In Search of the Picturesque and the Sublime: The English Romantics and the Lake District

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Introduction

The latter half of the eighteenth century saw the beginning of the Romantic period in literature and art in England and elsewhere in Europe. Although "Romanticism" is notoriously difficult to define, early English Romanticism, and particularly romantic poetry, was characterized by a movement toward the use of more natural, vernacular forms of language, and away from classical influences; a heightened concern for and sensitivity to nature and to rural life, as opposed to life in the newly industrialized cities; and a concern for spontaneity, Imagination, and a New Sensibility of feeling.

One side effect of this new aesthetic in England was to increase interest in local areas as suitable subjects for art, and also to stimulate interest in travel to local beauty spots and scenic areas by the moneyed gentry. Where in the past, English artists and well-to-do travelers had gone to see and paint and write about the ruined classical splendors of Greece or Rome, the pastoral villages of Tuscany, or the magnificence of the Alps, the English Romantics sought scenic inspiration in their own backyard: in the ruins of Tintern Abbey, or Peel Castle in Lancashire; in the wild peaks and crags and cataracts of the northwestern dale country; and in small country villages, where the sooty hand of the Industrial Revolution had not yet reached. It is not surprising, then, that the English Lake District became a magnet for Romantic poets such as Gray, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. The area was brim full with everything calculated to stimulate the Romantic sensibility and imagination, a tailor-made Rousseauian rural paradise. Romanticism also inspired a fad for "picturesque tourism" among the newly affluent upper middle class, and as a result outsiders in large numbers came to see the scenic wonders of the Lake District and the Dales for the first time.

On my first visit to the English Lake District several years ago, I could not help but wonder what had attracted such literary eminences as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge to the area. True, Wordsworth was a "local boy," born in Cockermouth just north of the Lakes, and raised in Hawkshead in the heart of the district. But there was no particular reason why the budding young poet should not have stayed in the south after his years at university, and Coleridge was from Devon in the West Country. What was the attraction which brought them to the Lakes, and drew other literary figures of the day, such as Robert Southey (from Bristol) and William De Quincey (a Manchester man), in their wake?

On my first visit, I found the villages of the Lake District to be quaint and picturesque, and the countryside beautiful and calming. But most of the time you could scarcely see the scenery clearly for the mists and clouds which hung along the mountain tops, or crept down the valleys to hover over the lakes. When it wasn't pouring down rain (and this was midsummer), it was drizzling. Wordsworth himself admitted, "The rain here comes down heartily. . .

> Days of unsettled weather, with partial showers, are very frequent; but the showers, darkening or brightening as they fly from hill to hill, are not less grateful to the eye than finely interwoven passages of gay and sad music are touching to the ear. Vapours exhaling from the lakes and meadows. . ., brooding upon the heights, . . . give a visionary character to everything around them, and are in themselves so beautiful . . ." (from *Guide to the Lakes*, excerpted in *The Lakers*, p. 90)

Admittedly, the rainy weather accentuated the green of the hillsides and lent a certain atmosphere to the area. But considering the rustic conditions of village life around the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, it must have been a damp and dismal place at times for the "Lake Poets" who chose make their homes in the district, as well as for the wealthy tourists who began during the same period to flock to the area in search of thrilling views and awesome natural scenery.

It was only after several return visits to the Lakes that I began to understand how these very mists, clouds, and "vapours" were one part of the secret of the region's appeal to the English Romantics. Not only does the Lake District contain even today the essence of everything that appealed to romantic sensibilities: awesome ragged mountains with terrifying cliffs and precipices, cataracts and torrents, precariously balanced boulders remain-

ing from the glacial age, and of course the various lakes themselves. There was also the idealized pastoral life of the rural villages, still at that time more or less untouched by the industrial revolution which had transformed most of the rest of Britain. Here, the "pure" rustic peasant was seen by the Romantics as an imbodiment of Rousseau's "natural man" living life at one with nature (never mind with what hardship and toil). Local legends and stories such as that of the Maid of Buttermere added to this image, and Wordsworth perpetuated it in his poems with characters such as "Michael" the old shepherd, and the aged wanderer of "The Ruined Cottage." And over the whole region lay the mists and clouds, adding just the necessary Romantic element of mystery, like a scene from a gothic novel. The setting was made to order not only for poets and painters, but also for tourists who were just beginning to explore their own shores in search of the sort of "picturesque" and "sublime" scenery that their generation had been schooled to admire.

The Roots of Romanticism

Volumes have been written on the meanings of the terms "Romantic" and "Romanticism" but it is not within the scope of this paper to continue or add to that debate. The only thing that most experts will agree on is that the terms have had widely different meanings for different people, and depend on specifics of place and time. Even within one European country, the way of thinking implied by the term changed widely over a short space of years, as movements developed. As Arthur Lovejoy put it, there is no Romanticism, but rather a "plurality of Romanticisms." (Lovejoy, p. 9. See Lovejoy's article for a detailed discussion of the meanings of Romanticism.) However, it is possible to make some general statements about Romanticism, and this becomes even easier if we limit ourselves to English romanticism in its early period, beginning around the 1740's and lasting until about 1820.

In writing, English Romanticism was a reaction against the classicism which had been a dominant force in European literature as well as in other arts. As with European Romanticism in general, it was a movement towards more vernacular literature and more natural, spontaneous language. Romanticism argued for "the creative artist's independence of rules" (Lovejoy, p. 10), not only in poetry and drama but also in painting, architecture and gardening, and led to the development of a new aethestic. Warton, for example, praises the "wild" and natural writing of Shakespeare as opposed to more "artful" and self-conscious forms of poetry (Lovejoy, p. 10). Not long after this, Wordsworth and Coleridge

also argued for the right of the poet to express himself freely and without articifial restraints on style and form. A dialectic of "art" versus "nature" developed.

There was also an emphasis on spontaneity and sincerity of feeling in poetry (Wimsatt, p. 30). English romanticism tended to be be concerned with the development of invention and imagination (as opposed to reason or fact), and was to some extent a reaction against the rationalist and scientific thinking of the industrial age. Coleridge in particular was deeply concerned throughout his life with the concept of the Romantic Imagination, which he saw as the main force by which man interprets and shapes his sensory awareness of the external world (nature) in order to achieve metaphysical understanding, and ultimately, union of the intellectual and material world.

One manifestation of the Romantic reaction against rationalism was a heightened awareness and appreciation of nature, and an attempt to find transcendental meaning in natural processes and phenomena. Gray, Coleridge and Wordsworth all saw nature as dynamic, and their poetry read philosopical meaning into the landscape and natural events.

"The Enthusiast" by Joseph Warton (1722-1800) is seen by some experts as "the first clear manifestation" of the romantic movement in England (Lovejoy, p. 10). This poem (subtitled "Or, The Lover of Nature") gives us an example of the early romantic reaction against the industrial age and the perceived degradation of man in the new industrial cities, a movement which is still with us today in "back to nature" movements and environmental protectionist groups like the Sierra Club and Green Peace. It is in sympathy with the writings of Rousseau and his concept of the "natural man," yet in fact Warton's poem, written in 1740, predates Rousseau's definitive works. The poet rejects both the classical aesthetic and the smoke and corruption of industrial cities for a vision of pastoral bliss: "Lead me from gardens deckt with Art's vain pomps . . .

Yet let me choose some Pine-topt Precipice
Abrupt and shaggy, whence a foamy Stream,
Like Anio, tumbling roars; or some black Heath
Where straggling stand the mournful Juniper,
Or Yew-tree scath'd; while in clear Prospect round
From the Grove's Bosom Spires emerge and smoak
In bluish wreaths ascends, ripe Harvests wave,
Herds low, and Straw-rooft Cotts appear, and Streams
Beneath the Sun-beams twinkle-

> . . . Happy the first of Men, ere yet confin'd
> To smoaky Cities; who in sheltering Groves
> Warm caves, and deep-sunk Vallies liv'd and lov'd,
> By cares unwounded; . . ."
>
> (*The Penguin Book of English Verse,* p. 220-222)

This description of idealized rural life, as contrasted with the dirty and crowded cities, already contains the heart of the romantic ideal of naturalism. Note the appearance even in this early work of images and catch phrases which later became almost stereotypical of romantic poetry, including shaggy precipices, tumbling roaring streams, and the value placed on primitivism, including country people without "wiles, nor artificial coyness." The type of rural scene Warton idealizes could be found in abundance in the English Lake District, so we should not be surprised that William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy chose to return to their home ground for inspiration, and that other Romantic writers and sightseers followed them there.

On the political and social level, Romanticism identified with the ideals of the French Revolution (before its later excesses and revisionism), and gave birth to various communal and mystical movements such as Coleridge's Pantisocracy, which involved a plan for a select group including himself, Robert Southey, and two of the Fricker sisters whom they married, to emigrate to the American wilderness and there develop a pure, communal society where their children could grow up free from the taint of modern civilization:

> "What I dared not expect from constitutions of Government and whole Nations, I hoped from Religion and a small Company of chosen Individuals, and formed a plan, as harmless as it was extravagant, of trying the experiment of human Perfectibility on the banks of the Susquehannah; where our little Society, in its second generation, was to have combined the innocence of the patriachal Age with the knowledge and genuine refinements of European culture . . ." (Holmes, p. 66)

Coleridge's belief in the essential goodness of "natural" man, once freed from a corrupt society, was a recurring theme in his early poetry. When the pantisocratic scheme collapsed in 1795, Coleridge pursued his search for a rural Utopia in England, first renting a cottage on the Somerset coast, then moving to Nether Stowey in the early days of his relationship with the Wordworths, and eventually following them north to reside in Keswick, not far from Grasmere, when the Wordsworths decided to return to their "dear native

regions."

The Romantic aesthetic valued all that was wild, spontaneous, and irregular, and at the same time simple, naive, and unsophisticated. For painters and writers, wild scenery and remote mountains became popular subjects as the last holdout from science and industry. But Romantic scenery also required mystery and secretiveness (in the form of mists, hidden valleys, and unaccessible mountaintops) as well as magnificence and "awfulness" (as seen in crags and cliffs). Later, tourists as well as writers and painters would be drawn to wild landscapes in places such as the Lake District, where they could be thrilled and pleasantly horrified by the sense of danger they could experience first hand at the edge of a terrifying precipice, in a chasm beside a roaring cataract, or beneath a precariously balanced boulder deposited in the glacial age.

If the preceeding images sound familiar, one need only dip into an anthology of Romantic poetry to find them occurring again and again. Later, in the Gothic novel, Romantic imagery and titillating horror were sometimes carried to excess, to the point where "sensibility" became slightly ridiculous. Anne Radcliffe's popular gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was the brunt of Jane Austen's criticism in *Northanger Abbey*. Austen points out the falseness and excesses of the feelings or "sensibilities" fostered by such books, and the lack of balancing common sense which leads her heroine Catherine into a sensationalized and bizarre misinterpretation of the events occurring around her. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the heroine Marianne nearly succumbs to an illness which could be attributed to an excess of Romantic sensibility.

It is interesting to note that Anne Radcliffe herself was an early visitor to the Lakes, and like many literary tourists of her time, she published an appreciative account of her journey in 1794, entitled "Observations During a Tour to the Lakes." It was this sort of account that spread word of the beauties of the Lake District among both writers and artists and wealthy travellers of the Romantic age.

Early Tourists and Literary Visitors to the English Lakes

According to Thomas DeQuincey, before 1787 "tourists were as yet few and infrequent to any parts of the country [the Lake District].

> Mrs. Radcliffe had not yet begun to to cultivate the sense of the picturesque in her popular romances; guide books, with the sole exception of 'Gray's

> Posthumous Letters,' had not arisen to direct public attention to this domestic Colabria; roads were rude, and in many cases not wide enough to admit post-chaises . . . the whole system of travelling accommodations was barbarous and antediluvian. . . As yet the land had rest; the annual fever did not shake the very hills; and . . . false taste, the pseudo-romantic rage, had not violated the most awful solitudes amongst the ancient hills by opera house decorations. . . The whole was one paradise of virgin beauty." (*Recollections,* p. 157)

The reclusive poet Thomas Gray, best known for his "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard," visited the Lake District in 1769, toward the end of his life. Although physically delicate, Gray traveled frequently and kept a meticulous journal of all he saw. During his later years he also developed an interest in the natural sciences, particularly botany. His detailed account of ten days in the Lakes was not published until after his death, but it was later included in Thomas West's *Guide to the Lakes,* and was no doubt influential in attracting more travelers to the region and influencing their perceptions.

Although something of a sensation seeker and very physically aware of the natural landscape, Gray's writing lacks the personal emotional involvement of a Wordsworth or a Coleridge, and is essentially passive. A timorous man, Gray nevertheless seemed to enjoy feeling the same kind of "pleasant horror" that future picturesque travelers sought after in what Nicholson calls "the cult of the nerves" (*Lakers,* p. 59). When passing through a landslide area near Borrowdale, he describes his anxiety thusly: "the crags named Lowdore-banks began to impend terribly over the way, and more terribly when you learn that three years since an immense mass of rock tumbled at once from the brow . . . I . . . hastened on in silence." (*Lakers,* p. 57-58) Similarly, when preparing to cross the sands of Morecombe Bay early in his journey, he hears the story of a husband and wife who had been lost in a mist and drowned, and quite savours recounting it in his journal after he has been safely delivered to the opposite shore (*The Lake District, An Anthology,* p. 110-111, hereafter cited as *Anthology.*).

Similar frightening local tales, such as that of the young Green children trapped in a remote, snowbound cottage after their parents perished in a storm (*The Letters of Dorothy Wordsworth,* No. 32, pp. 88-89), are told with equal relish in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal and letters, and Thomas DeQuincey's *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets.* In fact, local legends and stories such as "The Maid of Buttermere" added to the Romantic appeal of the Lakes.

William and Dorothy Wordsworth were born on the northern edge of the Lake

District in Cockermouth, so they were not "off comers" or outsiders to the area. *The Prelude* tells of many of William's boyhood experiences and impressions while attending the Grammar School at Hawkshead. In 1795 he met Coleridge in Bristol where the latter was active as a radical political writer and lecturer. Later the Wordsworth siblings and the Coleridges moved to neighboring rural villages in the West Country (Alfoxden and Nether Stowey), and William and Coleridge collaborated on the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 (which included much of Coleridge's very best poetry such as "The Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan").

In late October-November 1799, William and Coleridge toured the Lake District together on foot. Shortly thereafter William and Dorothy rented Dove Cottage, the first of a succession of homes in Grasmere, where they would spend the remainder of their lives. Coleridge followed them to take up residence in the area with his brother in-law, Robert Southey, also a writer, and their wives, until a breach with Wordsworth in 1810.

Most readers will already be familiar with the rich nature imagery of William Wordsworth's poetry. As DeQuincey says in an early admiring letter to the poet, "your name is with me for ever linked to the lovely scenes of nature . . ." (DeQuincey, p. 385). In "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth tells us that he found "In nature and the language of the sense/The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/ Of all my moral being." He also explains that he learned in maturity to find the profoundest meaning in nature:

"For I have learned
To look upon nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused. . ."

According to Norman Nicholson, Wordsworth's poetry not only encouraged the fashion for the Picturesque, but also his moral overtones "threw a glimmer of the transcendental over what was still a rather purposeless creed. . . The Picturesque, which had once been aesthetic, was now moral." (*The Lakers*, p. 183)

Scholars are now aware that Dorothy Wordsworth, far from just serving as her brother's amanuensis and companion, was in fact a great influence on his writing, "not only the inspiration but even the source of much of his best poetry." (Clark, p. 7) A study of Dorothy's journals and letters reveals many accounts and observations which William later used in his poems, sometimes retaining almost the same phrasing as originally used by Dorothy.

Dorothy herself never made any claim to being a writer, perhaps because in the society of her time, women were not widely accepted as qualified to enter the literary world. In her first entry in the Grasmere Journal (May 14, 1800), she says decided to keep a journal to pass the time until William returned from a trip, "and because I shall give William pleasure by it when he comes home again." But Dorothy is increasingly respected as an artist in her own right. Her freshness, sensitivity, and acute powers of observation resulted in descriptions and anecdotes which remain vivid and alive to the modern reader. Her prose is of interest on its own merits as much as for what it reveals of the artistic and personal life of her famous brother, or of their friend Coleridge, who also contributed much to Wordsworth's creative processes (in fact there was continual artistic interaction between the three of them during the years at Alfoxden and in the Lakes).

Thomas De Quincey, a great admirer of Wordsworth, also attached himself to the Wordsworth family at Grasmere. He became at first a frequent house guest at Dove Cottage, and ultimately its next resident when the Wordsworths moved to a larger house, Allan Bank, in 1809. DeQuincey's gossippy journalistic reminiscences tell us much about the group who came to be known as "The Lake Poets," and also about the growing number of visitors to the district. The presence of these literary lumiaries added further to the attraction and prestige of the Lake District in the early nineteenth century.

The Picturesque Tourists

The Lake District had no turnpikes or wagon roads until the 1750's and had been relatively isolated from the rest of the country. However, after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, the government felt the need for proper roads in order to more easily move troops and military equipment around in the north and borderlands. After this date, the district began to be more accessible to those who had the time and money needed to travel and an obsession with Romantic scenery or curiosity about natural history.

The rapid development of science in the mid-eighteenth century also acted as an en-

couragement to tourism, as educated people became more aware of their physical environment and more interested in exploring it. What began as a trickle of painters and literary travelers in search of interesting natural phenomena or scenic inspiration had developed into full fledged tourism by the nineteenth century.

In its original form, before it became overly obsessed with quaintness and rusticity, "Picturesque" referred to a new aesthetic for viewing the world visually, with emphasis on using one's eyes for sensation, not just for information. At first analysis, this seems in tune with the Romantic Sensibility and its emphasis on Imagination, feeling, and "soulful earnestness." However, the fad of the Picturesque developed into something quite at odds with the values of the early Romantics.

The term Picturesque was probably coined by William Gilpin, a retired clergyman and schoolmaster and an early exponent of the picturesque landscape. In 1786 he published a memoir of his visits to the Lakes including lengthy discourses on the nature of the picturesque, and in 1792 he published *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty.*

Edmund Burke had previously invented two categories of aesthetic perception of objects: the Beautiful, objects which were pleasing and gentle and suggested ease and safety; and the Sublime, great and vast objects inspiring fear and wonder and also arousing man's instinct for self-preservation. To this dichotomy, Gilpin added a third category which he called Picturesque Beauty, to describe the type of beauty "which would be effective in a picture." (This is another instance of the "Nature" versus "Art" dialectic, since Burke's terms apply to beauty in Nature, but Gilpin felt the need for a different term to define the sort of beauty which is effective in landscape art.).

Picturesque Beauty is usually rough, irregular, or wild, but may include elements of smoothness and conventional beauty for contrast. A ruin is more picturesque than a well-proportioned mansion because of the irregularity of its shape, and jagged mountains such as those in the Lake District were made even more picturesque by the smoothness of the waters below. To quote Gilpin, "The pyramidal shape, and easy flow of an irregular line, will be found in the mountain, as in other delineations, the truest sort of beauty. Mountains therefore rising in regular, mathematical lines . . . are displeasing. . . The sources of deformity in the mountain line will easily suggest those of beauty." (From "Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty in the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland," in *Anthology,* p. 38-39.). In his description of Grasmere viewed from the heights, Gilpin emphasizes the interest added by shadow and "a greyish mist [which] left the idea ambiguous. . . The whole view is entirely of the horrid kind." (*Anthology,* p. 57).

People were not important in this type of landscape except to add a sense of the scale of surrounding objects.

Gilpin's writings can probably be credited with starting the boom in picturesque travel, by encouraging people who shared his aesthetic values to seek out examples of picturesque landscapes: "The pleasures of the chase are universal... And shall we suppose it a greater pleasure to the sportsman to pursue a trivial animal than it is for the man of taste to pursue the beauties of nature?" (*Lakers,* p. 39) According to Norman Nicholson, picturesque travel became "a sort of collecting" of scenes which met the proper aesthetic criteria, and these criteria made people look at a landscape in a predetermined way (*Lakers,* p. 39, p. 42). Before long, guidebooks to the Lakes were published with commentaries by Gilpin, Gray, and other connoisseurs, so that the Picturesque Tourist no longer had to "chase" down desirable views for himself; instead, he was told where to look and how to look at them. Thomas West's *Guide to the Lakes* (originally published in 1778 but expanded and reprinted many times thereafter) gave travelers precise recommendations as to the best viewpoints or "stations" to pass by on a tour of the district, with detailed descriptions of what was to be seen at each.

Ultimately, this pre-packaged viewing was a betrayal was a betrayal of Romanticism in that it rejected spontaneous feeling and imagination, and reduced Nature to a charicature of itself, just as a Claude glass reduced a vast panorama to the size of a picture post card. Shape became more important than substance or feeling. Aesthetic value was placed on "the characteristic pushed into a sensible excess." (DeQuincey, p. 293)

The Picturesque Tourists soon began to arrive in numbers, visitors in search of safe thrills inspired by the "awfulness" of nature: "Horrors like these at first alarm,/ But soon with savage grandeur charm,/ And raise to noblest thoughts the mind . . ." (from "Descriptive Poem" by an early visitor, Dr. Dalton, in *Lakers,* p. 28). Tourists followed prescribed "stages" in their travels through the district, as recommended by the latest guidebooks such as West's. Wordsworth's own *Guide to the Lakes* was and still is a perennial bestseller, although encouraging tourism seems a contradiction of his often expressed wish to preserve the Lakes as they were.

The Picturesque Tourists came armed with money, servants, and all the necessary paraphernalia for properly viewing the scenery, including Claude glasses (named after the painter). These were sets of mirrors designed to reduce the most majestic view down to a compact composition which could be taken in at a glance. Glasses of different tints — dark, silvery, or yellow — were used depending on the weather and the mood of the

scene. No doubt these visitors were careful to summon up the prescribed Romantic sensations at each point of interest. In the dialectic of contrived Art versus spontaneous Nature, Romanticism had come full circle in the fashionable obsession with the Picturesque.

Commercial tourism had also begun to be an economic force in the Lake District and soon appropriate "attractions" were developed for the visitors' enjoyment and convenience. You could pay to have cannons fired from a barge on Ullswater or Derwentwater, and sit back and enjoy the eerie echoes. The charge in 1800 was ten shillings for a "first Quality echo," but only half that if the visitor could be contented with one of "second Quality" (Lefebure, p. 6. In 1807, Southey recounts fees of four shillings and two shillings sixpence respectively for a similar service on Derwentwater. See his letter in *Anthology,* p. 171-172). An earlier visitor, William Hutchinson describes such an entertainment and the feelings it evoked:

> "The report was echoed from the opposite rocks, where by reverberation it seemed to roll from cliff to cliff, and return through every cave and valley; till the decreasing tumult gradually died away upon the ear. The instant it had ceased, the sound of every distant waterfall was heard. . . The report of every discharge re-echoed seven times distinctly . . . on every hand, the sounds were reverberated and returned from side to side, so as to give the semblance of that confusion and horrid uproar, which the falling of these stupendous rocks would occasion, if by some internal combustion they were rent to pieces and hurled into the lake." (*Anthology,* p. 169-170)

French horns were also used to obtain interesting sound effects, and travellers also brought rifles and had their servants stay below in a valley and fire when the master was high enough up the mountainside to enjoy the resounding echoes.

Other "tourist traps" soon appeared, including attempts by local entrepreneurs to exploit, and even improve on, the Picturesque qualities of natural wonders and geological oddities. Poet laureate Robert Southey, who followed Coleridge north from Bristol to form a menage at Greta Hall in nearby Keswick, describes in 1807 a visit to Borrowdale to see "a single rock called the Bowder Stone, a fragment of great size which has fallen from the heights.

> The same person [i.e. Mr. Pocklington] who formerly disfigured the island in Keswick lake with so many abominations, has been at work here also; has built a

little mock hermitage, set up a new druidical stone, erected an ugly house for an old woman to live in who is to show the rock, for fear travellers should pass under it without seeing it, cleared away all the fragments round it, and as it rests upon a narrow base, like a ship upon its keel, dug a hole underneath through which the curious may gratify themselves by shaking hands with the old woman. The oddity of this amused us greatly, provoking as it was to meet with such hideous buildings in such a place, — for the place is as beautiful as eyes can behold or imagination conceive." (*Anthology,* pp. 170-170)

Besides the natural scenery and rustic villages, the inhabitants of the Lakes and Dales soon came to be regarded as picturesque objects in themselves. Visitors also became interested in local legends and history, and the tragic local tale of The Maid of Buttermere, recounted in DeQuincey's *Recollections* (pp. 67-70), became famous in Wordsworth's time. A recurrent theme in Romantic literature is the natural goodness of man, and the corruption of the country innocent by decadent society or city people. The true story of the comely but simple village girl who was seduced and abandoned by a swindler impersonating a nobleman seems almost a case of Life imitating Art.

A desire to protect the innocence of the local inhabitants, as well as the natural environment, led some to oppose any sort of change or Progress in the Lakes. William Wordsworth was apprehensive and critical of changes wrought by newcomers, and he opposed the building of railways because they "encourage entertainments for tempting the humbler classes to leave their homes . . . the injury which would thus be done to morals, both among this influx of strangers and the lower class of inhabitants, is obvious." (*A History of Cumberland and Westmoreland,* p. 99). In his wish to protect the country people (the closest equivalent in England to Rousseau's "Noble Savage") from corruption, Wordsworth seemed to disregard any economic benefit that might accrue to the region from development. However, his poems ("Michael", "Repentance," "Beggars," and "Resolution and Independence," among others) and Dorothy's journals and letters tell many a sad story of hardship and poverty, lost homes and shattered families, and the prevalence of beggars even in the idyllic vale of Grasmere. There is a contradiction, insensitivity, and selfishness in his attitude that is disquieting in its cold objectivity. Somehow it seems not far removed from the attitude of visitors who gawked at the local rustics as if they were mere players on a Picturesque set. Perhaps the class and economic barriers of the time were too strong for real sympathy even in a man of the New Sensibility.

The fight against the railways was later taken up, for the most part successfully, by

John Ruskin, and by the founders of the National Trust, and as a result the region remains remarkably unchanged today. In *A Guide to the Lakes,* Wordsworth wrote of the need to protect the area for posterity, thus reaffirming the original Romantic values of simplicity and naturalness, and anticipating the creation of the Lake District National Park by many decades: "It is then much to be wished that a better taste should prevail among these new proprietors;

> and, as they cannot be expected to leave things to themselves, that skill and knowledge should prevent unnecessary deviations from that path of simplicity and beauty along which, without design and unconsciously, their humble predecessors have moved. In this wish the author will be joined by persons of pure taste thoughout the whole island, who, by their visits (often repeated) to the Lakes in the North of England, testify that they deem the district a sort of national property, *in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy.*" (*Anthology,* p. 178)

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