

NOTES

WORDSWORTH IN MELBOURNE: A 'NEW' POEM?

THE STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA, Melbourne, holds an unpublished and unrecorded Wordsworth manuscript which indicates that, for a time at least, Wordsworth considered a passage from one of his later reflective poems as a separable poem.¹

In 1834, at Rydal Mount, Wordsworth wrote "Lines Suggested by a Portrait from the Pencil of F. Stone".² This poem of 131 lines appeared in *Yarrow Revisited and other Poems*, (1835) together with an afterthought of 32 lines, "The Foregoing Subject Resumed"; with one slight alteration in the generally exhaustively revised six-volume stereotype collected edition of 1836-7; and then unchanged in all later collected editions. The Melbourne manuscript corresponds to lines 79-91.

"Lines Suggested..." is largely a desultory meditation upon Art and Life, claiming a greater reality for Art. It has some clumsy imagery but one or two extended passages stand out strongly from the whole; the Melbourne manuscript gives one of these.

The 'Portrait whose mild gleam Of beauty never ceases to enrich the common light' (6-8) was of Jemima Quillinan, a daughter of the widowed Edward Quillinan who a few years later, in 1841, married Wordsworth's daughter Dora after a long relationship. Jemima was a frequent visitor to Rydal Mount and seems to have been accepted as almost one of the family. According to the notes Wordsworth dictated to Isabella Fenwick in the winter and spring of 1842-3, the portrait had 'hung for many years in our principal sitting-room, and represents J.Q. as she was when a girl. The picture, though it is somewhat thinly painted, has much merit in tone and general effect; it is chiefly valuable, however, from the sentiment that pervades it.'³

The Wordsworth Library of Dove Cottage, Grasmere, has no record of the Melbourne version. The Library holds:⁴

1. A manuscript fair copy of the poem (DCMS 130) in Dora Wordsworth's hand, written on sewn folded sheets watermarked 1833. This is very close to the printed text, as de Selincourt's variants indicate, and does not differ from it in lines 79-91.

2. The manuscript copy sent to the printers for *Yarrow Revisited* (DCMS 135, not noticed by de Selincourt), chiefly in Mary and Dora Wordsworth's hands. This differs from the fair copy and from the printed text in some details; a square bracket has been inserted before 'Godlike' at line 89, and the following line arrangement is changed, to give (omitting line 92):

Is not then the Art
 [Godlike, a humble branch of the divine,
 In visible quest of Immortality stretched forth
 With trembling hope? From every realm
 Thousands, in each variety of tongue
 (88-93 var.)

Probably the square bracket was misplaced, being intended to mark the beginning of a new verse paragraph at 'Is not then ...' - an indication that Wordsworth was considering the restructuring of this part of the poem. In any event, neither this nor the line rearrangement was followed.

3. First proofs do not seem to have survived, but there are revised proof sheets (DCM 137, 138) which give the printed text and lead to the assumption that in the first proof the wording and structure of the fair copy was restored.

The Melbourne manuscript of lines 79-91 has been held by the State Library for an unknown period, probably many years judging from the old frame in which, until my intervention, it was mounted. (Ink had lifted from the paper onto the glass of the frame.) There is no acquisition record. The only conjecture I can offer is that it was brought out by the poet's grandson Charles Wordsworth (b.1838, the fourth son of John Wordsworth, d.1913), a mariner who probably arrived in Australia about 1863 and died after some time on the goldfields. Charles Wordsworth had in his possession at least one book from Wordsworth's library, which bears Mary Wordsworth's signature and a note of gift to him, as well as Southey's initials and Edward Quillinan's signature.⁵

The Melbourne manuscript remains, then, the only manuscript in Wordsworth's own hand. It is written out on a single sheet, approximately 9½ inches by 7½ inches - the neatly torn half of a crown sheet. Rub marks indicate that at one time the sheet was folded in half crosswise, and then in thirds, to permit folding in. A transcript follows, which may be compared with the accompanying photograph. That the lines are spaced out to fill the sheet and signed and dated with great care, despite Wordsworth's weakening eyesight, is an indication of their importance to him.

Strange contrasts have we in this world of ours!
 That posture, and the look of filial love
 Thinking of past and gone, with what is left
 Dearly united, might be swept away
 From this fair Portrait's fleshly Archetype,
 Even by an innocent fancy's slightest freak
 Banished, nor ever haply be restored
 To their lost place, or meet in harmony
 So exquisite; but here do they abide
 Enshrined for ages. Is not then the Art
 Godlike, a humble branch of the divine
 In visible quest of immortality

Strange contrasts have we in this world of ours!
 That profane, and the look of filial love
 Thinking of past and gone, with what is left
 Dearly united, might be swept away
 From this fair Portraits' fleshy prototype,
 Even by an innocent fancy, slightest peevish
 Vanished, nor ever happily be restored
 To their best place or meet in harmony
 So exquisite; but here do they abide
 Endured for ages. So not then the Art
 Godlike, a humble branch of the divine
 In visible quest of immortality
 Shet off forth with trembling hope?

Orydel Mount
 22 Febr. 1896

In whom do we live.

Stretch'd forth with trembling hope?

W^m Wordsworth

Rydal Mount
22 Febr'y - 1836

The variants from the fair copy and printed text are individually slight,⁶ but (except for the superfluous full point at the end of the first line) together suggest revision rather than haste and so support the view that Wordsworth regarded the lines as able to stand on their own.

The date of 22 February 1836 means that the lines were written out after *Yarrow Revisited* but before work was well under way for the 1836-7 collected edition volume, again indicating the intention of a separate poem. Such use of extracted material is not, of course, unfamiliar in Wordsworth's work. Although the better known examples occur earlier, vision and revision characterise his life.

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NOTES

1. I am grateful to Trevor Mills, Rare Books Librarian of Fisher Library, University of Sydney, for drawing my attention to this manuscript; to Barbara Carrol, Rare Books Librarian in the State Library of Victoria, for making it available for inspection; and to the State Library for permission to publish.
2. *Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* ed. E. de Selincourt, 5 vols., Oxford, 1940-49, iv, 120-4.
3. *Poetical Works* iv, 429.
4. For information about these holdings I am grateful to Jeffrey Cowton, Research Assistant at the Wordsworth Library.
5. An account of Charles Wordsworth is given in an unpublished paper in my possession by the late Alfred Hart of Melbourne.
6. The variants are: 1. 79, full point following exclamation mark; 1. 85, no comma between 'ever' and 'haply'; 1. 87, 'here' not italicised; 1.89 and 1.90, no comma at end of lines; 1. 91, 'Stretch'd'.

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