

‘Words in tuneful order’: Anglo-Classical Schools and the Romantic Poets

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WORDSWORTH, COLERIDGE, SOUTHEY, Byron, Shelley and many others in the Georgian public sphere attended Anglo-classical grammar schools and university colleges for many years. Taking pupils at a very early age, often as young as eight years, and keeping them until they were twenty-one or twenty-two, these educational institutions taught their charges to read, write, and speak in very specific ways and accustomed them to certain patterns of behaviour beneficial to writers. It is my claim that this training, coming as it did at a propitious moment in history, was instrumental in shaping Romantic literary careers and the forms and themes these writers chose. It also contributed to literary tastes of the period. In this article, I discuss two important parts of this educational tradition: composition training and religious practice.¹

Essential to any study of the Anglo-classical education that the Romantics experienced are the school histories such as those by Leach, Tyerman, and Maxwell-Lyte² and the university histories published by the Oxford and Cambridge University presses.³ These volumes provide general surveys of administrative, political, and religious matters; notes about headmasters, deans, and fellows; and outlines of the curricula. They do not, however, offer many details about how teaching and learning took place day by day. Nor do these histories do enough, in my view, to correct misconceptions about educational practice in the period. Sutherland and others for example, discount school and college writing exercises as ‘banal’ and pay little attention to pupils’ memory exercises, yet both of these practices served important ends in training young writers, especially poets. They also do not attend to the effects of certain daily religious practices that were part of life at school and college. Recognizing these and other contributions to Romantic period writing skills, taste, and thought is long overdue. It is useful to recall that Coleridge credits his lessons at Christ’s Hospital for awakening his ‘fond and unmix’d LOVE and

¹ In my book, *Educating the Romantic Poets, Life and Learning in the Anglo-Classical Academy 1770–1850*, to be published in the fall of 2023 by Liverpool University Press, I provide a more detailed exploration and discussion of these and other influential aspects of the pedagogies, routines, and communities that taught these Romantics and many in their audience to read, write, and think.

² Arthur Francis Leach, *A History of Winchester College* (London: Duckworth, 1899); Christopher Tyerman, *A History of Harrow School 1324–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); H. C. Maxwell-Lyte *A History of Eton College 1440–1884* (London: Macmillan, 1889).

³ Christopher N. L. Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge, Volume IV* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Victor Morgan, Christopher Brooke, and Roger Highfield, *A History of the University of Cambridge 1546–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Peter Searby, *A History of the University of Cambridge, Volume III: 1750–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); T. H. Aston, ed., *The History of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); L. S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell, eds., *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume VI: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys, eds., *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume VII, Nineteenth-Century Oxford, Part 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys, eds., *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume VII, Nineteenth-Century Oxford, Part 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

ADMIRATION' of literature⁴ and that Wordsworth recalls that he first became conscious of the pleasure and charm 'Of words in tuneful order' and felt the 'passion and power' of poetry at Hawkshead School.⁵ Moreover, he reports that it was at Cambridge that he began to feel a 'fellowship / Of modest sympathy' with the 'mighty names' of the literary world and was 'emboldened' to trust in his talents as a writer.⁶

For centuries, the teaching at these schools and universities, to which I refer collectively as the Anglo-classical Academy, was surprisingly uniform across the country. They shared essentially the same curriculum, and their standard pedagogies focused on words, the forms and structure of language, and upon classical and biblical texts, mostly in verse. These studies always included careful attention to the distinguishing sounds and meters and to their effects in these texts as well as to their meanings and themes. Even at Cambridge, which was renowned for mathematics and natural philosophy, at least half the curriculum focused upon classical and biblical literature and topics.

The first lessons for the littlest boys at the grammar schools began with their simply learning Latin words and how to pronounce them with the proper accents. Significantly, 'grammar' study *always* included prosody.⁷ The first writing assignment was to compose 'nonsense verses'—the lines didn't have to make sense, the words simply had to fit a particular metrical pattern.⁸ As soon as boys knew enough words and grammar rules about how to use them, they were guided in reading Latin verses from the Bible and easy classical texts such as those by Aesop, Ovid, and Terence. With their teachers, boys translated these texts, word by word, noting not only meanings, syntax, and usage, but also the sounds and rhythms of each line. Subsequent composition assignments were to write verses in imitation of those that they were reading. Pupils in Georgian grammar schools were taught that the 'Ancients' observed certain common 'Measures'. A textbook of the period explained that

. . . the Majestic Gravity of Hexameter agrees with the Solemnity of the Epic. The Softness of the Pentameter, alternately added to the Hexameter, fits . . . the Sweetness and Tenderness of the Elegy. The Sapphic, Alcaic, and Phaleucian Measures . . . mixed together, best suit the musical and sublime Spirit of the Lyric; whilst the Simplicity of the Iambic, more nearly resembling Prose, is peculiarly proper for the Stage.⁹

⁴ Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, in Nicholas Halmi, P. Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano, eds. *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, Norton Critical Edition (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 383.

⁵ Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill, eds. *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 183, ll. 554–56. Reed's chronology of the early years speculates that this consciousness could have developed as early as the spring of Wordsworth's tenth year (Mark L. Reed, *Wordsworth Chronology of the Early Years 1770–1799* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967], 50).

⁶ J. Wordsworth et al., *The Prelude*, 1850, p. 189, ll. 42, 53. In the 1805 edition Wordsworth uses the word 'encouraged', 188, l. 65, instead of 'emboldened', which puts more emphasis upon his instructors.

⁷ *Appendix to the Eton Latin Grammar* (London: J. Hamilton, 1797), 3.

⁸ No doubt the youngest boys at Eton were called the 'Nonsense Boys' because of this practice.

⁹ John Milner, *An Abstract of Latin Syntax; . . . to which is added, prosody, or the art of Latin poetry . . . for the use of schools* (1743), 49.

By the time pupils at these schools were sixteen, most could not only identify the meter and generic conventions of many texts in the classical canon, but also compose hundreds of lines of iambics, dactyls, rhyming couplets, blank verse with internal rhymes, and Sapphic strophes in *three* languages.

Two important steps in this educational routine were nightly assignments to translate and memorize passages of Latin or Greek verse. A pupil at Rugby cited Coleridge's observation in *Table Talk* that good translation is far more difficult than original composition and requires 'higher . . . qualities of mind'.¹⁰ In point of fact, the work of translation provided pupils intensive and practical instruction about the internal structure of lines, stanzas, sentences, and paragraphs. This task, followed by nightly memory work acquainted students quite intimately not only with these structures, but also with the music of various metrical patterns and the conventions of classical genres. In 1787 a pupil at Eton wrote that the effect of reading and memorizing classical poetry, which included the great Greek plays, gave him a 'copious and splendid command of language' and an 'ear tuned up . . . to the "noiseless music of the spheres"'.¹¹ Schoolboys competed to see who could memorize the most lines. Thomas Arnold claimed to have learned more than 30,000 lines of verse in his youth; stories are told of boys who could recite the entire *Aeneid* in Latin.¹²

The follow-up assignment after translating and memorizing a passage was to write an imitation of it, sometimes in Latin, sometimes in English, and most often in verse. If the composition was in English, the typical assignments were to produce stanzas of rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter or sonnets in imitation of Petrarch. Oxford's Professor of Poetry, Edward Copleston, staunchly defended the practice: 'It is not that we seek to stock the world with new poems, but to give play in the most effectual manner to the poetic faculty'.¹³ The amount of writing that pupils at these schools did *every week* was remarkable. At Rugby, fourteen-year-old boys wrote three such 'themes' each week. Seniors at St. Paul's composed 'moral themes or declamations' in prose or verse three afternoons a week and a 'Divine theme' in prose or verse on Saturdays. If a student stayed in school four years, he would have composed at least 60 essays and the equivalent of 200 sonnets in three languages. Shelley was at Eton for six years; Wordsworth was at Hawkshead for eight years, and Coleridge was at Christ's Hospital for nine.

At the university, students continued to read and translate, sometimes memorize, and always write verse. When Wordsworth was at Cambridge, college students wrote themes, commentaries, verses, and problem sets every week for their college tutors *plus* twelve essays each year for the rhetoric tutor. The reading and discussion work of college men was punctuated by college exams each term and university exams halfway through and at the end of their time at university. These ordeals were both oral and written. They included

¹⁰ 'Some Remarks on the Study of the Classics', *Rugby Magazine* IV (1835), 358.

¹¹ *The Etonian* 2 (1787): 102.

¹² One of these boys, Charles Merivale, was the grandson of Byron's Harrow headmaster, James Drury.

¹³ Edward Copleston, *A Reply to the Calumnies against Oxford by the Edinburgh Review, containing an account of the studies pursued at that university* (Oxford, 1810).

translation and construal of passages of classical verse and prose, questions over classical texts and their generic and metrical conventions, philosophical principles, scripture, the 39 Articles of Religion, and mathematical or physics problems. Exams always included the composition of original verse in Latin and English.

Considered from the perspective of modern composition theory and pedagogy, Georgian schoolmasters and college tutors employed most of today's best practices in writing instruction. These include making sure students accumulate a great deal of quality practice; assigning tightly structured writing tasks (typical tasks were to summarize sermons, imitate classical writers or forms, and expand upon received arguments); clearly defining expected outcomes (the number of lines, verse form, and meter); providing examples or models (almost always classical or biblical);¹⁴ and specifying criteria for their evaluation. Writing instructors also gave frequent, targeted feedback to individuals and groups. Finally, they made writing meaningful, for students' work was read in class and on public occasions. Indeed, many prizes were awarded for pupils' writing, and the best writers and speakers won places at universities, scholarships, and the rowdy applause of their classmates. At university such writing often led to coveted fellowships. Every week of every year in the Anglo-classical academy students faced the blank page and a deadline. By the time these young men left university, they were well on their way toward reaching the marker of 10,000 hours of practice that modern theorists suggest are needed to achieve expertise.

In an early number of the *Rugby Magazine*, a pupil wrote that 'The principal ground on which . . . the importance of the study of the classics rests is the degree to which it assists boys in the right understanding and appreciation of the Christian religion'. This aim leads to my second topic: religious education in the Anglo-classical academy. By statute, the learning objectives of schools such as Winchester and Eton were to praise God, increase the strength and fervour of the Christian religion, and build knowledge and virtue.¹⁵ Founded originally as confessional institutions, the universities' mottos reflect this. Cambridge's is '*Hinc lucem et pocula sacra*' ('From here we derive light and sacred draughts'). Oxford's is '*Dominus illuminatio mea*' ('The Lord is my light'). V. H. H. Green is correct in his assertion that for centuries the universities played a pivotal role in confirming the 'moral and spiritual conventions' of the ruling classes.¹⁶ However, each college within the two ancient universities had its own history, theological preferences, and contributions. Hence, because the colleges were populated by clever, often quite competitive men committed to the life of the mind, they also reflected—especially among the younger schoolmasters and fellows—many points of view. Deists, broad churchmen, and evangelicals all resided in the universities. Men as widely different in their religious views as the Wesleys, William Wilberforce, Charles Simeon, Thomas Arnold, John Jebb,

¹⁴ Sometimes older pupils were given pieces from *The Spectator* to imitate.

¹⁵ Leach, *A History of Winchester College*, 69–70.

¹⁶ V. H. H. Green, *Religion at Oxford and Cambridge: A History, 1160–1960* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 11.

Robert Tyrwhitt, William Paley, and John Henry Newman were college men (and grammar schoolboys). Not a few college fellows and university students protested required subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, and others supported or at least tolerated Unitarian thinkers such as William Frend.¹⁷

Thanks to the schools' and university colleges' historically religious commitment and educational routines, but also—significantly—to their buildings and grounds, these institutions operated like coenobitic monasteries. Guided entirely by Anglican clergymen, the boys and men in these communities lived, worked, ate, played, and prayed together. Some of the schools and all of the university colleges had their own chapels, the larger colleges employed professional men and boys choirs. Students and faculty were expected to attend morning and evening prayer services daily and to pray (usually in Latin) before all meals. They met for afternoon chapel several days a week and spent many hours on Sundays in longer services with sermons, theological study, and devotional reading. It should be noted that the Lectionary of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which guides all Anglican services, sees to it that communicants who attend daily, as most schoolboys and college students did, read almost all 150 psalms *every month* and the entire Old and New Testaments every year. Schools trained boys for confirmation and to take communion; both the schools and colleges instructed their charges in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. In class with their schoolmasters or in tutorials with fellows, boys and young men in these institutions studied scripture, with special attention to the gospels, church history, the creeds, and controversies. Because close to a third of the students who matriculated at the universities expected to take holy orders, the universities also trained students in homiletics and elocution.

Regarding religious life as practiced at the schools, Westminster's headmaster Vincent admitted, 'we cast our bread upon the waters . . . we experience no instantaneous conviction or conversion, nor do we hope for it'.¹⁸ Noting that the age of reflection will arrive eventually for his students, Vincent continued:

men, even young men, feel the want and consolation of religion: and it is when those thoughts present themselves, that memory will suggest the precepts and principles, proposed to them in their youth. It is to that period we look for word of success.¹⁹

¹⁷ Frend was eventually ejected from Jesus College and Cambridge for his anti-trinitarian pamphlets, but for many years he was a respected teacher and scholar, despite such views. Fellows and students—among whom Coleridge enthusiastically numbered—stood by him during his trial before the Vice Chancellor. See his pamphlets: 'An Address to the Members of the Church of England, and to Protestant Trinitarians in General, Exhorting them to Turn from the False Worship of Three Persons to the Worship of the One True God' (London: Joseph Johnson, 1788); 'Thoughts on Subscription to Religious Tests Particularly That Required by the University of Cambridge' (London: Joseph Johnson, 1788); and *Peace and Union Recommended to the Associated Bodies of Republicans and Anti-Republicans* (St. Ives, 1793).

¹⁸ William Vincent, *A Defence of Public Education*, third ed. (London: 1802), 41.

¹⁹ Vincent, *A Defence*, 41–42.

William Whewell, the mathematician, tutor, and eventual Master of Trinity College Cambridge also acknowledged that college men cannot be made ‘pious by compulsion’,²⁰ but he observed that even those who enter the chapel with resentment at the early hour or the requirement itself have ‘their thoughts calmed and solemnized by [the] stillness and order [of the Anglican service]’. He and other Anglican educators of the period also believed these practices preserved what he called ‘the social sympathy of English worship’.²¹

The experience of living and learning in the little worlds of the Georgian boarding schools and university colleges explains the tendency of certain adult writers to gather and reside in house-parties where they talked, read, and wrote together. These semi-monastic gatherings—of Wordsworth and Coleridge in their great decade from 1797 to 1807, of Byron and Shelley during their European travels, and of the Lake Poets from time to time later in life—generated some of the most important literary works of the era. Calling attention to Wordsworth’s interest in abandoned and decaying monasteries, Jessica Fay has identified ‘monastic inheritances’ in the themes and styles of Wordsworth’s poetry from 1806 to 1822. These include exploration of the spiritual benefits of monastic life and recognition of the monasteries as places of sanctuary that can evoke a ‘sense of local attachment and transhistorical community’.²² My research suggests that such ‘monastic remains’ are also legacies of years living the day-to-day routines at Hawkshead Grammar School and St. John’s College, Cambridge.

The nature of training in the Anglo-classical Academy also helps to explain quite a lot about Wordsworth’s later career. I will focus on four phenomena that have also been discussed by Stephen Gill and, more recently, Tim Fulford.²³ These phenomena include Wordsworth’s embrace of religious and political orthodoxy; his focus upon churches and church history as the subjects of his later poems; his return to classical or traditional forms such as odes, inscriptions, memorials, and sonnets; and the reception of his verse by his nineteenth-century readers, many of whom, like him, had been classically educated or were the daughters and wives of men who had been afforded that privilege.

Both Hawkshead Grammar School and St. John’s College perpetuated religious traditions that were part of Wordsworth’s and his wife’s early childhoods. Participation in daily prayer services and instruction in ‘divinity’ during his school and college days built upon the poet’s early family experiences at Cockermouth and lay in waiting as a resource in his later days as he began to raise his family. That family life was not without soul-shaking heartbreak when they lost his brother John in 1805 and little Catherine and

²⁰ William Whewell, *On the Principles of English University Education* (London: John W. Parker, 1837), 112–13. Green offers contemporaneous accounts of rude and irreverent behavior in college chapel services; but other accounts by students of the time that I have found comment on the quiet and seriousness of students in these services.

²¹ Whewell, *Principles*, 112–13.

²² Jessica Fay, *Wordsworth’s Monastic Inheritance. Poetry, Place, and the Sense of Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2.

²³ Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Tim Fulford, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1815–1845* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

Thomas in 1812. When Wordsworth was in his thirties and forties, reviews of his poetry, particularly those by Jeffreys at the *Edinburgh Review*, caused frustration and real professional and financial anxieties for the poet and his family. What he experienced in England after Peterloo—'political changes, political remedies, [and] political nostrums'—so worried Wordsworth that he came to believe that only 'virtue and religion' could bring relief to the 'great evils, sin, bondage, and misery' he beheld.²⁴ As Fulford aptly comments, much of Wordsworth's poetry after 1819 portrays the Lake District as a 'landscape where English spirituality could be discovered'.²⁵ The evidence of his education and his family experiences (including brother Christopher's theological publications, church-building, and leadership at Cambridge)²⁶ suggest that many of Wordsworth's later expressions of religious and political orthodoxy were genuine efforts to recall, name, and confirm for himself and his family communally held experiences of faith—or lessons about the church and country—that might sustain them. Indeed, such sustenance would be especially welcome as they faced the challenges of Dorothy's decline (starting around 1835), Dora's death in 1847, and the poet's and Mary's old age. The later years of Wordsworth's life appear to demonstrate the truth of the Westminster headmaster's observation that men will 'feel the want and consolation of religion'; and when they do, their memories 'will suggest the [traditional] precepts and principles proposed to them in their youth'.²⁷

A second phenomenon that the Anglo-classical academy's religious life helps to explain is Wordsworth's remarkable focus in later life upon church history and church architecture, particularly in the *Ecclesiastical Sketches*. In his biography of Wordsworth, Stephen Gill asserts that in the years after *Lyrical Ballads* and the 1799 *Prelude* Wordsworth wrote to explore 'what he knew and could trust'.²⁸ In his earlier work, Wordsworth figures Nature as a secure source of knowledge, hope, and power. As is well known, his devotion to the natural world started in his childhood at Cockermouth. During his school and college days he continued to spend many hours outdoors in the natural world, which he memorably describes as the anchor of his purest thought; the nurse, guide, and guardian of his heart; and the soul of his moral being.²⁹ But at school and college he also prayed every day, studied scripture and poetry, and spent time in churches and churchyards. While Wordsworth is sometimes characterized during his early adulthood as a pantheist, his nephew Christopher

²⁴ Comments to the American Unitarian minister, Orville Dewey, quoted in Barbara T Gates, 'Wordsworth's Mirror of Morality: Distortions of Church History', *The Wordsworth Circle* 12.2 (1981): 129.

²⁵ Tim Fulford, *The Late Poetry of the Lake Poets: Romanticism Revised*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 206.

²⁶ While secretary to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Christopher Wordsworth published the six-volume *Ecclesiastical Biography; or Lives of Eminent Men, Connected with the History of Religion* . . . (London, 1810). He was quite involved in the nineteenth-century church building movement, initiated by the 1818 Act for Building New Churches. From 1820 to 1841 he was Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. Wordsworth visited him and his nephews there.

²⁷ Vincent, *Defense*, 41–42.

²⁸ Gill, *Wordsworth, A Life*, 152.

²⁹ 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey . . .', ll. 109–11.

asserts that when he was an undergraduate his uncle considered himself more reverent than many around him.³⁰

Fulford builds on Gill's assertion that Wordsworth wrote to explore, and he characterizes his poems about the church and church buildings as personal explorations of this beliefs. He asserts that Wordsworth came to believe that the English church, with its history and its 'holy buildings' was a source of creative and personal power parallel to that of the natural world. Hence, Wordsworth's use of religious figures in his later works can be read as a 'materialization' of this understanding and the expression of his 'devotion to traditional poetics'.³¹ Given Wordsworth's Anglican schooling, during which he received his first training in traditional poetics, learned to hear the music of classical and biblical verse, and spent hours every week in sacred spaces reciting scripture and traditional English prayers, this connection, or 'materialization', makes total sense. It should be noted as well that some of the *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, such as 'XXII Catechising', 'XXIII Confirmation', 'XXIV Confirmation Continued', and 'XXV Sacrament' attend quite specifically to the religious experiences of schoolchildren.

A third phenomenon in Wordsworth's later career is his return to classical images and literary conventions. This includes frequent allusions to Latin, Greek, and scriptural verse; his embrace of classical forms such as epistles and inscriptions; and his experimentation with the tight, rhyming form of the sonnet.³² Wordsworth's choice to turn to these forms bears the marks of his Anglo-classical education. After 1820 Wordsworth wrote more than 350 sonnets. Fulford aptly characterizes those focusing on religious figures, church buildings, and church history as the articulation of 'spirituality as the product of a tradition . . . that had developed . . . out of a distant [and shared] past'.³³ This shared past included Wordsworth's early religious experiences with his mother and eight years as a pupil at Hawkshead Grammar School, a community where faith in the Anglican Church was unquestioned and where short metrical psalms were often used in services. At his school, Wordsworth was given remarkably regular and carefully structured practice in producing verses in specific traditional forms. From Hawkshead, Wordsworth moved on to St. John's College, where his composition training and classical reading continued for four years. So, it is not surprising that he was soon publishing poems that apparently unsettled but also interested readers in 1798 and well into the first decade of the nineteenth century. After 1807, however, Wordsworth's career and along with it his ability to provide for his large family seemed to be foundering. The searingly negative reviews of *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807) and the singeing comments that Jeffrey and others made about Wordsworth's blank verse in *The Excursion* (1814) were devastating to him, and to Dorothy

³⁰ Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs of William Wordsworth, Poet-Laureate, D. C. L.*, 2 vols. (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851).

³¹ Fulford, *Wordsworth's Poetry*, 215.

³² These phenomena are all discussed by Fulford, *Wordsworth's Poetry*, 42ff.

³³ Fulford, *Wordsworth's Poetry*, 214.

and Mary.³⁴ Given what he described as 'malevolence' and 'ignorance' expressed by the critics, it makes sense that Wordsworth would not only turn to the consolation of religion, but also recall his early verse-writing experiences, knowledge of psalmody, and his training in self-discipline, by writing more conventional, tightly-constructed short poems, such as the rhymed couplets of the inscriptions and the rhymed octaves and sestets of sonnets. Fulford points out that after reading some of these bad reviews, Wordsworth sent Miltonic sonnets to the papers and started translating Michelangelo's Petrarchan sonnets. The latter exercise was a typical one for Anglican schoolboys.

Finally, understanding the training students received in the Anglo-classical academy also helps to explain Wordsworth's reception in the latter part of his career, when he courteously hosted literary tourists at Rydal Mount. As already noted, Wordsworth's early poems, those that modern scholars have long cited as his greatest works, got mixed reviews when they were first published. As the history of the nineteenth century unfolded, audiences and critics began to feel that his formerly pleasing 'originality, pathos, and natural feeling' were perverse and in bad taste.³⁵ The 'new school' of poetry represented in Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807) was also judged to be less interesting, for it lacked system, elegance and dignity.³⁶ Jeffrey laughed off poems such as 'To the Small Celandine' as 'namby pamby', but he praised Wordsworth's sonnets.³⁷ These, he notes 'escape . . . the trammels of his own unfortunate system,' which is otherwise in 'open violation of the established [ancient and venerable] laws of poetry'.³⁸ So it is no surprise that Wordsworth's more conventional later poems, such as the *River Duddon*, *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, and *Yarrow Revisited*, were quite popular with nineteenth-century readers. Though Jeffrey panned the *The Excursion* as a 'tissue of moral and devotional ravings', the poem was recovered by Victorian audiences who thought it—not his posthumous *Prelude*—was Wordsworth's great work.

Why did his audience respond in this way? *The Excursion* and the three volumes mentioned above echo mid-Victorian moral and religious expressions (and social anxieties) that were familiar to readers who had been schooled to appreciate traditional religious attitudes and classical verse forms in the Anglo-classical academy. The poems describe the natural world, but also numerous Anglican scenes and experiences—church buildings, churchgoing, liturgies, or church history—with which many of his readers had been familiar since childhood. Wordsworth even composed voluntaries, a worship form that is used in Anglican services. All these subjects were reassuringly familiar, and Wordsworth's more restrained later style appealed to the mid-century audience. Indeed, Wordsworth's later writing seems to perform the same public service that V. H. H. Green attributes to the universities—to confirm the moral and

³⁴ *William and Dorothy Wordsworth Letters the Later Years*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 145.

³⁵ 'Article XIV. *Poems in Two Volumes*. By William Wordsworth, Author of Lyrical Ballads', *The Edinburgh Review* 2.21 (1807–10): 214.

³⁶ 'Article XIV', 214–17.

³⁷ 'Article XIV', 220.

³⁸ 'Article XIV', 230–31.

spiritual conventions of the ruling classes who, not incidentally, bought books of poetry.

The evidence of these later poems and the diligence and determination of this aging poet to craft them so carefully are testimony of the long-term efficacy of the linguistic, generic, metrical, and religious training of the Anglo-classical academy. Wordsworth's school and university first gave him access, as he reports in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, to the 'The best models of composition' and trained him to be a 'reader of superior judgment'.³⁹ It taught him self-discipline as well. More importantly, it was the place where he began to recognize, as he also asserts in the Preface, the 'inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind'.⁴⁰ This is a concern that he explored and explained throughout his long life and that he expressed at the end of both the 1805 and 1850 versions of *The Prelude*. Given the nature of his training in the Anglo-classical academy, I believe it is no accident that Wordsworth concludes *The Prelude* with pointedly educative promises. Saying that he and Coleridge find 'solace in what they have *learnt to know*',⁴¹ he vows to work towards the 'deliverance' of people whom he fears are once again sinking into 'servitude'. He asserts that he and Coleridge have been 'sanctified' in this role by their ability to 'reason' and by their 'faith', two intellectual faculties that the schools and colleges endeavoured to cultivate.⁴² Finally, he vows that 'we *will teach*' others to love 'what we have loved,' and

Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells . . .
. . . [and] is itself
Of quality and fabric more divine.⁴³

The achievement of *The Prelude* and, indeed, of Wordsworth's entire career is evidence of the lasting efficacy of the education in life, learning, and language skills afforded by the curriculum, pedagogies, and routines of the Anglo-classical academy.

³⁹ Gill, *Wordsworth Major Works*, Preface to LB, 591.

⁴⁰ Gill, *Wordsworth Major Works*, Preface to LB, 600.

⁴¹ *Prelude* (1850), 483, ll. 445, 437.

⁴² *Prelude* (1850), 483, ll. 446, 447–48. In the 1805 edition he writes 'reason and truth', 482, l. 444.

⁴³ *Prelude* (1850), 483, ll. 440–56 (*italics mine*).