# 'Grace and metrical movement': Coleridge and Wordsworth on Grace

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WHEN COLERIDGE TURNED from Unitarianism to Trinitarianism in the early 1800s, his primary question concerned how one experiences the direct reality of God's presence, 'the adorable Tri-unity of Being, Intellect, and Spiritual Action'.[1] While Unitarianism had highlighted for Coleridge religion's capacity for social action through benevolence and affection, Trinitarianism offered him a 'practical and moral bearing' that balanced his sense of being as an organic process with a commitment to conscience and faith.[2] Critics disagree as to whether Coleridge's engagement with Unitarianism, pantheism, Spinoza, Kant and Schelling is compatible with his Trinitarianism (J. Robert Barth's *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine*) or divided against it (John Beer's *Coleridge the Visionary*).[3] This paper sides with Barth and proposes that Coleridge's religious writings—poetry and prose—remains focused on the question of how God communicates his love to believers. This focus is sharpened through Coleridge's interest in grace, the spontaneous occurrence of God's love and mercy in the life of the believer and a word that at once describes religious experience and the religious life.[4] For while grace is subjected to the same fierce theological debate as other doctrines in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (the atonement, the doctrine of reserve, the eucharist, confession and so on), it goes beyond denominational confines to sit at the heart of debate over religious experience and consciousness. John Ruskin, for example, calls grace a form of 'consciousness'; while Charles Lamb calls it a 'form for a moonlight ramble for a friendly meeting, or a solved problem'.[5] As a particular experience of how human beings feel and perceive the world, grace becomes a form of religious consciousness or intuition in the period, one that 'moves' believers into God's love. There is a clear emphasis on how grace 'moves' in contemporary literature, as a review of contemporary references reveals. *The Weekly Entertainer*, *The Sunday at Home*, *The Critical Review*, *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, *The School Music Review*, *Chamber's Journal*, *The Dublin Review* and *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* all name grace as that which breathes, operates, flows, bounces, energizes, cleans, pours (as if from a cup), is called or calls and carries God, music and goodness into the human body.

Both Coleridge and Wordsworth reflect on grace as that which moves into the believer, but their understanding of how this experience works not only

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1 Kathleen Coburn, ed., *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2 vols (New York: Bollingen Series L, 1957-1961), II, p.2444.

2 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, in *Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 2008), chapter x, p.261.

3 J. Robert Barth, *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); John Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959).

4 My discussion here is part of a larger project on grace and nineteenth-century religious poetry.

5 Charles Lamb, 'Grace Before Meat', in *English Prose of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longman, 1997), 79-82 (p.79).

differs, but might also be regarded as a contributing factor to their philosophical split during the writing and revising of the *Lyrical Ballads*. In this discussion I wish to explore the meaning of grace in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and position it as a pivot around which Coleridge and Wordsworth define their relationship to poetry, God and faith. The first part of this article places grace in its wider theological context and argues for a reading of it beyond forgiveness and ethics as an experience of God's love. Both Coleridge and Wordsworth agree on the idea of grace as an experience of love. For Coleridge, such experience is manifest and leads to a direct relationship with God; grace is felt in order for God to be reached. For Wordsworth, however, grace describes an inner transformation that enables the subject of grace to feel connected to others—people, animals, nature—as well as God. After outlining how Coleridge and Wordsworth define grace, I turn in the second part of the article to grace as a way of defining their disagreement regarding the role of metre during the *Lyrical Ballads* project. I draw on St. Paul's discussion of law, grace and sin in Romans as an analogy to Wordsworth's reading of poetry, rhythm and passion in the 'Preface' in order to cast light on the difference between his sense of rhythm as grace and Coleridge's more concrete definition of grace as physical experience connecting him with God. Finally, I discuss Martin Heidegger's thinking of rhythm as flow (*rhuthmós*) as a way of articulating Wordsworth's understanding of rhythm as grace. While Heidegger is rightly condemned for not seeking grace himself following his political alignments in the 1930s, one of his earliest assaults on National Socialism is recorded, if encrypted, in his Winter Semester lectures on Friedrich Hölderlin in 1941-42. His subsequent absorption in poetic questions are framed, like Coleridge and Wordsworth's, by a concern with human being's relation to God. I leave aside Heidegger's reading of 'the gods' to explore his Christian phenomenology and reading of Paul and suggest ways in which they help readers think both Wordsworth's own poetry of relationship and rhythmic way into issues of faith.

## I

The Hebraic origins of the word grace signify God's bestowal of life, peace, joy, fortune, health, descendants, and land, as well as graciousness itself, meaning to have mercy on someone or express kindness through gift giving.[6] Grace is not an object in Christian tradition, but an act of perception. As Cornelius Ernst writes about Paul's definition of grace: Paul did not use 'the word we translate as "grace" as a sharply defined concept': 'We might say that he used it poetically, meaning that under the pressure of powerful enthusiastic feeling the word excited associations and even perhaps created them when Paul set about preaching the gospel of God's transcendent generosity to man in Jesus Christ'.[7] In Romans, Paul uses the word grace as an adverb, deeming it

[6] Terrance W. Klein, *Wittgenstein and the Metaphysics of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.24.
[7] Cornelius Ernst, *The Theology of Grace* (Cork: Mercier, 1974), p.9.

a manner in which God acts and the believer's acceptance of those actions, rather than as a thing God bestows. Augustine and Aquinas developed Paul's definition, describing grace as a 'real' intrusion of the divine into the human, an emanation of light into the believer rather than a revelation of meaning. The graced human becomes the space where God is conscious of himself through giving himself to humanity, and all human impulses to do good become a result of God's grace. Modern critics find the concept more challenging to define, in part because of the dominance of empirical and materially-driven research that has no way of tracking or measuring grace. Grace thus registers as a metaphor of forgiveness or spirituality or else signifies as a supernatural force, a 'moonbeam' that issues from the realm of the divine and is projected down onto the individual.[8] The believer cannot see grace, although may witness either the impress of its effect or its working in others through action or prayer. As a kind of power that touches the believer, a phenomenological language of the haptic might get close to describing how grace somatically feels, but such a language might describe any experiential moment linked back to the divine. As a theology it figures through a number of subsets (sanctifying grace, actual grace, prevenient grace, uncreated grace, habitual grace) and borders on a metaphysics that posits a moment of connection or perception between humanity and the divine. As a form of ethics it becomes either an emotionally driven mode of compassion or even benevolence, and as the basis for a legal system it becomes forgiveness, one of the most contested, debated and fraught translations of grace to survive through Christianity into secular politics.

Grace departs from forgiveness because of the way it demands a meditative relationship that insists on a slow and considered response, one that requires a measure or metre found in poetry (one could envision a more active or even angry form of forgiveness that is not slow or measured). Grace lends itself to poetics because it is a form and not a substance, able to shape experience and allow for a particular kind of listening experience. Isaiah's proclamation 'Incline your ear, and come to me' (55.3) is a sentiment that echoes through the Old and New Testaments, urging the believer to listen for and to God's word. At a moment when God's voice seemed drowned by both the material sounds of a newly industrialized and technologized society and also an empirical focus on how to hear the invisible, eighteenth and nineteenth-century poets worked to reframe the devotional listening relationship. From the intensification of interest in prosody and rhythm in this period emerged a new sense of God as a listener and space in which faith resonated, rather than a far-off voice to be strained towards. Within this reconfiguration of God as listener, believers shored up faith through a confidence that they were being listened to, a factor underlined by the immense popularity of religious poetry throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As a formal device to shape and control sound, the poem delivered faith to a listening God who reciprocated back

[8] Klein, *Wittgenstein*, p.ix.

through the poem, as if it were an antenna receiving and retransmitting God's grace. The transmission and reception of grace through the poem was consonant with both a Catholic sense of co-operation with the supernatural force of divine grace, and also a Protestant sense of the passive reception of grace, opening discussion of its meaning into phenomenology as much as theology. The poem could be both architectural copy of a ritual space (like Wordsworth's *The Recluse*), a means of regulating daily prayer (like John Keble's *The Christian Year*) or, as Jacques Maritain suggests, a sacrament itself that animates or 'quickens' the religious ideas and emblems it embodies. Grace grants a rhythm to poetry in this quickening, a process Keble touches on in his proclamation that poetry 'lends' religion a 'wealth of symbols and similes' that are restored back to poetry in the form of sacramental light.[9]

Rhythm activates grace for both Coleridge and Wordsworth, the former using it as a way to shape and register the physicality of grace's measure; the latter defining grace as a rhythmic organizing of religious experience. For Coleridge, grace impacts on the believer like a strike of lightning that internally hits him or her but then continues within as an inward guiding presence. He explores the external and internal materialism of grace in a notebook discussion about beauty, nature and religion, attempting as he does to mediate the affective dimension of finding beauty in the world with the Gospel command to live '*a life of Grace by Faith*'. Coleridge's concern here is to dissociate Christianity from paganism, while retaining the affective experience the latter offers in the service of God. Contemplating God before a 'beautiful Sunset' he receives 'the solution of my difficulty, flashlike, in the word, BEAUTY! in the intuition of the *Beautiful*!—This (too) is *spiritual*'.[10] The flash triggers an intellectual and emotional ability to reconcile the 'communion of the Spirit with the Spirit in Nature', but also grants him an awareness of those who would seek to exploit the spiritual: namely, pleasure-seeking sensualists who read nature like an 'unalphabeted Rustic' reads calligraphy. The sensualist lacks discipline: he is without 'the *rhythm* of the Soul's movements', an internal metering out of grace that grants the believer spiritual literacy and being. Coleridge worries that if 'reality is a transfer of our own sense of being', then Wordsworth's subjective reading of religion, as well as rhythm, risked both '*religious* fervour' and ultimately a 'vague misty, rather than mystic, Confusion of God with the World & accompanying Nature-worship'.[11] Coleridge's later anxieties about David Hartley's notion of association echo this critique of Wordsworth, dismissing it as the 'irreligious metaphysics of modern infidels',

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[9] John Keble, *Lectures on Poetry: 1832-1841* (Bristol: Thoemmes, 2003), p.481; while doctrinally speaking neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge advocated a Catholic reading of grace, both addressed grace as a sacrament. As Michael Tomko suggests in *British Romanticism and The Catholic Question: Religion, History, and National Identity 1778-1829* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), despite Wordsworth's opposition to Catholic Emancipation, monastic ruins and religious aesthetics nevertheless entranced him (see p.90). Drawing upon Catholic imagery and superstition as an aesthetic bank of sacramental images and metaphors, Wordsworth also harnessed such language as a counterweight against nonconformist enthusiasm.

[10] Coburn, *Notebooks,* V, p.5428; I would like to warmly thank Graham Davidson for this reference.

[11] Coleridge, *Biographia*, p.315; Coleridge, letter to Thomas Allsop, August 8, 1820, in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71), V, p.95.

dependent 'in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of Feeling than on Trains of Ideas'.[12] Wordsworth's way into religion, and grace itself, was subjective, his written invocation of it preparing and softening the reader to receive grace through the experience of reading poetry. Coleridge questions this affective and metaphoric process of receiving grace as woolly and unpredictable: for him grace allowed for the direct experience of God, and could not be mediated either through a poem or by a poet, as an 1805 notebook entry attests:

> *O me miserum*! Assuredly the doctrine of Grace, atonement, and the Spirit of God interceding by groans to the Spirit of God (Rom. VIII. 26) is founded on constant experience, and even if it can be ever 'explained away', it must still remain as the rising and setting of the sun itself, as the darkness and as the light—it must needs have the most efficient character of reality, —*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*! Deeply do I both know and feel my Weakness—God in his wisdom grant, that my Day of Visitation may not have been past![13]

Like Wordsworth, Coleridge figures grace through the movement of rhythm, the rising and setting of the sun, the daily transition from light to dark. Yet Coleridge's grace-like rhythm is circular, bringing him back to grace for all time (*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*): it pervades lived experience as 'groanings which cannot be uttered' (Romans 8.26), or, as the NRSV has it, 'sighs too deep for words'. Its 'character of reality' is one Coleridge spent hours imploring God to enable him to physically feel, his notebooks full of prayers begging for mercy: 'Have Mercy on me, O something *out* of me! For there is no *power*, (and if that *can* be, less *strength*) in aught *within* me! Mercy! Mercy!'[14] Grace might be rhythmic, but Coleridge was concerned less with its poetic embodiment and more on its actual experience as that which would connect him back to God.

Coleridge's sense of the reality of grace is also consistent with his position that a spiritual commitment to God supports, rather than contrasts with, a historical reading of Christianity. For Coleridge the historical events of Jesus' life link the believer to the spiritual facts they embody: Enlightenment reason rendered Christianity objective and factual, Coleridge argued, especially when compared to the 'shapeless feelings' of moral sensibility and sentimentalism.[15] As he declared in his *Aids to Reflection*:

> For *the Light within me*, that is my *Reason* and *Conscience*, does assure me, that the Ancient and Apostolic Faith according to the *historical*

[12] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, letter to Thomas Poole, March 1801, *Collected Letters*, II, p.706; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, letter to Robert Southey, August 7, 1809, *Collected Letters*, II, p.961.

[13] Coburn, *Notebooks,* II, p.2437.

[14] Coburn, *Notebooks,* II, p.2453.

[15] Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion:* Aids to Reflection *and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character on the Several Grounds of Prudence, Morality and Religion* (London: William Pickering, 1826), p.49.

> Meaning thereof, and in the *literal* sense of the Creed is solid and true… The Gospel is not a system of Theology . . . it is a History, a series of Facts or Events related or announced. These do indeed involve, or rather I should say they at the same time *are*, most important doctrinal Truths; but still *Facts*, and Declaration of *Facts*.[16]

Coleridge is resolved that sentimental piety distracts the believer from 'facts' here, but he is also dismissive of maze-like debates over doctrinal abstraction and writes instead to engage the believer's interior being, his or her '*godlikeness*'.[17] God is both within and without us in his view, immanent and transcendent and both the source and inner spur of human goodness. To access this goodness, the believer must engage in thinking. For Coleridge, the process of thinking and reflecting bends the believer's soul back to God in order that he or she can feel God's presence and grace, an act in which inner being is sparked into life. The believer is then freed to engage with grace, not as a metaphor or sensual phenomena, but as an intelligible, material sensation that works within the believer like a chemical process. The Coleridge once so fascinated by hypnosis, animal magnetism and vibrations shepherded such interests into the subject of grace with his turn to Trinitarianism, and insisted that reason is spiritual because of grace: 'Reason is pre-eminently spiritual, and a Spirit, even our Spirit, even *our* Spirit, through an effluence of the same grace by which we are privileged to say Our Father!'[18] The pouring or effluence of grace from God to the believer both justifies the believer as righteous before God and sanctifies him or her in a union with God. The believer is thus regenerated and changed by grace in real and intrinsic terms. Coleridge is content neither with a Catholic sense of grace as inward change nor a Lutheran view whereby the sinner remains a sinner but is nevertheless accepted by God. Rather, he believes, the sinner is actually transformed and 'saved by and in the righteousness of Christ. This Righteousness is, & only can be, an *imputed* Righteousness', granted as gift and received through faith.[19]

The ascribing of Christ's qualities to the believer through grace provoked in Coleridge further thought about its reception and transmission, particularly in relation to the subject of free will. He commented in *The Friend* that reason is 'the power by which we become possessed of Principle and of Ideas… of Justice, Holiness, Free-Will, &c. in Morals', a capacity fine tuned through its working alongside sense ('sensations, and impressions') and understanding ('thinking and forming *judgments*').[20] Like Paul, to whom he refers for the cogency of his distinctions, Coleridge singles out reason as a practical commitment anchored in the spiritual, just as free will depends on its relationship to grace. This is apparent in numerous theological positions on

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[16] Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, pp.136, 196.
[17] Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, p.29, 265.
[18] Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, p.208.
[19] Barth, *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine*, p.151; and see p.151, fn55, reference to Coburn, *Notebooks*, V.
[20] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend: A Series of Essays in Three Volumes, To Aid in the Formation of Fixed Principles in Politics, Morals and Religion with Literary Amusements Interspersed*, 3 vols (London: Rest Fenner, Paternoster Row, 1818), I, pp.305-306.

this relationship: grace as a gratuitous free gift (prevenient); grace negotiated between God and the believer (subsequent); grace that the believer rejects (sufficient); grace with which the believer co-operates (efficacious); and grace as the dominant determining factor of human salvation (absolute). Coleridge believed grace was a free gift registered within and proven 'by internal Feelings' (as Hartley argued), illuminating and transfiguring the believer's being: 'Self becomes evanescent, or transfigured' in 'the work of the Free Will aided by Grace i.e. a Will ~~more~~ perfectly free'.[21] Images of light are central to Coleridge's definition of grace: it is actual and instructive and materially casts light on the scriptures, the Bible like a 'sun-dial by moonlight' without it.[22] As a real form of energy, grace comes into existence through Christ and moves into us like waves of light. As Coleridge proclaimed, grace 'becomes' through Christ, is 'prevenient' and works like a 'holy and spiritual power' of 'Light' that 'operates' in the believer to illuminate the grace already within him or her, 'So that finding the stream of grace in their hearts, though they see not the fountain whence it flows, nor the ocean into which it returns'.[23] If engaged with improperly, however, grace dissolves into conceit:

> where Private Interpretation is every thing and the Church nothing—*there* the Mystery of Original Sin will be either rejected, or evaded, or perverted into the monstrous fiction of Hereditary Sin, Guilt inherited; in the Mystery of Redemption metaphors will be obtruded for the reality; and in the mysterious Appurtenants and Symbols of Redemption (Regeneration, Grace, the Eucharist, and Spiritual Communion) the realities will be evaporated into metaphors'.[24]

Coleridge spelled out the implications of a 'literary' reading of grace over a religious one most succinctly in *The Statesman's Manual*: 'There is a grace that would enable us to take up vipers': 'Beware… that you do not frustrate the grace of God'.[25]

These warnings highlight both Coleridge's personal anxiety about his relationship to grace and also his fear that Wordsworth would be barred from its material experience through his abstracted views on faith. On the surface, Coleridge and Wordsworth appear to share an understanding of grace as a form of experience and feeling. In *Literary Remains*, for example Coleridge describes grace as a spontaneous overflow of affection: good deeds produce affection, which in turn allows for the 'continued increase of the free grace in

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[21] David Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duties and his Expectations,* 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1749), I, p.507; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia II: Camden to Hutton*, ed. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson, in *Collected Works*, XII, p.642.

[22] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *On the Constitution of Church and State According to the Idea of Each*, *Lay Sermons, TheStatesman's Manual* (London: William Pickering, 1839), p.258.

[23] Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, p.18; p.41; p.295; Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge (London: Edward Moxon, 1853), p.80; Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, p.56.

[24] Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, pp.293-294.

[25] Coleridge, *On the Constitution*, p.263.

the state of the soul' and connects the believer with 'the kingdom of Christ which is the realm of love and inter-community' where 'the joy and grace of each regenerated spirit becomes double' and 'the joys and graces of all unite in each'.[26] For Wordsworth too, grace is affective: when twinned with reflection, he wrote, it can 'restore tranquillity' to the 'mind', provide 'consolation' to the 'heart' and also 'infuses' knowledge and internal harmony into the recipient.[27] Yet Wordsworth's sense that grace as rhythm allows for emotional and spiritual renewal is theologically distant from Coleridge's reading of grace as a mode of reason that connects the believer back to God. Wordsworth's grace is a movement in which readers are rhythmically tuned into emotion, and can equally be stripped from them through inhuman treatment, the poor 'robbed of their Christian grace & spirit' by the selfish behaviour of the privileged and the thoughtless politics of the poor-law bill.[28] Coleridge's problem with this reading is both that it detracts from grace's tangibility as that which physically animates Christian faith, and also that it potentially renders grace equivalent to good feeling. By the end of the nineteenth century, grace did signify outside of Christianity as a form of good feeling, a kind of life force or energy flow, and was even used as an English translation of the Chinese 'tao'.[29] This seeming evasion of defined faith amounts to the vague and misty for Coleridge. As he argued in *The Statesman's Manual*: 'In RELIGION there is no abstractions. [sic] To the unity and infinity of the Divine Nature, of which it is the partaker, it adds the fullness, and to the fullness the grace and the creative overflowing'.[30] Grace might be felt intuitively, even spiritually, but the act of perceiving and beholding God through it is factual and real for him and is best communicated through direct prose.

While some of Coleridge's early poetry addresses the issue of grace as forgiveness—most notably in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'—his theological prose is continually and consistently concerned with it in a way his on-going poetic endeavours are not. If poetry was to communicate grace, Coleridge argued, it must be guided through a very precise metre and form in order to convey its existence. He was encouraged, for example, by Henry Coleridge's admiration of the 'grace and metrical movement' of his poem 'Love's Apparition and Evanishment', as he revealed in a letter to J. G. Lockhart in 1833.[31] Coleridge immediately follows the epistolary comment with a reference to his self-composed epitaph, 'Stop, Christian Passer-by!' in which he uses the measure of rhyming couplets to ask for grace through mercy

[26] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: William Pickering, 1828), pp.25-26.
[27] William Wordsworth, letter to unknown correspondent, 4 November, 1843; William Wordsworth, letter to Hugh Seymour Tremenheere, 16 December, 1845; William Wordsworth, letter to George Beaumont, 25 December, 1804, in *The Collected Letters of the Wordsworths* (Charlottesville, Va.: InteLex, 2002), electronic resource.
[28] Jared Curtis, ed. *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth* (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007), pp.148-149.
[29] 'The Tao-Teh King, or "Providential Grace" Classic,' *The Dublin Review*, 133.48 (1903), pp.360-376; Tao is a much wider concept than grace, however. A functional equivalent of grace might be the Shinran idea of tariki or 'other-power', see chapter 10 of Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989).
[30] Coleridge, *On the Constitution*, p.282.
[31] Coleridge, letter to J. G. Lockhart, 5 November, 1833, *Collected Letters*, VI, pp.972-973.

and forgiveness.[32] Regular metre, he implies, enables a good religious life, a correspondence of rhythm and grace that he hoped to explore further in a collaborative poetic project with Wordsworth.

## II

The differences between Coleridge and Wordsworth's theories of metre, so apparent following the *Lyrical Ballads* enterprise, are indicative in understanding their views on grace. For Coleridge, metre is functional and symbolic, producing in the reader certain expectations about how the poem will work: 'I write in metre, because I am about to use a language different from that of prose,' he declared in the *Biographia*.[33] For Wordsworth, however, metre signifies a rhythmic knowing of the world through affection. It does not provide a prosodic template to safely guide us through experience. Rather it shapes that experience as we read, metre serving to temper and bring out feeling in the reader: when the passion of a poem becomes too much, metre regulates our experience of it, and when there is not enough passion, metre triggers more passion. As Wordsworth writes in the 1802 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads*:

> The end of Poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure. Now, by the supposition, excitement is an unusual and irregular state of the mind; ideas and feelings do not in that state succeed each other in accustomed order. But, if the words by which this excitement is produced are in themselves powerful, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. Now the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion.[34]

Here Wordsworth writes that the poem's creation of excitement and pleasure overbalances the mind, but the mind is prompted into calmer moods through the regularity of metre. Critics frequently debate this poetic equation, in which the poem triggers and tempers passion in the reader. A reading of it through grace adds to the debate another way of exploring its terms and finds a parallel in Paul's pivotal reading of grace in Romans: like Wordsworth's rhythm, Paul's grace works as a pulse or dynamism that moves the word into the faithful. Paul's terms in describing this process are law (principles that regulate

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[32] The epitaph reads: 'Stop, Christian Passer-by! stop, Child of God! / And read with gentle heart. Beneath this sod / A Poet lies: or that which once seem'd He. / O lift one thought in prayer for S. T. C. / That he who many a year with toil of Breath / Found Death in Life, may here find Life in Death. / Mercy for Praise, to be forgiven for Fame, / He ask'd, and hoped thro' Christ. Do Thou the Same'.

[33] Coleridge, *Biographia*, p.353.

[34] William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems*' (1802), in *William Wordsworth: Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.609.

conduct), righteousness (God's message) and grace (God's free gift to the faithful). The law reminds the believer that he or she has sinned in the world, but in doing so provokes a repentance process that requires grace. Human weakness thus reveals God's grace and becomes a source of joy: as God tells Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12.9). God grants everyone grace, then, and believers are released from sin through their willingness to feel this gift through faith:

> the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5.20-21)

For Paul, the law reminds believers they need righteousness and grace moves it into them, an experience decoded through faith in the living present: 'we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand' (Romans 5.1-2). For Wordsworth, the poem similarly instructs readers in moral and emotional being and rhythm as a form of grace moves this into them, an experience understood through a faithful attention to the text. Both the King James Bible and Wordsworth use the word 'manifested' (Romans 3.21) to convey the gradual unfolding of God's righteousness and the poet's sensibility, carried and received through grace and registered through faith.[35] The believer and reader alike thus find themselves under grace rather than the law.

For Wordsworth, belief in the experience of reading poetry is equally as real as Coleridge's commitment to Christ, a 'practical faith' that redeems the 'savage torpor' that derives from inattentive and careless thinking.[36] Unlike Coleridge, however, Wordsworth sees the movement of grace in rhythm as a force that animates imagination, care and discernment as much as denominational position. His critique is aimed only at those who refuse to reflect mindfully on poetry, preferring 'frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies' and blunting their 'discriminating powers' with a 'craving for extraordinary incident'. Such readers are redeemed, he writes, through 'certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind' that are enabled through grace as rhythm.[37] Paul's declaration that law without grace increases sin, but when sin increases, grace abounds equates to Wordsworth's thesis that poetry without metre increases passion, but when passion increases, metre regulates. Like the law, poetry is necessary for Wordsworth, the best form for conveying the language and reality of real human beings and also the system by which our feelings and passions are revealed and measured. We are 'under poetry' in Wordsworth's argument, just as for Paul we are 'under the law', a state in which passion, like sin, is revealed. Like grace, metre and the rhythms it names regulate this experience, both working as a pulse and dynamism that moves

[35] Wordsworth, 'Preface', p.603.
[36] Wordsworth, 'Preface', pp.603, 599.
[37] Wordsworth, 'Preface', p.599.

religious or poetic content into the reader. To paraphrase Augustine, we are before the poem, under the poem and finally in 'full and perfect peace'.[38] The analogy clarifies Wordsworth's understanding of rhythm as a form of grace open to all readers. Grace and rhythm serve to make the law and the poem accessible to all, but steer readers into a meaningful or faithful interpretation of the text. He noted in his much later correspondence with Isabella Fenwick that faith is a 'natural constitution' enabled 'by God's grace', a force that reveals one's place in the world.[39] Commenting on the last lines of 'To a Highland Girl' (revised from 'The Highland Girl'), he intimates that grace led him into real feeling ('Joy have I had'), the place in which he stands, the spot in which he recalls his emotional response to what he sees and his capacity to remember specific experiences:

> Now thanks to Heaven! that of its grace
> Hath led me to this lonely place.
> Joy have I had; and going hence
> I bear away my recompense.
> In spots like these it is we prize
> Our Memory, feel that she hath eyes:
> Then, why should I be loth to stir?
> I feel this place was made for her;
> To give new pleasure like the past,
> Continued long as life shall last.
> Nor am I loth, though pleased at heart,
> Sweet Highland Girl! from thee to part;
> For I, methinks, till I grow old,
> As fair before me shall behold,
> As I do now, the cabin small,
> The lake, the bay, the waterfall;
> And thee, the spirit of them all!

Recollecting the Highland Girl at 'the close of my 73rd year', Wordsworth claims to 'have a most vivid remembrance of her and the beautiful objects with which she was surrounded', a memory prophesied in the poem through grace.[40] Wordsworth's sense of grace here is not bounded by denominational affiliation but is rather connected to 'powerful feelings' felt through their rhythmic expression in poetry. Discussing 'To I. W. on the birth of her first Child' (1833), for example, Wordsworth relates God's grace to the writing of poetry: he recalls 'dictating' the story behind the poem to Fenwick while the child 'upon whose birth these verses were written is under my roof & is of a disposition so promising that the wishes & prayers & prophecies, wh. I then breathed forth in Verse are thro' God's mercy likely to be realized'.[41] His

[38] Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* (1955), trans. Albert C. Outler, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/augustine_enchiridion_02_trans.htm, accessed February 16, 2013.
[39] Curtis, ed., *Fenwick Notes*, pp.88, 114.
[40] Curtis, ed., *Fenwick Notes*, p.88.
[41] Curtis, ed., *Fenwick Notes*, p.128.

palpable joy at the child's presence immediately connects his composing experience back to God and the 'mercy' that stimulates his breathing out of verse. A second example involves a similarly intense emotional memory of some lines written 'on the day on wh. My Sister S.[ara] H.[utchinson] died': 'and it was the thought of her innocent & beautiful life that, through faith, prompted the words "On wings that fear no glance of God's pure sight, no tempest from his breath"'.[42] What is key in these notes is that grace comes to those who feel authentically, joy for a birth, grief for a death, but is barred from those who twist God's righteousness into conflict and power. In an 1842 sonnet on the French Revolution, Wordsworth vigorously attacks those who manipulate God's righteousness through anger, commanding them to 'bend' into respect for humanity:

> Hath it not long been said the wrath of Man
> Works not the righteousness of God? Oh bend,
> Bend, ye Perverse! to judgments from on High,
> Laws that lay under Heaven's perpetual ban
> All principles of action that transcend
> The sacred limits of humanity. [43]

Those unwilling to live under grace are required to bend back to the law that fulfils Heaven's embargo on any action that cuts across what Wordsworth calls the 'sacred limits of humanity', that is, habitual everyday life. These limits suggest that believers are blessed because they dwell within their humanness and also because they are demarcated from God and so receive grace because of their distance from him. Wordsworth implies that rhythm is grace because it situates readers within the human meaning of a poem, requiring them to engage their 'qualities' of mind and pay attention. Like grace, rhythm is a flow or movement and offers 'a way' into meaning like some Victorian translations of the Chinese 'tao' connote.

To think about the implications of this for reading rhythm as grace in Wordsworth I turn in the final part of this essay to a reading of rhythm as *rhuthmós*, from the verb *rhéin* (to flow) and the suffix *(th)mós* ('a way' or 'a manner'). Read in this way, rhythm is rooted not in fixed form, but in a 'dynamic reality observed at one moment of its flowing' as well as 'to the form of this dynamism itself'.[44] As a way of flowing, rhythm becomes one way of communicating nineteenth-century definitions of grace as movement and listening to rhythm as a mode of faith. For Wordsworth the rhythm of a poem reveals our being in grace, an idea Martin Heidegger helps us with through his thinking of poetry as a disclosure and sending of being. For Heidegger we hear the world, both its visible and invisible aspects, by listening to how it registers in the rhythms of poetic language, an 'articulating, impressing, fitting,

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[42] Curtis, ed., *Fenwick Notes*, p.130.

[43] Wordsworth, 'In Allusion to various recent Histories and Notices of the French Revolution' (1842).

[44] Pascal Michon, 'A Short History of Rhythm Theory Since the 1970s', *Rhuthmos*, December 6, 2011, http://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article462, accessed October 15, 2012.

and forming' experience that swings or sways us through the poem.[45] Listening and hearing is key to Heidegger as a way of attending and caring to those rhythms which, for him, bring into presence the unknown, especially religious phenomenon like grace. It is constitutive of a human openness to both people and God, a point that echoes through his writings on poetry, but is apparent in his seminal *Being and Time*: 'The connection of discourse with understanding and intelligibility becomes clear through an existential possibility which belongs to discourse itself, listening. It is not a matter of chance that, when we have not heard "rightly", we say that we have not "understood". Listening is constitutive for discourse. And just as linguistic utterance is based on discourse, acoustic perception is based on listening. Listening to is the existential being-open of Dasein as being-with for the other'.[46] For the purposes of this discussion, I refer to *dasein* as the unique experience of being-human and being-with-others in the world alongside what Heidegger calls the 'phenomena of the *love of God*'.[47] Poetry is a 'world of experience' in which religious consciousness is disclosed and sent to us, comprised as it is of a language able to capture the emotional, rather than scientific or analytic, content of being. Specifically, poetry helps us to think about the world beyond presence and absence, that is, what can be seen or not seen, measured or not measured. He suggests instead that whatever we sense or experience always consists of multiple phenomenon that come in and out of view: as I look at my computer keyboard as I write this paper, my dog Grover, the oxygen I breathe, my internal organs, the floor, ceiling and windows around me disappear or withdraw from view. While I can summon back a thinking about the floor or ceiling, there are certain hidden aspects of life—such as grace, for example—that require another mode of summoning. For Heidegger, these invisible aspects register in poetry as rhythm: rhythm allows what is hidden to ripple and wave through the poem and enter into poetic speech.

The poem provides a sort of opening or clearing onto who we are, a letting be enabled through grace. In his essays on Friedrich Hölderlin, Heidegger claims that the whole of 'human existence is "poetic"' because it is 'not something earned, but is rather a gift', a gift that 'confers' grace: 'Thus: not the works of human beings, but rather grace!' he writes, echoing Paul.[48] Grace is an 'intentional, emotional reference of each content of experience' and gathers humanity as 'a living community of individuals in which isolated existence is to be lost'. The gift of grace, then, is to let humans feel needed and participate in a world revealed through poetry. Heidegger's own reading of Paul is indicative of this revealing. As Sophie-Jan Arrien argues, Heidegger is less concerned with the theological content of Paul's letters and drawn instead to the fact that

[45] Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.204.

[46] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), I.5 section 34, pp.157-158.

[47] Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004), p.222.

[48] See Martin Heidegger, 'Language in the Poem: A Discussion of George Trakl's Poetic Work', in *On the Way to Language* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982); Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), pp.60, 85; Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, p.90.

Paul describes a lived experience of continually unfolding faith and perpetual improvement of the inner life.[49] Through Paul, Heidegger understands faith as a form of knowledge that founds a becoming-of Christian existence as an evolving way of being as care and patience.[50] It is significant that Heidegger best expresses these ideas in the poetic speech he delivered at the ordination ceremony for his nephew in 1954, using the event as a way to think religion through an emotional connection with those present and via the affection he felt for his relative. In the speech, he reads the theological statement, '*gratia supponit naturam*' as 'Grace blooms on the ground of nature', a translation that imputes grace with a sense of human flourishing and joy that roots humans in the world, and imagines it as a 'bright light' that illuminates the world as a place to gather and unite rooted humans. Poems are also a gathering form for Heidegger: his description of grace as a gathering force and poetry as a place of gathered experience posit them in an analogous relationship that helps us read Wordsworth. Like Wordsworth, Heidegger understands poetry and grace together as equally constitutive of care, kindness, gentleness, softness, love, as well as teaching us how to 'hear' these qualities in the world. We are gentled into the poem by a rhythm that attunes us to relating to the world through a feeling of care for it. In relating to grace as care, Heidegger, and Wordsworth too look back to its meaning as life, peace, joy, mercy and graciousness. Poetry arrests that meaning to grant us time for careful listening to its affective content.

How might Heidegger's emphasis on grace as a way into the affective experience of poetry assist us in reading the *Lyrical Ballads*? Both poets use grace as a way of engaging the affective and immaterial, the blend of sorrow and grace that describes 'Christabel', for example (l.477), or the 'silent sympathy' that moulds 'the Maiden's form' in 'Three years she grew in sun and shower' (l.23). But the sense of grace as a rhythm that moves or ripples through the poem is everywhere in Wordsworth, not least in the immanent 'motion and spirit' that 'rolls through all things' in 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' (ll.101-103). Despite a shared vision of a God at once transcendent and immanent, Coleridge found Wordsworth's implied grace too abstract. He conveys this by citing grace at a pivotal moment of his major contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads*—'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'—using the blessing of the waternsakes to expose the consequences of abstracting grace into poetics and not theology. Both Coleridge's poetry and the later theological writings with which this discussion started are concerned with theological judgement in a manner that takes the miraculous sense of grace seriously. Many critics have read the poem through its theological concern with grace and forgiveness, William Empson reading it as a 'parody of the traditional struggle for atonement', Geoffrey Hartman calling it a 'passion

[49] Sophie-Jan Arrien, 'Faith's Knowledge: On Heidegger's Reading of Saint Paul', *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* 3 (2013), 30-49 (34).

[50] See Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*; and *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Scott M. Campbell (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

narrative', Edward Bostetter deeming it a commentary on Evangelical conversions to guilt, Robert Penn Warren claiming that it presents a yearning for pilgrimage towards grace and Peter Larkin suggesting that 'the divine is not the meaning of his tale but the meaning from, or out of, his tale,' a 'horizon of becoming'.[51] I too think of the religious content of the poem as a becoming, a moving out of the poem into real time to trigger Christian action. As a result, the experience of grace takes second place to the poem's complex narrative and consequent promotion of good works. Grace is asked for in Part III, before the sailors begin to drop dead, and the 'breathed wind' of Part VI 'ripples' in a way that evokes Heidegger: 'But soon there breathed a wind on me / Nor sound nor motion made: / Its path was not upon the sea, / In ripple or in shade'. Yet the sense of a supernatural or spiritual force is silent and frozen here, there is no movement in the poem, and even the joyous aspects are broken off and unexpected.

The quick turn from grace to good works in 'The Rime' indicates Coleridge's discomfort with conjecture, poetic or otherwise, about the experience of grace: he is committed instead to its reality as a foundation for the Christian life. Wordsworth, however, is interested in how rhythm renders audible a human being-in-the-world, captures the affective content of this being and registers how such affection moves us through time. If rhythm is 'articulating, impressing, fitting, and forming' (rather than prosodic and mathematical) it is able to shape us and provide an outline for our being. As Simon Jarvis argues:

> The blank verse which Wordsworth discovers in 1797 is a flexible medium in which he is able to follow with close discrimination the minutest nuances of affective coloration or of deep conceptual reflection, and which at the same time is intensely and evidently melodic… It does not drive the reader forward, but accompanies him or her: a movement inward, a comparison with the shape of our own experience, is necessary to make the writing intelligible.[52]

This movement inward is key to my reading of grace here: Wordsworth gets readers to turn inward habitually and regularly through the reading of poetry and so emotionally experience the universal grounding of being that is grace. And this turn inward—far from being an escape from the social—is a way

[51] William Empson, qtd. in Raimonda Modiano, 'Sameness or Difference? Historicist Readings of "The Ancient Mariner"', in Paul Fry, ed., *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: Complete, Authoritative Texts of the 1798 and 1817 Versions with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History and Essays from Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 187–219 (p.193); Geoffrey Hartman, 'Christopher Smart's "Magnificat": Toward a Theory of Representation', in Geoffrey Hartman and Daniel T. O'Hara, ed., *The Geoffrey Hartman Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp.29-49 (p.30); Edward Bostetter, 'The Nightmare World of "The Ancient Mariner"', in Kathleen Coburn, ed., *Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp.65–67; R. P. Warren, *Selected Essays of Robert Penn Warren* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), pp.198–305; Peter Larkin, 'Repetition, Difference and Liturgical Participation in Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner"', *Literature and Theology*, 21.1 (2007), 146-159 (p.154).

[52] Simon Jarvis, 'William Wordsworth', in Claude Rawson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to English Poets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.291-307 (p.295).

back into it, into a sense of shared community with others through a grace that abounds like spontaneous feeling. In so many of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*—'The Female Vagrant', 'The Thorn', 'The Last of the Flock', 'The Idiot Boy', 'Poor Susan', 'We are Seven'—we experience delight and joy beyond their stories or even their prosody. We are carried by their rhythm into the flux of their own experiences, and the feelings that course alongside them, in order to think our relationality to them. Rhythm creates a timed space in which the reader can 'view' the things and meanings of the poem through listening, situated in an auditory field in which he or she hears words rise and fade. Sounds are made present and absent through rhythm as a context or site for an engagement with the materiality of the feelings that occur in the process of reading. Like Heidegger, Wordsworth encourages the reader to listen to the poem as movement and impulse towards affective thinking, rather than as an idealized instance of the 'idea' of a poem. His ballads in particular discourage a 'reading' of poetry as an act in which one alters one's voice or performs deep feeling. Instead, specific moments within his poems—Martha Ray's penetrating cry, the shepherd's tears as his flock die, Betty Foy's relief on finding Johnny—place us back in human experience and attune us towards others. Even where these ballads end abruptly or emit awkward turns of phrase, they greet readers and draw them into thinking and feeling in order to send them back into the world. The incipient being that follows remains under grace if repeatedly connected back to this thinking and feeling.

Coleridge might have agreed with the poem as a trigger for feeling, but as a way of accessing grace, form rather than rhythm was paramount. As he makes clear in the *Biographia*, Wordsworth's understanding of metre as an effect was mistaken if not delusional, although both shared a sense of it as 'a stimulant of the attention'.[53] In the end, Coleridge was disappointed with Wordsworth because he had expected him to fulfill the role of 'that man of genius' who would place things in the world back under grace through poetry. As Coleridge wrote in the *Biographia*:

> A lasting and enviable reputation awaits that man of genius, who should attempt and realize a union;—who should recall the high finish, the appropriateness, the facility, the delicate proportion, and above all, the perfusive and omnipresent grace, which have preserved, as in a shrine of precious amber, the Sparrow of Catullus, the Swallow, the Grasshopper, and all the other little loves of Anacreon; and which, with bright, though diminished glories, revisited the youth and early manhood of Christian Europe, in the vales of Arno, and the groves of Isis and of Cam; and who with these should combine the keener interest, deeper pathos, manlier reflection, and the fresher and more various imagery, which give a value and a name that will not pass away to the poets who have done honour to our own times, and

[53] Coleridge, *Biographia*, pp.348, 351, 353.

to those of our immediate predecessors.[54]

While the aesthetic meaning of grace is apparent here, Coleridge seeks to find a poet able to affix its classical sensibility to Christianity through reason and honour: he longs for Wordsworth to offer him a way of enacting the religious life, rather than a poetry of religious experiences. Many other readers of Wordsworth did find in his work a model for religious life, Felicia Hemans, John Keble, Dora Greenwell, John Stuart Mill, William Hale White deeming him 'England's Samuel', a religious poet who realized the kind of union of classicism and Christianity Coleridge hoped for above.[55] While it makes no sense to this reader at least to identify in Wordsworth's poetry any specific Christian commitments, his verse nevertheless carries in it an experience that moves the reader from law into grace. What he shares with Coleridge is a thinking of grace as that which moves the reader and the believer into God's love under grace, one in which both poets sought to participate as well as circulate.

[54] Coleridge, *Biographia*, pp.329-330.

[55] See Stephen Gill's chapter 'England's Samuel: Wordsworth as Spiritual Power', in *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp.40-80.