–1820 recalled, in the context of the Academy's annual show, how

> Some years ago . . . old pictures were cloistered up from the public gaze and the desiring eye of the painter, as though they had been forbidden ware . . . ; it is upon conveying the memory back to those days that one feels a delight and a touch of gratitude at witnessing the happy change which has taken place in this respect. The most splendid collections of old original pictures of consummate excellence are now annually displayed before the public.[9]

Art was also becoming available in reproduced form in the phenomenally popular literary annuals that appeared from the early 1820s onwards. Published in time for the Christmas season, the annuals were luxuriously bound and profusely and lavishly illustrated books designed as parlour pieces for middle-class readers. As Eleanor Jamieson points out, due to the literary annuals, 'the *finest* art of the country could be reproduced at a reasonable price, and when such reproductions were diffused through the huge circulation of the annuals, they fostered in the general public an appreciation of painting never hitherto known'.[10] The annuals were hotbeds for the development of Romantic and later Victorian ekphrasis and more than the museum and other exhibitions of original art, they were both cause and effect of the dramatic upsurge in interest in visual art in the later Romantic period. In the introductory poem to one of the most popular annuals, *The Keepsake for 1828*, we see that these publications were highly conscious of their use of word–image constellations: 'Unto the beautiful is beauty due', the editor writes, addressing the female readers he was targeting,

> For thee the graver's art has multiplied
> The forms the painter's touch reveals to view,
> Array'd in warm imagination's pride
> Of loveliness (in this to thee allied).
> And well with these accord poetic lays
> (Two several streams from the same urn supplied);
> Each to the other lends a winning grace,
> As features speak the soul—the soul informs the face.[11]

Although word and image are presented as equals, in fact the image was superior in the medium. In responding to an environment increasingly saturated with works of plastic art, certain Romantic poets thus revised Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's influential division of the arts in *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766) according to whether their signs follow one another in time to better represent

actions unfolding in time, or whether they may be apprehended at once in a spatial configuration to better represent bodies in space; and they anticipated Richard Wagner's idea of the *Gesammtkunstwerk*, which he developed in *The Art Work of the Future* (1850).[12]

Yet, ekphrasis has been neglected in studies of Romanticism which have been dominated by an idealist understanding that concentrates on High Romanticism and finds it to aspire to emulate music rather than the visual arts. In the most influential study of High Romantic aesthetic theory in the twentieth century, M. H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp*, we read that 'In the place of painting, music becomes [for the Romantics] the art frequently pointed to as having a profound affinity with poetry. For if a picture seems the nearest thing to a mirror-image of the external world, music, of all the arts, is the most remote.'[13] In their quest for the abstract visionary, the Romantics are typically seen to eschew the concrete visible. In a lecture on *Romeo and Juliet* in 1811, Coleridge said that 'The power of genius [is] not shown in elaborating a picture of which many specimens [are] given in late poems where throughout so many minute touches [are] so dutchified that you ask why the poet did not refer to one to paint it.'[14] Instead, Coleridge said later, the 'power of genius' may be observed when the mind 'would describe what it cannot satisfy itself with the description of' (495). This struggle can lead to

> The grandest efforts of poetry . . . where the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind, still offering what is still repelled, and again creating what is again rejected; the result being what the poet wishes to impress, namely, the substitution of a sublime feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image. (496)

A poet's ability to thus articulate the sublime was for Coleridge a sign of his superiority, a sign of 'the narrow limit of painting, as compared with the boundless power of poetry: painting cannot go beyond a certain point; poetry rejects all control, all confinement' (496). For Coleridge as for Lessing (who Coleridge at one point claimed to be writing an extensive introduction to), poetry had little or nothing to gain from entering into a co-operative relationship with painting.

Geoffrey Hartman's interpretation of Wordsworth is similarly premised on the idea that 'When Wordsworth depicts an object he is also depicting himself or, rather, a truth about himself, a self-acquired revelation. There is very little "energetic" picture-making in him.'[15] As Hartman's note to Jean Hagstrum's discussion of *enargeia* in his classic

study of the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, *The Sister Arts*, that ends this quotation reveals, Wordsworth is for Hartman fundamentally anti-ekphrastic, and his Romantic resistance to the Neoclassical espousal of *ut pictura poesis* and *enargeia* partly define his originality. In a neglected article that extended *The Sister Arts* beyond the Neoclassical period with reference to Blake and Keats in particular, Hagstrum questioned the validity of what he calls 'the pre-emptive views that in the early nineteenth century *ut musica poesis* replaced the venerable *ut pictura poesis*'.[16] By presenting Wordsworth's later work as another example, my aim is not to deny that the Romantics often valued music over painting and aspired to eschew descriptive writing to better imitate the former art form in a sublime pursuit to describe what eludes description. Instead, it is to resist the theory of a sudden epistemic shift in aesthetics from idealising one art form to another and to argue that to neglect to consider the Romantic poets' use of painting and explain their strategic valuation of this 'other' of poetry, whether positive or negative, is to only partially understand the full complexity of their work.

In valuing the 'visionary' and transcendental aspects of Wordsworth's work as absolutely central, the idealist tradition that runs from Coleridge to A. C. Bradley around 1900 and on to Hartman, Harold Bloom and beyond has rendered virtually meaningless or unreadable in positive terms the strong desire to describe and verbally render the visible that is also present in his work, where it constitutes a materialist, 'low' Romantic strand that counters and unsettles the High Romantic strand to the extent that it values the visible object not for what it is not or what it points to (i.e. the subjectivity and personality of the poet), but for what it is in itself. In certain texts and passages, Wordsworth describes external, physical nature less to find himself reflected than to render the seen world and the pleasures it gives as accurately as possible. This descriptive/ekphrastic aspect of his poetic practice should not be understood in terms of a failure to achieve 'vision' or as a mere first step in a dialectic leading beyond the visible, but as of value in itself. William Galperin in particular has begun the recuperation of this strand in terms of his idea of the 'return of the visible', and has suggested that it instances a Wordsworthian 'counteraesthetic'.[17]

Some of the best evidence for this 'counteraesthetic' may be found in a text often neglected in accounts of Wordsworth that focus exclusively on his poetry, his prose masterpiece, the *Guide to the Lakes*, which Stephen Gill aptly characterises as 'a prose-poem about light, shapes, and textures, about movements and stillness'.[18] That Wordsworth did not see this prose work as opposed to his poetic concerns is indicated

by its inclusion in the *River Duddon* volume in 1820 as well as the inclusion in it of a number of poems and passages from poems. In a prefatorial note to its publication in the *River Duddon* volume, Wordsworth thus wrote, 'This Essay, which was published several years ago . . . is now, with emendations and additions, attached to these volumes; from a consciousness of its having been written in the same spirit which dictated several of the poems, and from a belief that it will tend materially to illustrate them.'[19]

While Wordsworth in 1820 presented the prose as an illustration of his own poems and as 'written in the same spirit', it not only predated the poems but had in fact first served as verbal illustration of visual images. The *Guide* was composed in 1809/1810 and published anonymously in monthly parts in 1810 as the verbal supplement to a series of forty-eight engravings from Rev. Joseph Wilkinson's pictures of the Lake District, *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*. It is an example of a text which was generated by visual art: where images dictate text. The work was commissioned by Wilkinson and stipulated that Wordsworth should follow a visual original and merely provide copytext. Wordsworth had grave difficulties thus being in a submissive position *vis-à-vis* a graphic artist where he had to write at a predetermined length and according to the order set by the engravings, and he only seems to have participated in the project to make money. In July 1810, he wrote Mary that '[Dorothy] has been so good as to abridge the sheets I wrote for Wilkinson', continuing, 'for my own part I have no longer any interest in the thing; so he must make what he can of them; as I can not do the thing in my own way I shall merely task myself with getting through it with the least trouble'.[20] Later in the year, he in fact made Dorothy compose some of the last descriptions, as she wrote to Catherine Clarkson 12 November 1810, '[William] employed me to compose a description or two for the finishing of his work for Wilkinson. It is a most irksome task to him, not being permitted to follow his own course, and I daresay you will find this latter part very flat' (*MY* 1, 449).

The *Guide* has a highly complex textual history: it was as mentioned republished in revised form in 1820 along with the *River Duddon* volume as *Topographical Description of the Country of the Lakes in the North of England*. In 1822 and 1823, it was published separately and again in revised form as *A Description of the Scenery of the Lakes in the North of England*. In 1835, it found its final form and was published, again revised, as *A Guide through the District of the Lakes in the North of England*. This protracted publication history shows that the *Guide* was among the most

popular of Wordsworth's works during his lifetime. As Gill writes, 'It is by far Wordsworth's most attractive and accessible prose and were it not for the utilitarian connotations of "guide" it would be recognized more freely for what it is, a gem of Romantic writing.'[21] Despite recent efforts, it is fair to say that the *Guide* remains neglected in the critical tradition.[22] The reasons for this include that it was written for money, that Wordsworth at first distanced himself from authorship through anonymity, that it is in prose, and no doubt that it is descriptive and signals the return of the visible. This return, however, also indicates its centrality and strength as it shows Wordsworth's participation in the visual art culture of Romanticism.

One crucial thing not made an issue in recent reappraisals of the *Guide* is that in all republications after 1810, where it continued to grow as more and more text was added, the engraved 'views' were left out and all reference to them suppressed. While probably made impossible due to technical problems involved in the process of reproduction, this is also a clear sign of Wordsworth's High Romantic iconoclastic scepticism regarding illustration and the visual noted by most critics, who align him with Coleridge and Charles Lamb on this issue.[23] Coleridge's above-mentioned antipathy to description and the visible in the lecture on *Romeo and Juliet* was articulated in the context of a harangue against graphic illustrators of Milton's Death in *Paradise Lost*. For Coleridge,

> the passage from Milton might be quoted as exhibiting a certain limit between the Poet & the Painter—Sundry painters had not so thought and had made pictures of the meeting between Satan & Death at Hell gate and how was the latter represented? By the most defined thing that could be conceived in nature—A Skeleton perhaps the dryest image that could be discovered which reduced the mind to a mere state of inactivity & passivity & compared with a Square or a triangle was a luxuriant fancy.[24]

Coleridge's criticism is not just directed against particularly bad and incompetent illustrators but against the visual medium as such, which renders the mind of the recipient passive and disenchants Milton's words.

Coleridge responded to what Martin Meisel calls the 'new age of illustration' that was 'launched with much fanfare just before the French Revolution by Alderman Boydell's grandly conceived Shakespeare Gallery and Thomas Macklin's rival Poet's Gallery'.[25] These galleries

exhibited paintings inspired by the works of Shakespeare and Milton in particular, which the audience could order engravings from to be made on demand. As Marilyn Gaull points out, 'The galleries themselves had only limited success but the promise of catalogues based on them stimulated engraving as an art form, the engravings often surpassing the originals in quality and detail.'[26] Boydell's gallery collapsed because the engravers could not deliver their works quickly enough, yet the fact that it faltered on a failure to answer demand is a significant sign of the burgeoning popular visual culture. Charles Lamb resisted this culture and said in an 1834 letter, 'I am jealous of the combination of the sister arts. Let them sparkle apart. What injury (short of the theatres) did not Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery do me with Shakespeare? . . . to be tied down to an authentic face of Juliet; to have Imogen's portrait; to confine the illimitable!'[27] Lamb and Coleridge's deep scepticism regarding illustration is typical of High Romanticism's privileging of the ear over the eye, the transcendent over the material, the general over the particular, the mind over the body, the visionary over the visible, and may explain the lack of critical interest in exploring the presence of illustration in Wordsworth's text.

Yet, the ghostly presence of the suppressed illustrations may be seen to inform the *Guide* and exert positive influence on Wordsworth's textual supplements. Indeed, the original assignment of providing copytext for the illustrations, which Wordsworth found 'irksome' and that for Dorothy resulted in 'flat' writing can be said to have determined the nature of the important textual additions in later versions of the *Guide*: additions which are among the most powerful parts of the work and more than anything signal Wordsworth's desire to grasp the visual through language in a manner that emulates that of the graphic artist. Having to write in illustration of pictures seems to have caused Wordsworth to think more seriously of ways of finding pleasure in visual representation and to cultivate his powers of description, especially once the illustrations were removed and there was no anxiety of competition from the painter's art. Judging from the nature of the later additions, the removal of the pictures and the assertion of verbal primacy gave Wordsworth a sense of empowerment and liberation that he converted into descriptive strength, thereby foregrounding the materially visible through *enargeia*.

The opening paragraphs to the first section, 'Description of the Scenery of the Lakes', show Wordsworth to be verbally complementing and assimilating a visual mode of representation (unless otherwise noted quotations are from the fifth 1835 edition):

> At Lucerne, in Switzerland, is shewn a Model of the Alpine country which encompasses the Lake of the four Cantons. The Spectator ascends a little platform, and sees mountains, lakes, glaciers, rivers, woods, waterfalls, and vallies, with their cottages, and every other object contained in them, lying at his feet; all things being represented in their appropriate colours. It may be easily conceived that this exhibition affords an exquisite delight to the imagination, tempting it to wander at will from valley to valley, from mountain to mountain, through the deepest recesses of the Alps. But it supplies also a more substantial pleasure: for the sublime and beautiful region, with all its hidden treasures, and their bearings and relations to each other, is thereby comprehended and understood at once.
>
> Something of this kind, without touching upon minute details and individualities which would only confuse and embarrass, will here be attempted, in respect to the Lakes in the North of England, and the vales and mountains enclosing and surrounding them. The delineation, if tolerably executed, will, in some instances, communicate to the traveller, who has already seen the objects, new information; and will assist in giving to his recollections a more orderly arrangement than his own opportunities of observing may have permitted him to make; while it will be still more useful to the future traveller, by directing his attention at once to distinctions in things which, without such previous aid, a length of time only could enable him to discover. It is hoped, also, that this Essay may become generally serviceable, by leading to habits of more exact and considerate observation than, as far as the writer knows, have hitherto been applied to local scenery. (*PrW* 2, 170–171)

Wordsworth had first seen this simulacrum of the Alps on his tour with Jones in 1791 and in 1822 he had revisited it. The model is invested with substantial value: it 'affords an exquisite delight to the imagination' and it enables the spectator to comprehend and understand 'the sublime and beautiful region, with all its hidden treasures' 'at once'. The model makes visible for the bodily eye what in the original is hidden from sight. For Coleridge, as we saw above, the visible negated the sublime, which for the (male) High Romantics typically instanced the most ambitious aesthetic goal.[28] To the contrary, for Wordsworth the sublime as well as the beautiful could be rendered visible and subjected to an act of comprehension and understanding that for Coleridge was incommensurate with the sublime. This made Wordsworth less categorically sceptical of the visual and allowed him to invoke it as his model for

verbal description in the *Guide* with the aim of ordering memory and giving a firm ground for new observations.

In the 1810 version that accompanied the engraved images, the second paragraph given above was substantially different:

> Something of this kind (as far as can be performed by words which must needs be most inadequately) will be attempted in the following introductory pages, with reference to the country which has furnished the subjects of the Drawings now offered to the public, adding to a verbal representation of its permanent features such appearances as are transitory from their dependence upon accidents of season and weather. This, if tolerably executed, will in some instances communicate to the traveller, who has already seen the objects, new information; and will assist him to give his recollections a more orderly arrangement than his own opportunities of observing may have permitted him to do; while it will be still more useful to the future traveller by directing his attention at once to distinctions in things which, without such previous aid, a length of time only could enable him to discover. And, as must be obvious, this general introduction will combine with the Etchings certain notices of things which, though they may not lie within the province of the pencil, cannot but tend to render its productions more interesting. (*PrW* 2, 170–171 *app. crit.*)

The first substantial change is from parenthetically mentioning in 1810 the inadequacy of words compared to the visual model to later pointing to the fact that 'minute details and individualities' will be left out of the description. This revision makes a significant difference in how the verbal medium is introduced in the *Guide* as such: while it suggests that words are inferior to and need the visual media of the model and the graphic illustrations in the early version, in later versions Wordsworth says that words are their equals and can substitute adequately for them even though it would make for awkward reading.

The next two substantial differences are the removals of references to the 'etchings'. In both cases, Wordsworth remarks on the different effects and capacities of the visual and the verbal media. The first states that Wordsworth's words will add to the drawings, which represent the 'permanent features' of the scenery, 'such appearances as are transitory from their dependence upon accidents of season and weather'. Although the syntax is problematic, Wordsworth here seems to align the visual with the permanent (space) and the verbal with the transitory (time).

Words can seemingly render the seasonal changeability of nature in a manner that pictures for Wordsworth cannot. This Lessingesque sense that the different media can render different things is elaborated in the last excised passage: 'this general introduction will combine with the Etchings certain notices of things which, though they may not lie within the province of the pencil, cannot but tend to render its productions more interesting'. The paragraph that had begun by stating the inadequacy of words ends by saying that the verbal supplement to the pictures will reveal certain things, which are not in these specific etchings, and perhaps not 'within the province of the pencil, [but which] cannot but tend to render its productions more interesting'.

The sense of verbal superiority Wordsworth almost cannot keep himself from expressing, and his typically High Romantic dislike of working as a secondary illustrator of primary pictures, was expressed in 1810 in the section, 'Of the Best Time for Visiting the Lakes' (in later editions called 'Miscellaneous Observations'):

> In the Introduction to this Work a survey has been given of the face of the country.... I will now address myself more particularly to the Stranger and the Traveller; and, without attempting to give a formal Tour through the country, and without binding myself servilely to accompany Etchings, I will attach to the Work such directions, descriptions, and remarks, as I hope will confer an additional interest upon the Views. (*PrW* 2, 226 *app. crit.*)

Having to follow Wilkinson's pictures made Wordsworth feel like a slave subjected to the 'despotic' 'tyranny' of the bodily eye. This sense of inhibition reflects Coleridge and Lamb's view of the word–image relationship and is in line with traditional accounts of High Romanticism's devaluation of ekphrasis that would make the matter of the text being illustrated unimportant.

Wordsworth sought to 'rebel' against his sense of being bound in a servile manner to the visual images in several ways, which paradoxically seem to have been profitable for the later work on the *Guide*, and by implication the turn to ekphrasis. His rebellion came most directly in the form of a denunciation of the quality of the engravings in a letter to Lady Beaumont, 10 May 1810,

> I am very happy that you have read the Introduction with so much pleasure.... The drawings, or Etchings, or whatever they may be called, are, I know, such as to you and Sir George must be intolerable.

> You will receive from them that sort of disgust which I do from bad Poetry, a disgust which can never be felt in its full strength, but by those who are practiced in an art, as well as Amateurs of it.... They will please many who in all the arts are most taken with what is most worthless. I do not mean that there is not in simple and unadulterated minds a sense of the beautiful and sublime in art; but into the hands of few such do prints or picture fall. (*MY* 1, 404–405)

Yet, we should note that Wordsworth denounces the quality of these specific examples as 'intolerable', not the idea and practice of such illustrated books the way Lamb and Coleridge were more inclined to do. He for instance praised his friend William Green's engraved views of the Lake District, published in 1819 as *The Tourist's New Guide to the Lakes*, and was hesitant to agree to help Wilkinson in order not to compete with Green's work (*PrW* 2, 124–125).[29]

Wordsworth rebelled against the engravings in a more indirect manner in the original 1810 version. First of all, in his introductory description of the Lakes modelled on the Alpine simulacrum where he introduced the figure of a wheel with eight spokes to visualise the eight valleys of the Lake District perhaps in verbal competition with and under stimulating inspiration from the idea of graphic illustration. Secondly, in his own word-paintings exemplified for instance at the end of Section Two (Section Three in later editions) where he gives advice on the proper way of planting trees so as not to disfigure the natural scenery:

> As to the management of planting with reasonable attention to ornament, let the images of nature be your guide, and the whole secret lurks in a few words; thickets or underwoods—single trees—trees clustered or in groups—groves—unbroken woods, but with varied masses of foliage—glades—invisible or winding boundaries—in rocky districts, a seemly proportion of rock left wholly bare, and other parts half hidden—disagreeable objects concealed, and formal lines broken—trees climbing up to the horizon, and, in some places, ascending from its sharp edge, in which they are rooted, with the whole body of the tree appearing to stand in the clear sky—in other parts, woods surmounted by rocks utterly bare and naked, which add the sense of height, as if vegetation could not thither be carried, and impress a feeling of duration, power of resistance, and security from change! (*PrW* 2, 223)

This 'picture' is an extreme instance of Wordsworthian '*matter-of-factness*' in its enumeration and accumulation of detail. Wordsworth's peculiar '*matter-of-factness*' has often been the object of critical despair. In the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge said it contravened 'the very essence of poetry' (Bate & Engell 2, 127) because it was superfluous and could be replaced by a graphic illustration ('what a draughtsman could present to the eye with incomparably greater satisfaction by half a dozen strokes of his pencil, or the painter with as many touches of his brush'). According to William Hazlitt, already in 1798 Coleridge had 'lamented... that there was a something corporeal, a *matter-of-fact-ness*, a clinging to the palpable, or often to the petty, in [Wordsworth's] poetry', at least in the 'descriptive pieces' compared to the 'philosophical' poetry that Coleridge preferred.[30] According to Galperin, the resistance to '*matter-of-factness*' in Wordsworth is due to a fear of 'what the world, either viewed or accidentally admitted, might do to [his] poetry'.[31] The visible world threatens to evacuate the mind from the work which then only aspires to the condition of a mute and 'palpable' thing. This may be observed in the extreme '*matter-of-fact*' passage from the *Guide* where Wordsworth uses words and typographic dashes as a kind of painterly lines to compose an ideal landscape, which is meant to 'impress a feeling of duration, power of resistance, and security from change!' in a manner similar to how he typically saw and valued works of art as permanent and unchangeable.

Wordsworth rebelled against the idea and presumed need for graphic illustration in a less indirect manner when in the third unillustrated and first independently published edition in 1822 he added a passage dealing with 'fleecy clouds resting upon the hill-tops' towards the end of the first section; such clouds, says Wordsworth,

> are not easily managed in picture, with their accompaniments of blue sky; but how glorious are they in nature! how pregnant with imagination for the poet! and the height of the Cumbrian mountains is sufficient to exhibit daily and hourly instances of those mysterious attachments. Such clouds, cleaving to their stations, or lifting up suddenly their glittering heads from behind rocky barriers, or hurrying out of sight with speed of the sharpest edge—will often tempt an inhabitant to congratulate himself on belonging to a country of mists and clouds and storms, and make him think of the blank sky of Egypt, and of the cerulean vacancy of Italy, as an unanimated and even sad spectacle. (*PrW* 2, 191)

Painting is denigrated as mechanical (something 'managed') and the poet's imagination is being upgraded as organic. This is illustrated as Wordsworth presents a verbal rendition of three variations of a cloud formation and its movement ('cleaving to their stations, or lifting up suddenly their glittering heads from behind rocky barriers, or hurrying out of sight with speed of the sharpest edge'). In Wordsworth's paratactic sentence, the three cloud images connected by 'or' are presented as if in simultaneity even though they negate one another in being fixed, moving and disappearing at once. Such an image, he implies, could not be 'managed' in a picture which for Wordsworth should only represent one moment.

This verbal representation of the moving 'spectacle' of various cloud formations sets the stage for the most interesting addition to the fourth edition in 1823, a stunning 'painting' in words that gives closure to the first section and performs with words both what the absent visual representations could perhaps have accomplished if their quality had been sufficiently high, and something more, as Wordsworth expands 'the province of the pencil' and inscribes time and movement into his verbal 'painting'. Yet, he begins by suspending chronological time and invoking the stasis of a moment or 'spot of time' especially 'pregnant with imagination for the poet':

> It has been said that in human life there are moments worth ages. In a more subdued tone of sympathy may we affirm, that in the climate of England there are, for the lover of nature, days which are worth whole months,—I might say—even years.... [I]t is in autumn that days of such affecting influence most frequently intervene,—the atmosphere seems refined, and the sky rendered more crystalline, as the vivifying heart of the year abates; the lights and shadows are more delicate; the colouring is richer and more finely harmonized; and, in this season of stillness, the ear being unoccupied, or only gently excited, the sense of vision becomes more susceptible of its appropriate enjoyments. A resident in a country like this which we are treating of, will agree with me, that the presence of a lake is indispensable to exhibit in perfection the beauty of one of these days; and he must have experienced, while looking on the unruffled waters, that the imagination, by their aid, is carried into recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable. The reason of this is, that the heavens are not only brought down into the bosom of the earth, but that the earth is mainly looked at, and thought of, through the medium of a purer element. The happiest time is when the equinoxial gales are departed; but their fury may probably

> be called to mind by the sight of a few scattered boughs, whose leaves do not differ in colour from the faded foliage of the stately oaks from which these relics of the storm depend: all else speaks of tranquillity;—not a breath of air, no restlessness of insects, and not a moving object perceptible—except the clouds gliding in the depth of the lake, or the traveller passing along, an inverted image, whose motion seems governed by the quiet of a time, to which its archetype, the living person, is, perhaps, insensible:—or it may happen, that the figure of one of the larger birds, a raven or a heron, is crossing silently among the reflected clouds, while the voice of the real bird, from the element aloft, gently awakens in the spectator the recollection of appetites and instincts, pursuits and occupations, that deform and agitate the world,—yet have no power to prevent nature from putting on an aspect capable of satisfying the most intense cravings for the tranquil, the lovely, and the perfect, to which man, the noblest of her creatures, is subject. (*PrW* 2, 191–192)

This passage, which Ernest de Selincourt calls 'perhaps the subtlest and most finely wrought passage in the book' (*PrW* 2, 400n), utilises the ancient trope of *enargeia* and seems to emulate and wish to surpass the effect of graphic illustration. It makes us see what is neglected in accounts of Wordsworth that centre on his early iconoclasm and sense of the 'tyranny' of the eye; that in a 'season of stillness, the ear being unoccupied . . . , the sense of vision becomes more susceptible of its appropriate enjoyments'. If the painter's canvas tended to be a poor surface for the reflection of moving clouds, the mirror of a lake is ideal. This mirroring effect is reflected in Wordsworth's equally gliding prose which duplicates the three-part paratactic or-construction noted above as it references clouds, a traveller, and, in an especially pregnant moment, the spectacle of 'the figure of one of the larger birds . . . crossing silently among the reflected clouds'. This double image of an image of a bird 'crossing silently' the images of moving clouds—'crossing' suggesting both a kind of blending and marking—leads Wordsworth to state, as succinctly as anywhere in his work, the function and value of visual representation for him: it can satisfy 'the most intense cravings for the tranquil, the lovely, and the perfect, to which man . . . is subject'.

Paradoxically, the visual here performs exactly the kind of subjection of the human that Wordsworth would resist according to Geoffrey Hartman. For Hartman, there is in Wordsworth a 'constant concern with denudation, stemming from both a fear of visual reality and a desire for physical indestructibility'; there is, Hartman continues, a 'vast

identity established throughout the poems of Wordsworth, an identity against sight, its fever and triviality, and making all things tend to the sound of universal waters; subduing the eyes by a power of harmony'.[32] For Hartman, Wordsworth's poetry is ultimately hostile to sensuous nature and concerned with the possibility for consciousness to transcend the natural-corporeal world of mutability and death. Hartman has surely located the central current in Wordsworth's Great Decade poetry and identified it as a 'fear of visual reality'. In a key passage in *The Prelude*, for instance, Wordsworth describes a privileged moment in which he 'felt what'er there is of power in sound / To breathe an elevated mood, by form / Or image unprofaned' (1805, II, ll. 321–326), which made him forget that he had 'bodily eyes' (l. 369). As much motivated and energised by attacks on Neoclassical descriptive poetry and the popular, profoundly visually oriented gothic genre, as by the political ideals espoused by the iconoclastic French Revolution, this resistance to the visual came to represent, for Hartman and a number of other Romanticists, what was most authentically Wordsworthian about Wordsworth.[33] Indeed, for Harold Bloom, it signified what was Romantic about Romanticism and what defined the originality of the movement. As Bloom writes, 'The burden of Romantic poetry is absolute freedom, including freedom from the tyranny of the bodily eye, and this freedom appears to have resulted in part from the specifically Protestant influence that made modern poetry possible.'[34] However, this interpretation of Wordsworth typically fails to account for the later work except in terms of a decline into weakness and a failure to maintain imaginative vision. It consequently blinds us to the strength of a new current in the later work which tends towards the visual and towards a positive valorisation of sight as seen when the 'fear of visual reality' and 'identity against sight, its fever and triviality' is replaced in the *Guide* by a need for the clear sight of watery reflections that are indeed seen to reflect and satisfy what Hartman calls Wordsworth's 'desire for physical indestructibility'.

When we read Wordsworth's relationship with visual phenomena in dialectical terms of interchange and cross-fertilisation rather than of silent repression or violent denial, we begin to see that such phenomena as the Alpine model, the wheel metaphor or illustrations present and absent inspire some of the most characteristic and most forceful texts and passages in the later work, such as the 1823 addition to the *Guide*. The return of the visible in the later work, of the capacity to take almost endless pleasure in the reception and production of the illusions of visual representation, does not usurp what Hartman calls the

'identity against sight' that according to him permeates Wordsworth's work; it disrupts it and makes us question whether there is not more than one 'identity' in the *oeuvre*. Having to a large extent overcome his 'fear of visual reality' and learnt how to take pleasure in the sights given in many of the later works, which tend to consist of reports made by a sight-seeing tourist writing primarily to render, not the seeing subject, but the seen world visible through language, Wordsworth saw in the visible the possibility for a fulfilment of what Hartman describes as his 'desire for physical indestructibility' that underpins his creative activity, especially after the orientation towards a posterior reception.

Despite frequent celebrations of the painter's and sculptor's crafts as well as attempts at emulation through ekphrasis and *enargeia*, Wordsworth valued poetry over painting and other products of the visual arts. Yet, his understanding of their relationship is more complex than it is often made out to be. In the Fenwick Note to the 1835 sonnet, 'Composed in Roslin Chapel, During a Storm' (*PW* 3, 266), Wordsworth provided a characteristic comparison of the painter and the poet when he told Isabella Fenwick that

> the movements of the mind must be more free while dealing with words than with lines and colours; such at least . . . has been *on many occasions* my belief, and, as it is allotted to few to follow both arts with success, I am grateful to my own calling for this and a thousand other recommendations which are denied to that of the Painter. (*PW* 3, 528; emphasis added)

According to Wordsworth, the painter cannot like the poet evoke the impact of an outside and hence invisible storm on someone inside the church: the painter cannot represent the roof as a space for sublime sounding and resounding the way the poet can and does in the monosyllabic rhyme-words of the sonnet's octave. Especially the *a*-rhymes (*clank, sank, blank, bank*) give the impression of a cacophony of 'harsh' sounds, which a storm may be imagined to make to someone inside a church building. At least, the rhymes reinforce the poem's subject, which is the 'music' made by the storm on the 'organ' of the church building. Although we must temper it with Wordsworth's own qualification ('on many occasions'), he would typically 'not allow the plastic artist of any kind to place himself by the side of the poet as his equal', as his friend and travelling companion, Henry Crabb Robinson, reported in a letter to Barron Field after the tour to Italy in 1837.[35]

Already in 1820, Crabb Robinson had noted an impression of Wordsworth's understanding of the hierarchy between poetry and the plastic arts during a visit to the British Museum:

> I did not perceive that Wordsworth enjoyed much the Elgin Marbles, but he is a still man when he does enjoy himself and by no means ready to talk of his pleasure except to Miss Wordsworth. But we could hardly see the statues. The Memnon, however, seemed to interest him very much. I have thought that Wordsworth's enjoyment of works of art is very much in proportion to their subserviency to poetical illustration. I doubt whether he feels the beauty of mere form.[36]

Wordsworth's apparent lack of response to the Elgin Marbles may have been due simply to poor viewing conditions either because of darkness or the crowd that would be present in the temporary gallery, which had opened in 1817 (in use until 1831). Or perhaps Wordsworth just had a problem with sculpture. As Crabb Robinson told Barron Field in 1837, 'His eye for colour seems more cultivated than his sense of form: at least the picture galleries were more attractive to him than the museums of sculpture.'[37] His taste for sculpture may also simply have been more eclectic and less highbrow than that of Crabb Robinson's and other connoisseurs at the time, who had learned to praise the classical, Hellenistic Elgin Marbles as the epitome of 'fine art'.[38] Hence his interest in the Egyptian Memnon (actually the head of Ramses II), which had been brought to the Museum in 1817 by Giovanni Belzoni.[39] Many did not consider the Egyptian works fine art and Wordsworth's 'interest' in them (as objects of curiosity rather than forms of beauty) may explain Crabb Robinson's sense that Wordsworth was incapable of 'feeling the beauty of mere form'. Yet, another explanation may simply be that he had already seen and praised the Elgin Marbles and was more interested in the Egyptian novelty. In December 1815, he had written to the first and most ardent supporter of the Elgin Marbles, the history painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, 'I am not surprised that Canova expressed himself so highly pleased with the Elgin Marbles. A Man must be senseless as a clod, or perverse as a Fiend, not to be enraptured with them' (*MY* 2, 257–258).

As the letter to Haydon indicates, in his later years Wordsworth was immersed in the visual art culture of Romanticism and had learned to value the plastic arts very highly. Indeed, he was actively seeking to integrate them into his poetic works even if they were to take up a subservient, servile position. In October 1836, referring to the revised

multivolume collected works edition being published by Edward Moxon, Wordsworth wrote to the artist, Thomas James Judkin, 'I am truly sensible to your kind offer to assist in illustrating my Poems . . . . It is now too late for the present Edition, but I shall nourish the hope that at some future time our labours may be united in a manner so agreeable to my feelings' (*LY* 3, 306). Later he wrote to Moxon and suggested that in future editions they might 'try [their] fortune with illustrations. Both Mr [Frank] Stone and Mr Judkin have [offered?] drawings gratis—an artist whom I met with the other day promised to send me a finished drawing from a sketch which he had made of the Valley in which I have placed the Solitary and which would be an appropriate ornament for the Excursion' (*LY* 3, 318). This typical Wordsworthian desire to reduce costs by getting illustrations for nothing hides a less typical positive espousal of the presence of visual images in his books. The hierarchy and production sequence is clearly in favour of the word over the image, of the poet inspiring and controlling the painter in an inversion of how the *Guide* was produced. In the letter to Judkin, Wordsworth was writing to acknowledge the receipt of a painting which it appears he had a hand in designing, 'Your Picture was very welcome, I think it decidedly improved by the suggestions you were kind enough to work upon, and by the additional figure' (*LY* 3, 306). Yet, Wordsworth's espousal of illustration and his sense that his and Judkin's 'labours may be united in a manner so agreeable to my feelings' still problematises the usual understanding of Wordsworth's view of illustrated books.

Wordsworth's wish for an illustrated edition may be contrasted to a letter he had written to Moxon in May 1833, where he said that 'It is a disgrace to the age that Poetry wont sell without prints', and continued: 'I am a little too proud to let my Ship sail in the wake of the Engravers and the drawing-mongers' (*LY* 2, 617). This letter is in tune with the typical account of Wordsworth on illustration which is based on a late sonnet, 'Illustrated Books and Newspapers' (1846):

> Now prose and verse sunk into disrepute
> Must lacquey a dumb Art that best can suit
> The taste of this once-intellectual Land.
> . . . .
> Avaunt this vile abuse of pictured page!
> Must eyes be all in all, the tongue and ear
> Nothing? Heaven keep us from a lower stage!
>
> (*PW* 4, 75)

Despite this animosity (which registers, for example, in the '*dumb* Art' as a derogatory variation on mute), the subject of illustration was evidently one that Wordsworth was also positively attracted to. Wordsworth did not, in a reactionary manner, condemn and wish to ban illustration *per se*. He may have taken offence over certain examples in the ephemeral press. Not until the mid-1830s did newspapers regularly provide illustrations of the events they reported. In 1840, the *Penny Sunday Times*, as Richard Altick points out, 'pleased its semiliterate public with crude illustrations depicting the murders, child kidnappings, armed robberies, and other violent occurrences with which its columns were filled. But the sixpenny *Illustrated London News*, begun two years later, was the first to make a policy of subordinating text to pictures'.[40] But primarily he worried that the eye might become more important than the ear and render it superfluous as an organ of sense. 'Must eyes be *all in all*' is no longer a simple reflection of the 'tyranny' of the eye. It is a recognition that the eye is vital, but that the eye and the ear must co-operate rather than compete.[41] Gillen D'Arcy Wood presents a too simple view of Wordsworth's complex relation to graphic illustration when he sides Wordsworth with Coleridge and Lamb and claims, merely on the basis of 'Illustrated Books and Newspapers', that

> as late as the 1840s, the literary elite continued to actively resist the cultural influence of new visual media. Like the public spectacles of the theater and the panorama, the increasingly popular illustrated book engaged the eye rather than the mind and imagination. For Romantic writers, it symbolized the spread of an infantilizing visual medium to the domestic sphere and, more seriously still, the encroachment of the visual arts onto literature's sovereign domain, the printed book.[42]

Wordsworth actively resisted being dictated by visual art of poor quality, yet he did not unequivocally resist illustration or visual media just because they were visual.

Crabb Robinson registered the later Wordsworth's enhanced understanding of the plastic arts when he reported from an 1828 visit first to the National Gallery and next to the British Institution: 'A long lounge over the pictures. Wordsworth is a fine judge of paintings and his remarks are full of feeling and truth. We afterwards went to the British Institution, where we also lounged a long time over a glorious collection of the Old Masters—a very fine collection.'[43] According to Robert P. Graves, Wordsworth at one point said that

> there were three callings, for success in which Nature had furnished him with qualifications—the callings of poet, landscape-gardener, and critic of pictures and works of art.... As to works of art, his criticism was not that of one versed in the 'prima philosophia', as he called it; and it was, as it appeared to me, of the highest order.[44]

This art critical interest and talent was registered by William Hazlitt in *The Spirit of the Age*: 'We have known him to enlarge with a noble intelligence and enthusiasm on Nicolas Poussin's fine landscape-compositions, pointing out the unity of design that pervades them, the superintending mind, the imaginative principle that brings all to bear on the same end',

> His eye also does justice to Rembrandt's fine and masterly effects. In the way in which that artist works something out of nothing, and transforms the stump of a tree, a common figure into an *ideal* object, by the gorgeous light and shade thrown upon it, he perceives an analogy to his own mode of investing the minute details of nature with an atmosphere of sentiment; and in pronouncing Rembrandt to be a man of genius, feels that he strengthens his own claim to the title.[45]

Wordsworth, in other words, at times did not insist on the inferiority of 'the plastic artist' or always hold that pictures must be subsumed by poetry and serve only as secondary illustration. Instead of insisting on *ut musica poesis* he sometimes openly engaged in the game of *ut pictura poesis* wherein he identified with certain painters both in terms of technique and in terms of possessing genius. In the sonnet he wrote to Haydon in 1815 and included in the letter that mentioned the Elgin Marbles, Wordsworth saw the two kinds of artists as equals even if their means or 'instruments' of expression differ:

> High is our calling, Friend!—Creative Art
> (Whether the instrument of words she use,
> Or pencil pregnant with ethereal hues,)
> Demands the service of a mind and heart,
> Though sensitive, yet, in their weakest part,
> Heroically fashioned—to infuse
> Faith in the whispers of the lonely Muse,
> While the whole world seems adverse to desert.
>
> (*PW* 3, 21)

Haydon naturally took delight in this sonnet and in what Robert Woof has described as Wordsworth's 'bracketing together [of] poet and painter as creatures equal in high creative impulse'.[46] As he wrote to Wordsworth in December 1815, 'every other poet has shown a thorough ignorance of its nature before—seeming not to know that the mind was the source the means only different—if for this only, you will have the gratitude of every painter'.[47] As Haydon said of Wordsworth in 1842, 'His knowledge of Art is extraordinary, he detects errors in hands like a connoisseur or artist.'[48]

Wordsworth's acquired knowledge of art was also demonstrated in his 1826 poem, 'The Pillar of Trajan' (*PW* 3, 229–231). It is an ekphrasis of the impressive thirty-metre tall Pillar of Trajan, which still stands in Rome where it was first erected in the early second century (AD 107–113). The poem was first published in 1827 among the 'Poems of Sentiment and Reflection', and in 1845 it was reclassified and printed in the important position as concluding poem in the *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837*, which were first published in 1842 among the *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*. Wordsworth had not seen the Pillar of Trajan in 1826 and based his account on written evidence and possibly engraved reproductions that proliferated; but in 1845, after visiting it with Crabb Robinson, he saw that it suited the touristic and visually overdetermined sequence of Italian poems.

'The Pillar of Trajan' reads like Wordsworth's version of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. The urn's 'leaf-fringed legend' haunting about its shape is typically taken to mean that Keats sees the urn as inscribed with ornamental letters formed like leaves. Keats's use of Nature as a metaphor for Art is then read as characteristically late Romantic, as inspired by his immersion in contemporary art and museum culture, and as a departure from Wordsworth's first-hand use of nature.[49] Yet, we can observe the same thing in 'The Pillar of Trajan':

> Historic figures round the shaft embost
> Ascend, with lineaments in air not lost:
> Still as he turns, the charmed spectator sees
> Group winding after group with dream-like ease;
> Triumphs in sun-bright gratitude displayed,
> Or stealing into modest shade.
> —So, pleased with purple clusters to entwine
> Some lofty elm-tree, mounts the daring vine;
> The wood-bine so, with spiral grace, and breathes
> Wide-spreading odours from her flowery wreaths.
>
> (ll. 13–22)

The Pillar is famous for its row of numerous images which spiral upwards in a helix depicting the Emperor Trajan's campaigns and victories ending with a statue to crown it. Two natural phenomena, vine and woodbine, are used by Wordsworth as metaphors to describe the way in which the images thus wind themselves around the pillar. This is an instance of a chiasmic reversal in the transition from earlier to later Wordsworth whereby the hierarchy of nature and art seems to be reversed, and art takes up a position over nature. As Peter Manning points out, in his later phase Wordsworth 'became increasingly concerned with problems of representation and cultural transmission, [and] ekphrastic poems, rare at the outset of his career, crop up with some frequency. Meanings once inscribed on the natural landscape . . . now shelter in art'.[50]

'The Pillar of Trajan' is composed in the heroic couplet. The prosaic explanation is that Wordsworth wrote it as an example of a poem that might have competed for the so-called Newdigate Prize, a competition instituted in 1806 at Oxford for students to write the best poem on a classical Greek or Roman work of art or architecture.[51] Wordsworth of course did not participate in the competition and merely wrote the poem to show his twenty-two-year-old son, John, then at Oxford, how such a thing might be done. With one exception, the couplets in 'The Pillar of Trajan' are closed. They are not as closed as they tend to be in Dryden or Pope, as signalled by the fact that the very first line runs over ('Where towers are crushed, and unforbidden weeds / O'er mutilated arches shed their seeds'). But they are not as open as in Keats, who famously enjambs a series of couplets in opening *Endymion* (1818) in imitation of earlier romance poets' use of the so-called 'romance couplet'. In an 1819 letter, Wordsworth expressed his 'detestation of couplets running into each other, merely because it is convenient to the writer;—or from affected imitation of our elder poets. Reading such verse produces in me', he says, 'a sensation like that of toiling in a dream, under the night-mare. The Couplet promises rest at agreeable intervals; but here it is never attained—you are mocked and disappointed from paragraph to paragraph' (*MY* 2, 547). Often, the first line of a couplet in 'The Pillar of Trajan' is run over without punctuation, yet with almost no exception the second line is terminated either with a full stop or a semicolon. The closed nature of Wordsworth's couplets suggests the classical Augustan virtues of control and restraint and may thus be said to match the 'classical' work of art they represent and build up.

Just as the Pillar ends with something special, the statue of Trajan (in fact substituted in 1587 by one of St Peter), so the poem ends with something special in the form of a remarkable variation on what has

by then become an almost unbearably regular couplet pace: the second line of the penultimate couplet is run over, the only of its kind in the entire poem:

> Still are we present with the imperial Chief,
> Nor cease to gaze upon the bold Relief
> Till Rome, to silent marble unconfined,
> Becomes with all her years a vision of the Mind.
>
> (ll. 70–73)

Far from a result of what Wordsworth would call a writer's 'convenience', this perfectly timed enjambment of two couplets—which disrupts our expectation of 'rest at agreeable intervals'—gives a colossal sense of release, openness and liberation, which the poem calls 'unconfinement'. This release is captured in the pun on 'relief' and enacted metrically by the use of an alexandrine as closing line, which inscribes an extra foot to both contain and release, in a word, to 'unconfine' the most important thing in the poem and in normative High Romanticism: 'the Mind'. Yet, now 'vision' and 'Mind' have been solidly anchored and externalised in the material and visible world of art.

Due to its placement between two libraries from where spectators could view its upper images, the Pillar is usually taken to imitate a partly unrolled scroll. The Pillar is a kind of poem, a visual epic that relates Trajan's history. In the book Wordsworth used as his main source, Joseph Forsyth's *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters, during an Excursion in Italy in 1802–3* (1813), it is said that the Pillar should be 'considered as a long historical record to be read round and round a long convex surface'.[52] Just as the monumental Pillar is like a text, so the text about the Pillar assumes monumental and sculptural contours. In ekphrastic poems, the verbal representation of the act of seeing a visual representation may cause the reader to begin to look at the words of the poem and to attend to them as if they were of the same ontological nature as the represented art object. We are encouraged to do so by the fact that the poem refers to its art object not only as a 'pillar' in the title and in line 35, but also as a 'Column' (l. 6). If we activate the pun, we get the sense in which a two-dimensional printed column on the page may iconically imitate a three-dimensional free-standing column. That Wordsworth calls the object one thing in the title and another in the poem merely reflects general practice, which too reveals confusion whether to call it a pillar or a column. Yet, a poem is of course

not ordinary speech, in which verbal confusion may be just that; in a poem, such apparent confusion often contains vital leads to the poem's significance. In 'The Pillar of Trajan', the art object described is surely called both a column and a pillar to suggest the textuality of the pillar and the spatiality of the poem's column.

What Wordsworth values about the Pillar is its permanence and capacity to remain after the death of speech. Towards the end of the poem Wordsworth asks: 'Where now the haughty Empire that was spread / With such fond hope? her very speech is dead' (ll. 65–66). The Empire's fall is illustrated by the fact that Rome's 'very speech is dead'. While it obviously refers to Latin as a dead language that does not live in speech but only remains as written text, it has a certain resonance for the poet who had fashioned himself as a 'man speaking to men'. After the death of speech, the statue representing the quintessential Romantic type of the overreacher remains: 'Yet glorious Art the power of Time defies, / And Trajan still, through various enterprise, / Mounts, in this fine illusion, toward the skies' (ll. 67–69). In an analysis of the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', A. W. Phinney points out that Keats 'countered his failure to find a large contemporary public by placing his hopes in poetic immortality', and that 'A confrontation with the art of the past... represented a confrontation with the destiny he had willed for himself.' As Phinney continues, 'Looking at an image of the past, the poet who aspires to immortality cannot help but see his own future image. Thus the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" looks not only toward the past but toward the future as well, encoding in itself an allegory of its reading.'[53] In the permanent Pillar, which is presented as a visual text and subjected to reading (l. 15), Wordsworth similarly perceived a model for a poetry written for posterity which he aimed to absorb and assimilate through ekphrasis. The artwork offers what the verbally mediated images of nature offer in the *Guide*: permanence, stability and an idea of indestructibility which Wordsworth wished to confer upon his own work in the interest of securing its posterior survival.

In another characteristic late touristic poem, the sonnet 'Brugès' from the *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820*, Wordsworth writes:

> The Spirit of Antiquity—enshrined
> In sumptuous buildings, vocal in sweet song,
> In picture, speaking with heroic tongue,
> And with devout solemnities entwined—
> Mounts to the seat of grace within the mind
>
> (*PW* 3, 165)

Buildings, paintings and monumental sculpture evidently spoke to and inspired the later Wordsworth. Their materiality gave them a permanence that enabled them to transcend the moment of production and promised the survival of the 'spirit' of the past. Wordsworth's historical consciousness undoubtedly led him to draw a parallel between this articulate sense of the presence of the past in material objects and the possibility of securing the presence of 'himself' in a similar future situation. Wordsworth's attraction to the visual was an attraction to the materially permanent, and it was both spurred by and in turn spurred his desire to produce an equally permanent ekphrastic work that might endure beyond himself; that might be an extension of himself beyond himself in the doubling of the statue that remains, like a written and printed text, after the death of the speaker.

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