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The uses of Notebooks: from Journal to Album, from Commonplace to Keepsake ¹

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I

IT HAS NOT PASSED UNNOTICED that phrases describing light, often the light of a night sky, are not dissimilar in the writings of Coleridge, Dorothy Wordsworth, and on occasion Wordsworth, in 1797-8. So, how did they talk, these writers? Coleridge suggests an answer. Writing a continuation (never completed) of Wordsworth's 'Three Graves', intended for pay from the *Morning Post*, in spring 1798 he describes a group of three persons, and the talk is about light:

The Sun peeps thro' the close thick leaves,
 'See dearest Ellen! See!
'Tis in the leaves, a little Sun,
 No bigger than your ee:
 A tiny Sun, and it has got
 A perfect glory too:
Ten thousand threads and hairs of light,
Make up a glory, gay and bright,
 Round that small orb, so blue.'

And then they argued of those rays,
 What colour they might be:
Says this, 'they 're mostly green;' says that,
 'They're amber-like to me.'

So they sat chatting...²

All the chatting about light, and again, about thin clouds and moonlight, probably dates from the Wordsworths' first coming to Alfoxden in July 1797: 'one's breath/ Floats round the Flame', says Coleridge's Ferdinand in an October 1797 text of *Osorio*,

and makes as many colours
As the thin Clouds that travel near the Moon. (*Osorio*, IV, 23-6)

The grey cloud spread on high, that covers but not hides the sky of 'Christabel' has already appeared variously in Coleridge's Notebook (see, for example, entries CN I 216, 315, 316) and the sun, like Coleridge's round full moon, can look small, and change its size to the uncertain eye. In 'The Three Graves' it

¹ I am grateful to the Trustees of the Wordsworth Trust and to Jeff Cowton, the Curator, for permission to quote from manuscripts held in the Wordsworth Library at the Jerwood Centre, Grasmere

² Coleridge, *Poetical Works* I, (Part 1) ed. J.C.C. Mays, Princeton 2001, 348

can be seen through green leaves as tiny, and with a nimbus of threads of glory, 'a perfect glory'. It is connected not just with such sense experience, but with Coleridge's reading and his not infrequent use of his Notebook as a Commonplace book. He copied into his book a paragraph, 'a Description of a Glory', from an article in the *Memoirs of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society*, and he borrowed these *Memoirs* from the Bristol Library, April/May 1798.

In his Notebook Coleridge tries out ways of catching light behind light, or veils so thin that they themselves seem light. His additions to another poem by Wordsworth, 'Beauty and Moonlight', or, as Coleridge re-named it, 'Lewti' (first published in the *Morning Post* 13 April 1798), illustrate this:

I saw a cloud of palest hue,
 Onward to the Moon it passed.
Still brighter and more bright it grew,
With floating colours not a few,
 Till it reached the Moon at last;
Then the cloud was wholly bright,
With a rich and amber light! ('Lewti', 15-21)

Coleridge seemed almost in competition with himself to produce the thinnest cloud:

I saw a vapour in the sky,
Thin, and white, and very high:
I ne'er beheld so thin a cloud. ('Lewti', 42-4)

And again,

I cannot chuse but fix my sight
On that small vapour, thin and white!
So thin, it scarcely, I protest,
Bedims the star that shines behind it.
('Lewti', *Morning Post* text, 54-7)

Kept safe in Coleridge's Notebook, probably since the end of 1797, was the entry,

So thin a cloud –
It scarce bedimm'd the Star that shone behind it.
(CN I 316)

Dorothy Wordsworth must have noted something of Coleridge's practice of making memoranda as they all three walked the Quantocks, as against Wordsworth's reliance on memory and his non-use of a notebook –; and she had heard 'This Lime-tree Bower my Prison' in the summer of 1797 and knew its 'long lank Weeds/

That all at once (a most fantastic sight)
 Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge
 Of the blue clay-stone... (ll. 17-20)

She had heard Coleridge read his even earlier *Osorio* and had met the clay-stone there that

Drips on the long lank Weed that grows beneath:
 And the Weed nods and drips. (*Osorio* IV, i, 17-19)

Notebook water-drops from the Sabbath day mossy wheel of the Miller ‘dripped leisurely’, and the ‘damp Clay banks furr’d with mouldy moss’ would add to Coleridge’s water-drop perceptions (CN I 213); all these much-mocked drippings may well have led Dorothy Wordsworth to her own Journal’s (10 Feb. 1798) adders-tongue and ferns in the ‘low damp dell’,

now in perpetual motion from the current of the air; in summer
 only moved by the drippings of the rocks.

Why, after all, did Dorothy Wordsworth even begin a notebook journal at Alfoxden on 20 January 1798, except that, with Coleridge away from early January until 2 February, her written observations, clearly encouraged by Wordsworth, since it was he who wrote (or only wrote down) the initial four sentences (the only ms. we have), these observations would be a kind of substitute for the larger conversation.³ This is much of course as the Grasmere Journal was later to begin: Wordsworth was uniquely away from Grasmere for three weeks in May 1800 and Dorothy was uniquely alone. That first Alfoxden Journal, once begun, continues of course as a descriptive journal well beyond Coleridge’s return; for now Dorothy too was ‘making studies’ (Coleridge’s term, *Biographia Literaria* ch. X) of natural effects, though probably not, as Coleridge frequently did, actually writing out of doors, yet writing generally on a daily basis. The loss of the physical manuscript of Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Alfoxden Journal* since William Knight—a far from reliable textual editor—last handled it, possibly in 1913, simply throws up of course the importance of any primal unedited manuscript as an indication of a writer’s hurry, leisure, mistakes, after-thoughts.

Even so, we have a linguistic intimacy. Dorothy’s notebooks do not directly record conversation; they assume it. Absent or present, Coleridge plays a part: Dorothy too notices moons and clouds: how ‘the moon burst through the invisible veil’, and then became dimmer, ‘a white thin cloud’, over it (27 January 1798); notices how a continuous cloud, whitened by the light of the moon failed to generate shadows though it revealed the moon’s shape (25 January 1798); notices how clouds contract the dimensions of a moon

³ See my essay ‘The Alfoxden Journal and its Mysteries’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, XXVI, 3, 1995, 125-33.

immensely large (31 January); how straggling background clouds seemed dark and still, with nearer clouds moving fast in front of them (3 February); how the moon could be half-veiled; how one evening the fog became thin and the shapes behind of the central stars came clear (6 March); how there could be ‘a sort of white shade over the blue sky’ (24 April). A Notebook is for practising expression as well as for recording; and its words become sharper as the practising eyes become better at looking. Coleridge encouraged himself to notice the indefinite, the uncertain:

‘Twas not a mist, nor was it quite a cloud’, (CN I 315)

and that same capacity, with Coleridge present in his absence, became a new way of looking of Dorothy’s, directed, on occasion to land as well as to sky and clouds: ‘the turf fading into the mountain road’ (23 January). Was it turf or road, or that ‘half-marked road’ of another entry (26 January) along which the woodman was winding, and how dead was the ‘half-dead sound of the near sheep-bell?’ (24 February); was the far sheep-bell inaudible?

Not everything had such deliberate indefiniteness—not for Coleridge, or Dorothy, or, in the case of ‘black-blue’, for Wordsworth. Coleridge had put into the safe-keeping of his Notebook the verse comment:

—one black-blue Cloud

Stretched, like the heavens o’er all the cope of Heaven. (CN I 318)

He had probably written this after a conversation walking to Stowey or Alfoxden with Wordsworth and Dorothy in December 1797. Soon, needing an arresting adjective to provide a dramatic contrast to the whitened continuous cloud and dimly-seen moon at that precise moment when the moon could ‘sail along’ clear in an open sky, Wordsworth, or Dorothy, or both of them, clearly recalled Coleridge’s ‘black-blue’, and in both Wordsworth’s poem ‘A Night-Piece’ and Dorothy’s prose entry for 25 January 1798 that Moon sails along in a ‘black-blue vault’. The adjective has a place probably in three notebooks: Coleridge’s, Dorothy’s, Wordsworth’s (though only stubs indicating the poem remain here), written down in all three within the space of a few weeks. None of the three writers seems to have used the adjective a second time, though a Scottish ‘black-green Isle in shape like the Sword-fish’ appears in Coleridge’s Notebook in 1803 (CN I 1462). Dorothy must have written her ‘black-blue’ entry on returning from Poole’s house that same evening, 25 January; and while ‘A Night-Piece’ has a different structure from Dorothy’s Journal entry, Wordsworth nevertheless has several phrases identical with hers. In later life he said that he composed the poem *extempore* and remembered precisely the places on the road between Nether Stowey and Alfoxden (*Fenwick Notes*, ed. Jared Curtis 1993, 13, 108) where he composed. Certainly, in the early 1798 Alfoxden Notebook, used for poetic drafts, there is evidence of the poem’s existence. But we shall never certainly know. Perhaps

both Dorothy's entry and Wordsworth's poem have their origins in an animated conversation, and behind that conversation hovers another conversation, and that was one that took place earlier and it was with Coleridge.

II

People who do not regularly keep a diary have a tendency to notebooks when they set out on their travels. When the three left England for Germany on 14 September 1798, Dorothy had with her at least three small notebooks. She used parts of two of them for the Hamburg visit and the journey to Goslar. Wordsworth used one to record the conversation in French that he had had with the poet Klopstock and at a later point, on Friday 28 September 1798, clearly outraged, he seized the book that Dorothy was using for her Journal, and beginning with the word 'Yesterday', he set down two incidents: one of a man's beating a woman in the street, the by-standers complacent, and the other of his own baffling experience of being cheated in a baker's shop. Two of these books were also used in Goslar for drafts of poems; all three were filled up later by sections of the *Grasmere Journals*. Coleridge had three notebooks and he used these in Germany.

Dorothy thus begins her Hamburg Journal neatly, retrospectively, and decently:

Before we heaved the anchor I was consigned to the cabin, which
I did not quit till we were in still water at the mouth of the Elbe.
(*Journals*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 1941, I, 19)

Coleridge in his Notebook is graphic:

Wordsworth shockingly ill! Miss Wordsworth worst of all—vomiting
& groaning & crying the whole time!—and I the whole time as well as
I ever was—(CN I 335)

Finally in the calm water up-river Dorothy was able to make observations:

... towards Cuxhaven the shores appeared low and flat, and thinly
peopled; here and there a farm-house, cattle feeding, hay-stacks, a
cottage, a windmill. (*Journals* I, 19)

Coleridge by insistent repetition brings out the sameness of those Elbe riverbanks along the forty or so miles to Cuxhaven:

—banks neat, & flat, & quite artificial—Steeple & Windmill, &
Cottage, & wind mill & house & steeple & wind mill & wind mill, &
neat house, & steeple (CN I 335)

Towards Hamburg Dorothy adds the churches, ‘very frequent on the right, with spires’, while Coleridge crowds the churches like tall monitors amongst the dwellings:

neat houses & sharp steeples, some white some black & some red
peering over them (CN I 335)

So well did Coleridge like his 1798 Notebook evocation of the banks of the Elbe that he made a second use of it almost word for word:

Steeple, and Windmill, and Cottage, and Windmill & house, and
Steeple, and Windmill & Windmill, and neat house, and Steeple
(*Collected Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs, I, 426)

This is in a letter to Mrs Coleridge written from Ratzeburg barely two weeks after the Notebook entry. And the passage appears some ten years later in Coleridge’s weekly essay publication *The Friend*, 1809-10, and here it prompts Coleridge to comment on the inappropriateness (as compared with by the level Elbe), indeed the ludicrousness, of having churches with spires in narrow valleys in a mountainous country where the church is deprived ‘of all connection with the sky or clouds’ (*The Friend* 14, 23 November 1809).⁴ The description then is used a fourth time and the spire-comment repeated when Coleridge had to find something to fill up the second volume of *Biographia Literaria* in 1816-17. The frequently resurrected passage appears happily there in an autobiographical section, *Satyranes Letters*.

Few notebooks could be so mined. Dorothy Wordsworth’s travel journals, for example, had less of the precious significance possible to her journals written at home, whether at Alfoxden or in Grasmere, where conversation and writing nourished the sympathies. Yet talk there must have been when Coleridge and Dorothy stood with the luggage on the quay at Hamburg while Wordsworth went in search of lodgings. Both noted the hats of the passing women:

Dutch women with immense straw bonnets, with flat crowns and
rims in the shape of oyster shells, without trimming, or with only a
plain ribband round the crown, and literally as large as a small-sized
umbrella. (*Journals*, ed. De Selincourt, I, 21).

So Dorothy, straightforwardly, while Coleridge suggests a more wicked energy:

Dutch Women with huge umbrella hats shooting out half a yard from
their eyes—& with a prodigality of petticoats—(CN I 335)

Again, Coleridge keeps the shooting hats for the subsequent three

⁴ *The Friend* ed. Barbara E. Rooke, Bollingen Series LXXV 1969, II 195.

incarnations—the immediate letter, the 1809 *Friend* and 1817 *Satyrane's Letters*, merely adding a sensual touch: his 'prodigality of petticoats' develops into 'a prodigal *plumpness* of petticoat *behind*.'

For Dorothy an umbrella was an umbrella, the contraption which Wordsworth in 1804 'takes out', generally alone, 'and I dare say, stands stock-still under it during many a rainy half-hour, in the middle of road or field', engaged in composition (letter to Catherine Clarkson, 13 Feb. 1804).⁵ He 'seldom knows how the time slips away or hardly whether it is rain or fair' (letter to Lady Beaumont, 25 May 1804, *Ibid.* 477). An umbrella was an essential and Dorothy's account of her determined search for her own lost umbrella in Glasgow during her much later and second six-week tour of Scotland in 1822 with Joanna Hutchinson can be followed through two notebooks and a Journal.

The rougher of the two small notebooks has all the marks of being at times kept handily in a pocket. Both inside covers are scrawled randomly with expenses set out as sums: washing, coffee, sausages, pies, coach fares; there is a similar sum on the middle page; entries in pencil, and even in ink, could be jotted while Dorothy was on the move, in either coach, or boat; indeed, she acknowledges this, and speaks in the subsequent Journal of

Notes taken while we moved along at a gentle though not very slow pace. The horses trot briskly ...

That change to the present tense has a sharp immediacy:

The fiddler is now below & his music much sweeter than above . . .
(18 Sept. 1822)

Sometimes Dorothy used pencil and then wrote over this in ink, and the writing is fast, smudged, blotted and difficult. What we do learn, apart from Dorothy's low opinion of Glasgow people, place and weather, is that an umbrella was not to be found:

Up at 5. Umbrella—foggy, cold. I walked along Saltmarket. Joanna stayed foot palsied. No umbrella. Mounted coach at 7. Boy comes. Fog, cold, dirt, dirty people dirty houses—coal carts, busy in fog. (*Journal of My Second Tour in Scotland* 1822 ed. Jiro Nagasawa, Kenkyusha 1989, 19)

The enigmatic staccato jottings of this manuscript (DCMS 98A, Wordsworth Library) are then written up seemingly for the eyes of friends in an identical notebook, in Dorothy's close and careful hand. Only one sum appears on the end papers. But as this second notebook progresses, the writing speeds up,

⁵ *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Early Years, 1787-1805, EY*, ed. E. de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver, 1967, 440

small corrections are made, extra half pages are pasted in; there is the dried frond of a fern leaf. One extra fact is added to the first notebook's mention of the umbrella:

Thursday 20th

Rose at 5—Hurried away to reach Boat at 6—Discovered that J. had left my umbrella at Fruiterers while I was in search of post office—& wrote an order for the waiter to demand it before our return—

(DCMS 98B, *Second Tour*, 47)

What we discover here is that it was Joanna who had left behind an umbrella that was Dorothy's.

All the deletions, insertions, substantial information added on extra paper, must have induced Dorothy to write the whole thing out yet again, and in a bigger notebook.

She chose a large book, practically in quarto and wrote spaciouly. She and Joanna arrived back at the hotel in Glasgow which they had left five days earlier, without umbrella, in order to sail up Loch Lomond and go on to visit Inverary. Dorothy here writes out verbatim the impressions jotted down in the first rough notebook written while the horses trotted or the handsome Boatmen managed the Steam Boat, the Lady of the Lake. But on the subject of the Umbrella she becomes newly expansive:

Monday Sept. 24 1822

Asked after my umbrella at the Fruiterer's Shop—if it had been fetched away. The Boy only knew that it was not in the shop; & his master's house was half a mile distant. Found Joanna much fatigued

...

Tuesday Sept. 25 1822

A foggy morning... Rose at 5 (to secure our umbrella) though the Coach was not to depart till 7. In fact I had been obliged in the evening to sally forth a second time, with the *Boots*, who had delivered our note, yet could not obtain the umbrella and I have little doubt that it had been removed from the Shop to the house purposely that the owner, (whom the Shopkeeper must have known to be a stranger) shrinking from trouble, might leave the umbrella behind her. A fraud easy to the Conscience. Our attendant went in search of the Fruiterer's Dwelling. Joanna remained under the piazzas of the Tron house; & I walked down one of the picturesque old streets to the Salt Market. The poor Fellow returned unsuccessful, and we expected to lose the umbrella; but just when we were seated on the Coach & the Driver ready with his whip, we perceived the Fruiterer's Boy coming with it in his hand. (DCMS 99 *Second Tour*, 143-4).

The fullness of this happy story has grown from a few words in a rough notebook:

Up at 5. Umbrella—foggy... No umbrella. Mounted coach at 7. Boy comes. (DCMS 98A, *Second Tour*, 19)

And Dorothy can now find a generosity:

Notwithstanding this petty trick of *cheatery* we were not displeased with the little we saw of the people of Glasgow. (*Second Tour*, 144)

She even modifies the first Notebook's distaste for

Fog, cold, dirt, dirty people dirty houses—coal carts, busy in fog

The Journal has less woundingly:

Doleful going out of Glasgow, uncomfortable-looking houses, dirty people, cold & fog. (*Ibid.*, 145)

De Selincourt in his edition of the Journals in 1941 omitted the whole umbrella incident, both Notebooks and Journal.

That umbrella was a Notebook digression. We return to the comparison of Dorothy's Journals and Coleridge's Notebooks. Like the 1798 journey to Hamburg, the first part of the first Scottish Tour of August 1803 was recorded by both Dorothy and Coleridge. Dorothy's *Recollections* of that Tour, written up between autumn 1803 and early summer 1805, is indeed a travel book and was intended for friends to read and pass round; there are several manuscripts. Her writing assumes readers. Coleridge may have thought of an even wider readership: the party being still south of Carlisle, he comments on 'two Bridges infamously perilous' (the travellers were in an open jaunting car with an aged horse) and on a road 'with no Guide Posts'. He then adds, 'Lay stress on this', as though he had a possible guide-book in mind. It has been suggested, perhaps even a joint guide book with the Wordsworths, to defray expenses. No guide book resulted, though Dorothy's *Recollections*, revised later for publication (though not published), was in a sense from as early as 1805 a joint production with Wordsworth in that her prose became a context for the poems Wordsworth wrote, not only during the Tour, but in later response to it; in response also to Dorothy's writing activity and undoubtedly to their shared recollecting conversation. She declares that 'we took no notes', though a very few faint pencilled notes do exist, written on roughly cut and folded leaves of paper only 110 x 85 cm. These contain telegraphic words: places where they stayed, the number of miles between night stops, the miles in total, the state of the road, the odd drawing of a gate; they would have been a help in bringing back the recollections. Coleridge on the other hand wrote in the present, on the spot, wrote in the immediate past, inserted comments (critical of Wordsworth) years later (1812), jumped from himself to the Wordsworths,

to Asra, to the place, to his bodily or emotional state, was exhilarated when solitary, was humiliatingly ill, poor, was having nightmares, writing letters, writing 'The Pains of Sleep'; all this, whilst looking and noticing.

For almost two weeks Coleridge shared the expedition with the Wordsworths, and his and Dorothy's writings have similarities of phrasing that must indicate shared looking and talking. Tiny details add up to the conversation behind the written word: 'lasses in gay dresses run like cattle in the broom' for Dorothy near the Falls of Cora Linn (*Journals I*, 222); Coleridge had noted 'Men & women in their Sunday finery straggle like Cattle, each in his own path' (CN I 1449). It is the simile that must have come up in conversation. Both describe what Coleridge calls a Moss House, and Dorothy, using the local name for moss, 'fog', the Fog-house; 'it was exactly like a Hay-stack scooped out', says Coleridge (CN I 1449); it was 'like a hay-stack scooped out' Dorothy recollected. On the rare occasion of a merry evening in the Highlands and shortly before Coleridge's leaving them Dorothy turns Coleridge's more literal description into a simile: Coleridge speaks of 'the Fowls roosting in the Chimney amid the cloud of Smoke' (CN I 1471) and Dorothy describes the chimney 'where the hens were roosting like light clouds in the sky'. (*Journals*, I., 276). The hovel was 'black and varnished and glistening' for Coleridge; for Dorothy the beams had been 'crusted over and varnished by many winters', and then she adds her simile, extraordinarily Coleridgean: the beams became as 'glossy as black rocks on a sunny day cased in ice' (*Ibid.* 276-7). Different as they are, Coleridge's Notebooks and Dorothy Wordsworth's finished *Recollections*, have conversation somewhere in the background.

When Coleridge is not in conversation, is on his own, he can at times approach, indeed reach, the solitary perceptions of a Hopkins as a Journal/Notebook keeper; so in her own way, can Dorothy when left alone, as she is, for example, for those three weeks at the start of the *Grasmere Journal* in 1800. Otherwise her time of solitude has to wait for the mentally unstable end of her life and in those late Rydal Notebooks she cannot quite record the full flash of thought. In Dorothy's Notebooks generally we are aware less of solitude than of company, of the presence of one person or of more, of interaction, conversation, both intimate and casual. Her Notebooks preserve more than herself.

Notebooks are for preservation. They are also that ideas might be explored, and expression refined. Coleridge's Notebooks, Dorothy's Scottish *Recollections* and Wordsworth's poetry arising from the 1803 tour satisfy in all these ways the human need for Notebooks and there is no need to say more about them here, particularly about those covering the Scottish period, since much attention has recently been paid them⁶.

⁶ See: Pamela Woof, 'Dorothy Wordsworth and the Pleasures of Recognition: An Approach to the Travel Journals', *The Wordsworth Circle*, XXII, Summer 1991, 150-60
Carol Kyros Walker, 'Breaking Away: Coleridge in Scotland', *The Wordsworth Circle*, XXXI, Spring 2000, 102-108
Seamus Perry, 'Coleridge's Scotland', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, New Series 17, Summer 2001, 58-75

III

The Wordsworths' Commonplace Book (DC MS26) is dated at the front:

W^m Wordsworth
Grasmere
Jan^{ry} 1800

This is in Wordsworth's hand and it is written out twice. On the next page an Index is grandly begun which gets as far as indicating the first two of thirty-five extracts. These are on pages 1 and 2. Three sheets, ie six pages, are then left blank, presumably for more index. The first extract is from the *Romance of Roberte the Deyyll* re-published 1798 with its Elizabethan spelling somewhat modernised; the second is from Robert Heron's *Journey through Western Scotland* (2 vols. Perth 1793), and the third from Thomas Pennant's *Tour in Scotland* 1769. The thirty-five items are in the hands of Wordsworth, Dorothy, Mary Hutchinson, possibly John Wordsworth, Sara Hutchinson and Thomas Wilkinson, the contributions of these two last pasted in. The items are miscellaneous and have been well described elsewhere.⁷ Several extracts from travel books, however, and some eleven ballads or fragments of ballads reveal Wordsworth's continuing interest after 1800 in the same literary productions that had hovered behind the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*. Extracts from Pennant and Ritson and from ballad verses quoted in letters by Burns and newly published in Dr. Currie's *Life of Burns* (1800), tell us of Wordsworth's sustained ballad interest, and point up his divergence from the old ballads: first, in content:

The moving accident is not my trade
To curl ['curb'/'freeze?']the blood I have no ready arts;
(‘Hart-Leap Well’, 97-8)

he wrote in early 1800; and second, in metre; Wordsworth employed a more artful metre than that of traditional ballads. His interest was in the ballad's ability to express suffering. Immediately after the verse extracts from the *Life of Burns* 1800 in the Commonplace Book is the moving fragment that has been seen as a source, but might well be an analogue for elements in Wordsworth's 1798 ‘The Thorn’:

And there she's lean'd her back to a thorn
Oh! And alas-a-day oh &c
And there she has her baby born,
Ten thousand times good night, and be wi' thee.

⁷ See, for example, Appendix IX of Mark Reed's *Chronology 1800-1815*, and the 1959 doctoral Ph.D thesis of R. S. Woof, University of Toronto.

She has houked a grave ayont the sun
Oh! &c
And there she has buried the sweet babe in
Ten &c

And she has gane back to her Father's ha'
Oh! &c
She's counted the leelest maid o' them a'
Ten &c

O look not sae sweet, my bonny babe,
Oh! &c
Gin ye smyle sae ye'll smyle me dead;
Ten &c

This fragment, printed in David Herd's collection of Scottish poems, 1776, could have been known to Wordsworth before he wrote his spring 1798 'Thorn', but it need not have been; he wrote it into his book in or soon after 1800, following the 1800 verse extracts from Burns's letters; it precedes the Commonplace Book copying of Cowper's 'My Mary', not published till 1803.

Wordsworth did know the *Monthly Magazine* for 1796; it was sent him by his friend James Losh in March 1797, and in these 1796 issues was William Taylor's translation of a modern ballad by Bürger, called in English 'The Fair Lass of Wone'; this on its own could have suggested ideas for 'The Thorn'. And it is also perhaps from Taylor's poem rather than from the single narrative voice of the Herd ballad fragment that Wordsworth learnt to move so confidently into the telling of a story, such as 'The Thorn', in continuously interrupted dialogue.

Every item in the Commonplace Book has its interest. Briefly, one other. At some point, probably the summer of 1807, four short poems by Blake were entered. The first line of the last of these is 'I love the jocund dance' (from *Poetical Sketches*, 1783); its second verse begins, 'I love the laughing gale'. Three times in Blake's five verses there are laughs and laughter. Wordsworth must have been reminded of his own dancing daffodils, dancing waves and laughing company in his 'I wandered lonely as a Cloud' published shortly before in April/May 1807 in *Poems in Two Volumes*. When he later revised and expanded that poem to the well-known four verses in preparation for *Poems* 1815 he made sure that the word 'dance' or 'dancing' was insistently heard in each of the now four verses, and, perhaps in association with Blake's 'jocund dance', he asserted that a poet could not but be gay/ In such a 'jocund', as against the earlier 'laughing' company. Although Crabb Robinson regretted the change and although Wordsworth told him in May 1815 that he would 'probably restore the original epithet' (Henry Crabb Robinson, *Books and their Writers*, I, 166), he never did, perhaps privately liking the more unusual, more literary

word 'jocund', a word he knew from classical Gray's 'How jocund did they drive their team afield', from Milton's 'jocund rebecks' to whose sound maids and youths danced in the chequered shade, and now, in addition, from Blake and his idyllic country scene where the poet is in love with both place and people and begins it all with a dance, 'I love the jocund dance'.

The commonplace element of the Commonplace Book peters out after thirty-five items; the last entry is a copy, or draft, of part of a letter from Wordsworth to Wrangham of 8 June 1808. There are then seventy-seven blank sheets (one hundred and fifty-four pages) and these meet writing from the other end of the book used upside-down. This writing is domestic; it is women's work, much of it in Dorothy's hand. It begins with a list dated Grasmere, November 1802, ie, one month after Wordsworth's marriage to Mary Hutchinson, a list of 'Mary's Linen which came from Penrith'. The linen is marked with the initials, most probably sewn, just possibly made with indelible ink, of previous Hutchinson owners, and is a reminder of the importance of precious linen: Dorothy records in Grasmere on a rainy October morning in 1800, 'little Sally learning to mark', and again, a week later, 'Sally Ashburner learning to mark'. Here, at the back of the Commonplace Book in 1802, Mary's contribution to the Grasmere household is listed: Huckaback Towels, Napkins, Damask Table Cloths, Diaper (a patterned woven white linen probably less weighty than damask), breakfast cloths, Huckaback Cloths, fifteen pairs of sheets, some two dozen towels, eight bolster and six pairs of pillow cases. All these are marked variously with the initials, later identified by Gordon Wordsworth, of Hutchinson relatives: grandparents, great-uncle, grandmother, grandmother's niece, uncle, father, grandmother's sister. There is then a statement of a small loan to Mrs Coleridge repaid within the month, February 1804. There is a recipe for making ink with Gum Arabic (the resin from acacia trees), Galls (oak-apples), sulphate of iron, warm water to dissolve the gum: three days without cork, shake, more gum, a further three days, '& it is fit for use'.

The ink recipe is followed by Dorothy's attempt dated 12 March 1804 to render in words baby John's 'First inarticulate sounds about 4 months old'. John was born the previous year, 1803, in June. He appears to have murmured at four months, "Googen Googen Googen & something like diddle diddle after". By six months he had advanced to "Dad Dad Mam Mam incessantly"; punctiliously further mono-syllables are recorded, frequently 'nan nan na na'. 'John was taken from his mother's Breast on the night of the 8th April, Dorothy records here, and she continues:

At first he was silent & low spirited not very fretful. In two or three days he began to ask for food very impatiently always with nan nan nan nan & something like the German nein—very quick.

The weaning had been decided in the previous week: 'Poor little Fellow!', wrote Dorothy to Coleridge on 29 March 1804,

He is going to encounter his first sorrow, he is to be weaned the beginning of next week. His Mother is very thin and looks very ill, but her appetite is good and she is tolerably well in general, but neither W^m nor I are easy under the idea of her suckling him any longer, for she looks so *very* ill and is not strong. Before your Return I hope we shall be blessed with another little Baby... (*EY*, 463)

Dorothy had had charge of the weaning; she had had Johnny

under my care night and day to wean him, an office of anxiety which has taken up most of my thoughts, it being necessary to keep him almost out of sight of his Mother—he is now nearly reconciled to his Loss. (from a letter to Lady Beaumont, 13 April 1804, *Ibid.*, 467)

Dorothy, sitting alone and writing with Johnny on her knee, had to finish her letter abruptly on his waking: ‘he will not rest upon my knee, and I must feed and attend upon him.’ In a small house, a trauma, and not only for the baby.

Before the Commonplace Book ceases to fulfil the function of a Journal (Dorothy’s Journal had been abandoned five months before John’s birth, doubtless in part to have time to make clothes for the coming baby), the aunt has one more observation to make about Johnny and about his proud father:

NB. On Thursday the 14th April he first got up upon his feet by himself, with help of a stool—I had set him down on the ground, left him, turned my head in about two minutes & he was standing on his feet—William wagered a guinea with me that he would *walk* in a fortnight.

Wordsworth must have lost this wager, for as late as 1 June Johnny was able only to ‘walk by himself along the window side, or with hold of one hand’ (Dorothy to Catherine Clarkson, 1 June 1804, *EY*, 480).

This domestic aspect of the Commonplace Book ends with a remedy for the Croup taken from the *Morning Chronicle*, another for Chilblains, and a further and plentiful list of Linen, including ‘11 Knife Cloths one wanting marked 12’, ‘14 pair of Sheets mark’d W.W. 123 &c to 14’, ‘6 pairs of Sheets marked W 1234 &c, more bolster slips, pillow slips, four marked with blue thread, ten pairs of pillow slips made of calico’, and the entire list ending with ‘1 pair of old fine sheets marked with blue thread’. When one considers the many visitors who stayed in the cottage at Town End and that Molly Fisher managed ‘the great washes’ (with Dorothy helping with the ironing) ‘about once in five weeks’, (letter to Jane Marshall, 10 September 1800, *EY*, 296), it must have been a comfort to have so good a stock of household linen.

One might note the different uses of Commonplace Books. The Wordsworths, at both ends of their book, use it to reflect private reading and

family concern. There is no purpose beyond the private, whether it be literary, in terms of travel books or ballads, or whether it be domestic, from linen to babies. A comparison with the Commonplace Books of Robert Southey is instructive. Three massive volumes were published in 1849 and 1850 by Southey's son-in-law, John Wood Warter. Passages are grouped into such sections as English History, Anglo-Irish History, Voyages and Travels, Literary History, English Manners and Literature, etc. and within each section, long or shorter extracts often as short as anecdotes, are meticulously presented and referenced, by book, date, chapter, page, and frequently given titles, often by Southey, otherwise by Warter. Southey's aim was clearly a huge anthology of his reading and it was surely destined for publication, posthumous as it turned out. Warter is in wonder that 'a man of Southey's intellect could have given up time to such extracts as are contained in these volumes', and he concludes that 'no volume has contained more condensed information' (Preface, *Southey's Commonplace Book*, Third Series, Analytical Readings, London 1850). The compilation is encyclopaedic rather than personal and the reader feels relief when tiny individual recollections occasionally appear: Southey records, for instance, that in 1752 General Wolfe commented from Paris on the use of umbrellas to defend from sun as well as from snow and rain, and wonders that the practice had not been introduced into England, 'especially in the country where they can be expanded without any inconveniency'. Southey adds a note which he initials:

My mother was born in the year when this was written. And I have heard her say she remembered the time when any person would have been hooted for carrying an umbrella in Bristol. (*Southey's Commonplace Book*, ed. John Wood Warter, London 1849, 574)

In another entry he records that there was a

mad fashion among riotous drinkers about 1792, of eating the wine glass—biting a piece out, grinding it with the teeth, and actually swallowing it; the enjoyment being to see how an aspirant cut his mouth! I never saw this, but R. L. *had done it*. Mortimer the artist did it, and is said never to have recovered from the consequences. Signed R. S. (*Ibid*, 577)

Robert Lovell, who did it, was Southey's early Pantisocratic supporter and his brother-in-law. He died in 1796 aged 25—though not, so far as we know, through biting wine glasses.

The Commonplace Book as a reader's repository thus stretches over a wide range. The Wordsworths never filled the 1800 book. Dorothy began a rather grand book, not shared by Wordsworth, in the 1820s and it continued into the 1830s when illness began. This has commonplace elements: a fair copy, for instance, of Wordsworth's school-boy prize poem in eighteenth-

century couplets celebrating the foundation of Hawkshead School and slyly demonstrating as it progressed that the ‘golden lyre’ had clearly been taught to rise and that such ‘Seats of learning [as Hawkshead] brave the distant skies’. Much of Dorothy’s book, however, looks undeviatingly backward—as is undoubtedly the nature of commonplace books—and has not that call to the future, ‘Awake, awake, & snatch the slumbering Lyre’ that Wordsworth had certainly sounded in his poem at fourteen. Dorothy’s own verses in draft form, repeated, blotted, in a wavering hand, in fair copy, crossed out, scrawled, and most often written from her position as

... Prisoner in this quiet Room

dominate the blank pages, the birthday verses to her niece Dora, the album tribute to young Edith Southey, the copied-out epitaphs, the recipes for salve, the insistent hope for an eternal life, the anecdote from the *Newcastle Journal* in March 1834 of a man and wife who celebrated birthdays at 103, the deaths of Uncle William Cookson and his wife. The few Commonplace elements such as the passage copied from the writings of Isabella, Countess of Glencairn, cannot dispel the book’s melancholy; even the Countess of Glencairn, it appears, died in debt, in Boulogne, and Dorothy concludes, ‘she was not a good manager, suffering herself to be cheated, I suppose, by Servants’.

Yet if the commonplace Book fell somewhat away, for good numbers of the female population (at least), the album rose into favour. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Southey, Scott, Byron, all wrote verses for the albums of young ladies, usually the daughters of friends. Family scrapbooks and large folio books were pasted up with verses, autograph letters, newspaper anecdotes and articles, engravings of portraits, signatures, even envelopes simply on their own; letters were cut and mutilated to obtain names. Politicians, military men, admirals, aristocrats, surgeons, actors and authors filled the pages of family books with random history. There is no evaluation of the letters and little or no comment—an obituary notice perhaps. Livingstone is there in 1860 describing his marvellous coming upon and naming the Victoria Falls while the churchman, Dean Stanley—not the explorer—has only a short letter agreeing to stay for a few days with the Stangers. Four thick folio books in the Wordsworth Library are the result of the leisure hours and assiduity of Mary Calvert, later Mrs Joshua Stanger; she was Dora Wordsworth’s friend from school and niece of Wordsworth’s 1795 benefactor, Raisley Calvert. Pasted into the beginning of the first of the books is a newspaper cutting that reproduces a letter from Julia Margaret Cameron to Sir Henry Taylor describing an evening Mrs Cameron had spent in the company of Tennyson:

He was very violent with the girls on the subject of the rage for autographs. He said he believed every crime and every vice in the world were connected with the passion for autographs and anecdotes and records; that the desiring anecdotes and acquaintance with the

lives of great men was treating them like pigs to be ripped open for the public; that he knew he himself should be ripped open like a pig...

Wordsworth's own family did not escape the passion. Felicia Hemans, staying at Rydal Mount in the summer of 1830, gave a small, beautiful green leather-bound notebook to Dora, then in her mid-twenties. The book's first entry was written by Mrs Hemans herself; it is a tribute to Rydal Mount. Dora—or sometimes Wordsworth on her behalf—presented the album to Wordsworth's many literary and artistic friends and visitors. Few escaped. Hartley Coleridge is there as well as his father. Contributions were exacted, and the little book was bound by Dora in patterned blue silk to protect it on its journeys to and from London, while the verses, sonnets, squibs, sketches, signatures and dates, tiny watercolours and tributes accumulated. After Dora's death in 1847, and shortly before Wordsworth's in April 1850, Mathew Arnold from nearby Fox How furnished a short, sad, into-the-cold-grave sort of poem, and Sara, Coleridge's daughter, provides the final composition, a prayer for Tranquillity entered in September, 1850 after Wordsworth's death. Many of the pages are left blank, testimony to Dora's premature death.

Even acclaimed poets were troubled at the request for original verse for family albums; Coleridge exercised himself into quite a scatological state about it:

A portly Dame whose Good man has done well for himself in the Carcase-Butcher Line would fain have something, in the Ottigraph way, from *me* in the splendid Book which by a somewhat *italianized* mode of pronunciation she calls her *Obum* or *Ambum*—Would this do?

Parry seeks the Pólar Ridge:
But rhymes seeks S. T. Cóléridge
Fit for Mrs Smudger's *Obum*
Or to wipe her Baby's small bum. (CL VI 686)

But there was money in it, and publishers scented a market: the commercial keepsakes and albums of the 1820s and 1830s. The story of Coleridge's negotiations with *The Amulet*, *The Bijou*, *Friendship's Offering*, *The Keepsake*, and *The Literary Souvenir*, is too big for treatment here. Southey, Lamb and Wordsworth also obliged, for they all needed money, and the £50 for seven pages—in 1828 100 Guineas to Wordsworth for twelve pages offered by the editor Frederic Mansel Reynolds for *Keepsake* contributions—was more than most poets received in a year. Of course, they knew the danger: if Annuals were to be bought as presents for young ladies, and George Eliot witheringly indicates that the *Keepsake* was all the rage in Middlemarch, and were to be strewn on the coffee tables of fashionable hostesses, how much harder it

would be to sell the slim volumes of the serious poet. Anthologies present the same danger today. Yet, *The Casket* for 1829 edited anonymously by a lady, Mrs Blencowe (Wordsworth thought highly of some literary ladies), and paid for by a socially distinguished and blue-blooded list of subscribers, drew from Wordsworth a sonnet that is supremely his. He fretted under the demands of albums, and felt no joy or facility. But this sonnet, buried in a little-known album, is not unworthy. It is based, like much of Wordsworth's best work, on fact: it concerns time, memory, memorial, the humble working world, the links between generations. It was called simply 'The Peat Stack', but lost that emphasis on the thing built in the landscape, when Wordsworth collected it in 1832 and changed its title to the abstract 'Filial Piety'.

'The Peat Stack'

The traveller, who has had frequent occasion to pass the high road between Ormskirk and Preston in Lancashire, may have noticed for many years a pile of turf for fuel, of unvarying dimensions during the winter and summer season. The following lines record its history:

Untouch'd through all severity of cold,
Inviolatè, what'er the cottage hearth
Might need for comfort or for festal mirth,
That pile of turf is half a century old:
Yes, traveller, fifty winters have been told
Since suddenly the dart of death went forth
'Gainst him who rais'd it, his last work on earth;
Thence to the son endear'd, by such strong hold
Link'd to his father's memory, that his hands
Preserved the fabric, and do still repair
Its waste, though crumbling with each breath of air.
In annual renovation thus it stands:
Rude mausoleum! But wrens nestle there,
And redbreasts warble when sweet sounds are rare.

The professional writer, in this instance, was able to give distinction to the album, and permanence to fashion.