

Mighty Poets: Hartley Coleridge and William Wordsworth

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“[H]e is a man of inimitable Power,” William Wordsworth wrote to Edward Moxon in June 1839.¹ A few months later, on February 21 1840, he explained: “I admire his Genius and talents far more than I could find words to express” (Hill V.1005). The subject of these letters was Hartley Coleridge and they portray a relationship with Wordsworth that has remained obscured behind more familiar accounts that characterise Hartley, in Wordsworth’s words, as “a bairn that needed managing to the end.”² In fact, Hartley and Wordsworth were mutually admiring as well as critical of each other’s life and work: their relationship was both more complex and more significant than has previously been acknowledged.

My most straightforward claim here is that to overlook the complexities of Hartley’s and Wordsworth’s personal and poetic relationships does both authors a significant disservice. Rejecting Hartley as little more than a drunken, tragic failure overcome by the burdens of his literary inheritance is to obscure someone considered by his contemporaries one of the finest poets of his generation. In turn, Hartley’s poems to Wordsworth offer a valuable record of the poetic authority Wordsworth enjoyed in his later years. For Hartley, this power seemed to retrospectively age Wordsworth, so that the famous poems from Wordsworth’s youth seemed to have been written by someone prematurely old; Hartley claimed to his mother that he could not

¹ William Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, vols V-VI, edited by Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979-82), VI. 711.

² Don Paterson, “Enthusiasms: Hartley Coleridge, 1796-1849,” *Poetry*, 187, no. 6 (2006): 490-2; 491.

“conceive [Wordsworth] to have ever been a youth either in mind or body.”³ Hartley wrote against a critical tradition that, as Tim Fulford has shown, has prioritised youth at the expense of the late poems that were more widely read in Wordsworth’s own lifetime.⁴ By advancing a type of elderly Romantic poet, Hartley might be read as an important early precursor to scholarship that has only recently begun to recognise the significance of age in Romanticism.⁵ His poetic addresses to Wordsworth offer incisive, and rare, critiques on the poet’s later years and encourage re-readings of Wordsworth’s career that include old age as a vital stage in the growth of the poet’s mind. Hartley’s poems invert Wordsworth’s representations of childhood and apply similar tropes to later life.

In writing Wordsworth, Hartley was partaking in a tradition that Wordsworth’s writing on Hartley had started. The poems Hartley addressed to Wordsworth turned the tables on the established dynamics of their relationship. Wordsworth’s poems about Hartley had considered how creativity manifested in the young. In turn, Hartley’s addresses to Wordsworth ask how poetic feeling and imaginative vision operate in the elderly. Hartley discovered that both stages of life share correspondences in their creative modes, and his addresses to Wordsworth reclaim a kind of poetics that High Romanticism had disparaged. In short, Hartley used Wordsworth to establish a type of Romantic aging, just as Wordsworth had used Hartley as the archetypal Romantic child.

³ Letter to Sarah Coleridge: February 17 1832, in *Letters of Hartley Coleridge*, edited by Grace Evelyn Griggs and Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 136.

⁴ Tim Fulford, *The Late Poetry of the Lake Poets: Romanticism Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1-3.

⁵ See, for instance, Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) and Heike Hartung, *Ageing, Gender and Illness in Anglophone Literature: Narrating Age in the Bildungsroman* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016).

Hartley – “poet’s son and poet,” as Herbert Hartman memorably styled him – was central to the Romantic project.⁶ Molly Lefebure writes that “[p]erhaps no other child in the history of literature was ever so essential a strain in the voice of great poetry as was Hartley Coleridge,” but perhaps, too, no other child had such a great literary burden to carry.⁷ As an infant, Hartley inspired several important poems, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Nightingale,” “Frost at Midnight” and the conclusion to the second part of “Christabel,” as well as Wordsworth’s “To H.C. Six Years Old.” These poems each created a pervasive myth of Hartley as a “faery thing” (“Christabel” 658), an otherworldly being who seemed ill-suited to mortal, human existence.⁸ Ann Fadiman argues that a “penumbra of impossible expectation began to settle around Hartley’s head,” and she thinks that the weight of these expectations did Hartley irreversible damage.⁹ In fact, much of Hartley’s adult career would be spent attempting to negotiate these expectations in ways that allowed him to incorporate them into his own autonomous poetics.

To Hartley’s contemporaries, Wordsworth’s poem seemed to capture Hartley’s enchanting strangeness. Chauncey Hare Townsend, who met Hartley at Greta Hall in 1818, wrote that he felt how “exactly Mr. Wordsworth must have delineated” Hartley as a being who seemed not quite to belong in this world.¹⁰ In 1829, Samuel Taylor Coleridge declared that those “delightful lines” gave him “a feeling of awe, blended with tenderer emotions – so prophetic

⁶ Herbert Hartman, *Hartley Coleridge: Poet’s Son and Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931).

⁷ Molly Lefebure, *Private Lives of the Ancient Mariner: Coleridge and his Children* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 176.

⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works*, vol. I, edited by J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 503.

⁹ Ann Fadiman, “The Oakling and the Oak: The Tragedy of the Coleridges,” in *Letter Writing Among Poets: From William Wordsworth to Elizabeth Bishop*, edited by Jonathan Ellis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 95-110; 99.

¹⁰ Hartley Coleridge, *Poems by Hartley Coleridge*, 2 vols., edited by Derwent Coleridge (London: Edward Moxon, 1851), I. lxxiv.

were they.”¹¹ In the years after Hartley’s loss of his fellowship at Oriel and his banishment back to the Lake District as an alcohol-sotted eccentric, prophecies like these seemed tragic.¹² When Derwent used “To H.C.” to introduce the “Memoir” in his edition of Hartley’s poems (*HCP* I. xxii), the poem seemed to anticipate Hartley’s adult failings and to reinforce Derwent’s construction of his brother as a talented man who was ill-equipped for adulthood (Nicola Healey concludes that Derwent considered Hartley to be too “fragmentary and derivative” to function as an independent creative being).¹³ The myth was that Wordsworth’s poem haunted Hartley. If it was the image that his friends thought suited him best, however, it was also the one from which Hartley was most keen to escape.

“To H.C. Six Years Old” established Hartley as a person who was preoccupied by his interior landscapes at the expense of engagement with the real world. The poem’s opening lines reveal a figure characterised by a strange, restless energy that coexists with an eerie stillness:

O thou! whose fancies from afar are brought;
Who of thy words dost make a mock apparel,
And fittest to unutterable thought
The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol;
Thou faery voyager! that dost float
In such clear water, that thy boat
May rather seem
To brood on air than on an earthly stream;

¹¹ Letter to William Sotheby: July 13 1829, in *Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Earl Leslie Griggs (London: Constable & Co., 1932), 428.

¹² Anya Taylor, *Bacchus in Romantic England: Writers and Drink, 1780-1830* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 147.

¹³ Nicola Healey, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge: The Poetics of Relationship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

Suspended in a stream as clear as sky,

Where earth and heaven do make one imagery ("To H.C. Six Years Old" 5-10).¹⁴

This passage has divided critics: Anya Taylor argues that the predictions in "To H.C." "reverberate gloomily" when read in conjunction with the sonnets Samuel Taylor wrote when Hartley was born.¹⁵ Lucy Newlyn, on the other hand, sees this version of Hartley as an "embodiment of perpetual joy" whose motionlessness "is not a sign of fixity, but proof of his creative stillness."¹⁶ She indicates that stillness is akin to calmness, but it is more sinister than that. In the definition of motion Samuel Taylor was beginning to develop at this time, motion meant life, but rest – or stillness – was equal to death.¹⁷ When read in this light, Samuel Taylor's declaration that Hartley was a "fairy elf – all life, all motion – indefatigable joy" is loaded; if Hartley is composed of motion, he is infused with poetic, creative energy.¹⁸ In "To H.C.," however, Hartley's gentle motion and his stillness alike indicate passivity: the "breeze-like motion" is a form of movement that is not quite strong enough to effect change. The faery voyager's stillness becomes a damning indictment by Wordsworth of Samuel Taylor's hopes for his son's future, and of Hartley's capacity to stir himself to success in the real world. Rather than being indicative of creativity, the stillness here reveals stagnation, or even blankness.

The faery voyager's stillness is reflected in the stream itself. In "To H.C.," the child is dematerialised; not only is he transformed into an ethereal "faery voyager," he is so immersed in the stream that he seems to occupy it in a supernatural way. He is not *on* the stream but *in* it, and

¹⁴ William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, edited by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984; repr. 2008), 246.

¹⁵ Anya Taylor, "'A Father's Tale': Coleridge Foretells the Life of Hartley," *Studies in Romanticism* 30, no. 1 (1991): 37-56; 44.

¹⁶ Lucy Newlyn, "The Little Actor and his Mock Apparel," *Wordsworth Circle* 14, no. 1 (1983): 30-9; 31.

¹⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. II, edited by Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 3156.

¹⁸ Letter to John Thelwall: January 23 1801, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. II, edited by Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 376.

as a result he seems to enter into the life of the water and share its characteristics. The stream's waters do not flow but are instead "clear," keeping Hartley in a moment of eerie stillness. Unlike the lakes in "Frost at Midnight," this stream does not reflect the "lovely shapes" through which the child might learn about the divine presence in nature ("Frost at Midnight" 59 in *STCPW* 456); its clarity is more indicative of vacuity than serenity. The lines mimic that lack of motion: "float" and "boat" are left suspended at the end of the lines on a page that is "as clear as sky." The "faery voyager," meanwhile, makes no mark on a stream that perfectly reflects the empty sky. The whispering sibilance ("Suspended in a stream as clear as sky") has a similar effect; it suggests a breeze brushing over the surface of the stream, but not disturbing it. This version of Hartley is without creativity of his own; he simply sits, caught between two blank canvases, and he makes a mark on neither. Like the "limber elf" in *Christabel*, this version of Hartley "never seeks" ("Christabel" 659 in *STCPW* 503 [original emphasis]); he, like his boat, can only "brood," not act. The image of serene contemplation that Newlyn draws out might quickly become an emblem of a child trapped by his own lack of agency.

Like in Samuel Taylor's "The Nightingale," where the infant's pre-verbal utterance "mars" the objects he seems to be trying to describe ("The Nightingale" 93 in *STCPW* 520), in "To H.C." the words Hartley uses make a "mock apparel" (my emphasis). As Taylor puts it, Hartley's early attempts at speech become "flawed rather than merely tentative" ("A Father's Tale" 44). Taylor thinks that Wordsworth's poem portrays Hartley as a derivative creature, and Hartley himself was painfully aware that he was usually read, at best, as what Harold Bloom summarily termed "a Wordsworthian minor poet."¹⁹ When Hartley responded to poems like "To H.C." in his verse, he was preoccupied with demonstrating his own poetic volition. Andrew Keanie has argued that Hartley's successes as a poet and essayist in his own right depended upon

¹⁹ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 198.

“emancipating himself” from the “ideal image” created by Samuel Taylor and Wordsworth.²⁰ His poetry articulates an ongoing process of negotiating these images and discovering an autonomous poetic identity. Hartley turned Wordsworth’s predictions back onto the elder poet; in Hartley’s later verse, Wordsworth becomes the derivative party, and Hartley the creative force.

Hartley’s verses on the “faery voyager” demonstrate how Wordsworth’s vision in “To H.C.” affected his creative processes, but indicate, too, ways in which he outgrew Wordsworth’s prophecy. Beatrice Turner has suggested of another set of poems that Hartley “mimics Wordsworth not in order [...] to acknowledge literary influence but to explore the consequences – at once literary, cultural and for his own inner psychology – of the manner of the Romantic child’s creation.”²¹ Hartley’s faery voyager undertakes precisely such an exploration. The untitled sonnet “How long I sail’d, and never took a thought” demonstrates how Hartley incorporated the “faery voyager” into his own poetic visions, but also reveals how he altered Wordsworth’s prophecies to suit his self-presentation. In Hartley’s poem, the “faery voyager” is not timeless and still. Instead, he is a victim of time’s unnoticed passage:

How long I sail’d, and never took a thought

To what port I was bound! Secure as sleep,

I dwelt upon the bosom of the deep

And perilous sea (“VIII – How long I sail’d, and never took a thought” 1-4).²²

This poem recalls the sibilance I uncovered in “To H.C.,” as in Wordsworth’s poem, the sibilance in this sonnet begins as an indication of the speaker’s lack of capacity to disturb a blank canvas. This mariner sleeps without a thought, and, like the “faery voyager,” does not interact

²⁰ Andrew Keanie, *Hartley Coleridge: A Reassessment of His Life and Work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 132.

²¹ Beatrice Turner, *Romantic childhood, Romantic heirs: Reproduction and retrospection 1820-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2017).

²² Hartley Coleridge, *Hartley Coleridge: New Poems*, edited by Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 8.

with the world around him. Here, though, that passivity is dangerous. The motion of the sea lulls the mariner into a false sense of security; he acts as though this wide, wide sea is as still as the Wordsworthian stream. Yet, the soothing rhyme of “sleep” and “deep” creates an echo that mimics the gentle repetition of the waves on a calm sea. That serenity is disrupted by the enjambment, which enacts formally the sea’s perilousness: the “deep” hides danger. There are echoes here, too, of Wordsworth’s *Immortality Ode*, another poem inspired – in part at least – by Hartley. Addressing the “six years’ darling of a pygmy size,” the speaker wonders about the child’s philosophical capabilities:

Thy soul’s immensity;
Thou best philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read’st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind, –

Mighty prophet! Seer blest! (“Ode” 109-14 in *Major Works* 300)

What Newlyn suggests of “To H.C.” is more apt here; this version of Hartley’s creativity is facilitated by his lack of engagement with the world. “[D]eaf and silent,” he reads – but does not comment upon – the “eternal deep.”

In his sonnet, Hartley re-imagines this “deep” as an expansion of the “stream as clear as sky,” and his realisation that it conceals peril alters the effect of the sibilance:

Nor changeful wind nor tide I heeded ought,
But joy’d to feel the merry billows leap,
And watch the sun-beams dallying with the waves;
Or haply dream what realms beneath may lie
Where the clear ocean is an emerald sky,
And mermaids warble in their coral caves,

Yet vainly woo me to their secret home; –

And sweet it were for ever so to roam (“VIII – How long I sail’d, and never took a thought” 7-14).

The sonnet’s sibilance gives way to the mermaids’ singing, and the speaker realises that the mermaids are actually sirens trying to lure him into a trap. Meanwhile, the consonance of “coral caves” disrupts the softer sounds of the rest of these lines, suggesting the sharp edges of the rocks concealed in the “deep.” Yet, this “faery voyager” is cannier than Wordsworth’s. Hartley imagines that the “faery voyager” has grown up; he sails, now, in a ship in the open sea, rather than a boat in a Lakeland stream, and he must seek a fairyland that is his own, rather than rest in one created by Wordsworth.

Fairyland offered Hartley a potent metaphor through which to express his creative independence in dialogue with the “ideal image[s]” that had characterised him as a child, and which continued to colour other people’s perceptions of him. Hartley’s Fairyland began in his act of reading Samuel Taylor’s and Wordsworth’s poems about himself, but it came to fruition when he wrote it into an autonomous imaginative space. His Fairyland, to adopt Stephen Bygrave’s suggestive term, was “meta-Romantic;” that is, it self-consciously appropriated existing tenets from Samuel Taylor’s and Wordsworth’s poetry, but transformed them into access points to a new, late-Romantic space.²³ Unlike those earlier Fairylands, Hartley’s was a carefully-contained, specifically-located vision: it was found late at night beside the fire at Nab Cottage. Hartley’s poem, “Fairy Land” (published posthumously in 1851), depicted the ageing poet’s imaginative space. The dramatic “I” in this poem is the elder “faery voyager,” and he analyses the long-term effects of the formative texts which shaped his early years. “Fairyland” is addressed to a reader well-versed in those “ideal images” perpetuated by Samuel Taylor and Wordsworth:

²³ Stephen Bygrave, “Land of the Giants: Gaps, Limits and Audiences in Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*,” in *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to texts and contexts, 1780-1832*, edited by Stephen Copley and John Whale (London: Routledge, 1992): 32-52; 33.

For, though I never was a citizen,
Enroll'd in Faith's municipality,
And ne'er believed the phantom of the fen
To be a tangible reality,
Yet I have loved sweet things, that are not now,
In frosty starlight or the cold moonbeam.

I never thought they were ("Fairy Land" 6-12 in *HCP* II. 162).

The "faery voyager" is now nothing more than a "phantom of the fen," a mythical being who haunts England's wild places. This speaker declares that he "never" believed in Samuel Taylor's or Wordsworth's constructions of his childhood, though he accepts that he did love some of the things they wrote about. The semi-colon in the middle of the line ("I never thought they were; and therefore now") indicates the imaginative gap between the Fairyland of these precursor texts, where Hartley "never was a citizen," and the Fairyland which he now claims for himself.

Hartley relocates his Fairyland; for him, it is not outside, whether in an "earthly stream" or beneath the "quiet moon" ("Frost at Midnight" 74 in *STCPW* 456). Rather, this Fairyland is inside:

[I]t was always by the glimmering hearth,
When the last fagot gave its reddest glow,
And voice of eld wax'd tremulous and low,
And the sole taper's intermittent light,
Like a slow-tolling bell, declared good night ("Fairy Land" 16-20).

The "voice of eld" Hartley hears beside the fire is a threefold figure: it is simultaneously the Samuel Taylor of 1798, a figure of elder times sitting by the fire with his firstborn by his side; the present, ageing Hartley; and the contemporary, elderly Wordsworth. A letter Sara Coleridge

wrote to Hartley on March 30 1847, in which she described a meeting with the Wordsworths, perhaps contains a clue as to the composition date of this poem:

Mr W. is much more vigorous [than Mary]: (her *voice* is so faint and low.) but [*sic*] perhaps more altered in *mind* – certainly very much more *altered*. He continually lapses into a kind of doze. Sometimes he brightens up a little; but at best he presents the faintest possible shadow of his former self. Indeed when he talks the best, it seems but the repetition and re-continuance of what was said before – as if he remembered what he used to think and say and by habit repeated it, than that any original process of thought went on within his mind now.²⁴

The similarity in diction between Sara’s description of Mary Wordsworth’s voice as being “faint and low” and Hartley’s metre-appropriate “tremulous and low” suggests that “Fairy Land” was written soon after Hartley received this letter. More importantly, Sara’s letter and Hartley’s poem imply a reversal of roles: now, it is Hartley who is the original, generative poet and Wordsworth who can only imitate.

Hartley explores his own progression from a Wordsworthian figure to a poet writing in conversation with his precursors, as well as what he perceives as Wordsworth’s reverse transformation, in a series of poems addressed to Wordsworth written between c.1830 and 1845. This period was a crucial one for Hartley personally; it was in these years that he settled into enough of a routine to write, and publish, regularly. Consequently, he was increasingly able in these years to assert his poetic independence, and the series charts his personal poetic growth alongside evolutions in his relationship with Wordsworth.

²⁴ Sara Coleridge, *The Regions of Sara Coleridge’s Thought: Selected Literary Criticism*, edited by Peter Swaab (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 87.

When Hartley began writing this series of poems in 1830, his relationships with the Wordsworths were fraught. It was an exceptionally difficult year for Hartley: two of the local landlords – one at the Royal Oak in Ambleside and the other at the Red Lion in Grasmere – killed themselves within weeks of each other. Hartley had known both well, and had stayed regularly with Jonathan Bell at the Red Lion. Because of these bereavements, Hartley’s lifestyle had become even more erratic than usual. The Wordsworths arranged new accommodation for him and attempted to regulate his lifestyle. The search for lodgings was not easy; few landlords wanted the responsibility of taking care of Hartley. Eventually, on March 5 1830, Dorothy wrote to Sarah Coleridge that she could “have at length the satisfaction of being able to say something decisive concerning your poor Hartley, and more satisfactory for you than till the present time has been in my power” (Hill V. 208). She records how Hartley had finally turned up again after a long absence; he had disappeared on one of his “wanderings,” and arrived at the local doctor’s “faint and hungry.” The doctor, William Fell, took him to the Red Lion, paid for his bed and breakfast, and informed the Wordsworths that Hartley had been found. It was in the Lion’s interests to dispatch Hartley to them as speedily as possible; the Wordsworths had sent instructions to the local landlords that no money would be forthcoming from Hartley’s friends or family to cover any costs Hartley incurred. The Wordsworths made it clear that if the landlords served him, or let him stay, it was tantamount to an agreement that they would pay for Hartley out of their own pockets. His existing accounts amounted to no small sum; Dorothy records that Hartley’s current bill at the Red Lion amounted to £49 13s – even with the landlord’s generous deduction of 6d a day, and several nights’ free board (Hill V. 210).

The new lodgings that Dorothy described to Sarah were with “old Mr and Mrs James Fleming” at Rose Cottage, Town End – next door to the Wordsworths’ former home. Dorothy described the cottage as “small,” with a garden that “looks towards Thomas Ashburner’s old Barn at the Town End, and the front of the house, with a little court before it towards the new

Road and the Lake” (Hill V. 209). Hartley “poured out thanks and promises,” and stipulated his terms:

He was quite satisfied with his lodgings in all respects – had agreed with Mrs F. that he must dine alone at his hour, and have a room to sit in alone, with a fire when necessary, to do his work. They had not fixed their terms, but he thought that she would do all for £40, and we think she will not be willing to take less, or that we ought to require it – in consideration of the extra accommodations of separate dinner and private sitting-room (Hill V. 209).

Dorothy noted in a postscript that nowhere else could be found for Hartley “at and near Ambleside” owing to Hartley’s “habits.” £40 seemed like the cheapest, reasonable sum to offer a landlord and lady willing to put up with Hartley’s drinking and erratic hours, not to mention the responsibility of locating him on the frequent occasions when he didn’t make it home.

Under this new arrangement, Hartley became unusually productive. In March 1831, Dorothy told his mother that Hartley had received several sums of £10 from Blackwood’s for essays he had written, and that James Fleming kept a “small surplus” of it for Hartley to use when needed (Hill V. 369). Although Dorothy records that Hartley still disappeared for short periods once every two or three months, he wrote steadily and became “pretty regular.” Dorothy notes with satisfaction that it was “very pleasing to hear how affectionately James Fleming and his Wife speak of Hartley” (Hill V. 369). His long-promised volume of poems was published in 1833, as was a collection of essays titled *Biographia Borealis; or, Lives of Distinguished Northerners*. Aside from a brief period of residence in Leeds in 1832-33, Hartley stayed with the Flemings until Mrs Fleming died in 1837.

Notwithstanding their help – or perhaps because of what Hartley viewed as their interference – for much of the 1830s Hartley largely avoided the Wordsworths. William suspected that he was “ashamed” of his over-enjoyment of “*Pot house* wanderings,” and was “shy

in coming to us lest we should reproach him *inwardly*, for he knows very well that we should not teize him with censorial comments upon a custom which has become a sort of second nature to him” (Letter to Edward Moxon: December 8 1833 in Hill V. 669). They had learned their lessons from their fallings out with Samuel Taylor, and were more willing to accept Hartley, alcoholism and all. Wordsworth even seems to have invented excuses to check in on Hartley; in September 1835, Hartley wrote to his mother that Wordsworth had called on him: “what do you think for? to borrow a razor as he had not shaved that morning, and bethought him to call on the Parrys” (HCL 176). By this point, their relationship had evidently become cordial on both sides.

Throughout the 1830s, Hartley’s opinion of Wordsworth – and sense of his own poetic place in relation to him – changed considerably. Hartley could not but notice that the hordes of tourists who began to visit Rydal over the next thirty years had started to arrive with reasonable regularity, and whose antics Stephen Gill and Saeko Yoshikawa have explored in detail.²⁵ Hartley suspected that these displays of readerly adoration had made fame go to Wordsworth’s head. He found the tourists’ fascination with Wordsworth – and, indeed, Wordsworth’s fascination with himself – ironic, since by 1830 he was of the opinion that Wordsworth was no longer much of a poet. A letter to Derwent from August 1830 summarised his discontents:

W.W. to me seems yearly less of the Poet, and more of the respectable, talented, hospitable Country gentleman. Unfortunately, his weakest points, his extreme irritability of self-approration and parsimony of praise to contemporary authors are much *in statu quo*. This is a little ungrateful, for he always applauds my attempts; but what he would do, if they were favourites with the public, no matter (HCL 111).

²⁵ See Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Saeko Yoshikawa, *William Wordsworth and the Invention of Tourism, 1820-1900* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014).

Nevertheless, Hartley was moved by the evidence that Wordsworth's influence was spreading rapidly: "it must delight every lover of mankind to see how the influence of Wordsworth's poetry is diverging, spreading over society, operating upon thousands, who haply, never read, or will read, a single page of his fine Volumes" (*HCL* 112).

The poems to Wordsworth explored this tension between Hartley's ongoing professional admiration of Wordsworth and his more complicated personal feelings. The scant existing scholarship on these poems has viewed them as straightforward celebrations of Wordsworth by one of his minor imitators. Albert Morton Turner anticipated almost a century of scholarship when he wrote of them in 1923 that "higher praise is scarcely possible" than that of Hartley for Wordsworth in his poems to the bard.²⁶ More recent criticism has been more perceptive: Healey's comment that Hartley's poetry "often alternates between reverence for and opposition to William Wordsworthian poetics" is particularly applicable to the series of poems Hartley addressed to Wordsworth between 1830 and 1845.²⁷

In fact, the poems reveal evolutions in a complex poetic and personal relationship. Like the "faery voyager" poems, this series indicates how Hartley used his poetic responses to Wordsworth to explore his own creative independence. The poems spoke back to Wordsworth's textualisations of the child Hartley by offering poeticised versions of the aging bard. Hartley was particularly critical of Wordsworth's self-fashioning, and his series to Wordsworth combines critical perceptiveness of the poet with personal knowledge of the man. The poems are preoccupied with the tension that was central to his relationship with Wordsworth: that between Wordsworth's ego – supplemented, in these later years, by his fame – and Hartley's personal connections to him.

²⁶ Albert Morton Turner, "Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philosophy* 22, no. 4 (1923): 538-57; 540.

²⁷ Nicola Healey, "The Reception of Hartley Coleridge's poetry, from 1833 to the Present," *Romanticism* 16, no. 1 (2010): 25-42; 26.

The underlying question in Hartley's poems recalls Wordsworth's in the "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:" what – or rather, in Hartley's terms, *who* – is a poet? In Hartley's thought, as in Keats's, the most important attribute of the canonical poet was the ability to disguise their sense of self. Hartley maintained that the poet should stand for democracy, and should "speak, in short, for the whole state of human nature, not for that particular plot of it which they themselves inherit."²⁸ This was a trait that Hartley found in Wordsworth's poetry, but Hartley worried that Wordsworth's writing was perpetually on the verge of becoming individualistic. Healey rightly observes that Hartley uses Wordsworth to "criticize the egotistical tendencies of a poet" and to "reach a greater understanding of the role of the poet in general;" indeed, she suspects that Hartley's poem "Who is the Poet?" was also a reflection on and about Wordsworth (*Poetics* 101). "Who is the Poet?" suggests that the *true* poet is "the man whose lines | Live in the souls of men like household words" (1-2 in *HCP* I. 150), and who combines "eldest truth" with "each day's product" (4-5). The poet, by this sonnet's reckoning, combines truth and "virtue" with everyday experiences, and "instructs the infant spirit" (8-9) on a quest towards divinity. Above all, the poet's virtue is "fraught with sweetness" (14), and it is through such gentleness that the poet can successfully locate themselves in the divine order of the natural world. Hartley rejects the High Romantic poet who is defined by imagination, power and genius. Instead, he posits a late Romantic figure whose priorities should be the wisdom and gentleness that Hartley believes are more suitable for later life.

Wordsworth became Hartley's prime example for the transformation of the High Romantic into the late Romantic poet. Hartley's poems to Wordsworth explore his personal doubt that Wordsworth was still interested in being "a man speaking to men," and they assess

²⁸ Hartley Coleridge, *Essays and Marginalia*, 2 vols., edited by Derwent Coleridge (London: Edward Moxon, 1851), I. 4.

the elder writer's success in fulfilling Hartley's exacting definition for the true poet.²⁹ As with "How long I sail'd," the first poem to Wordsworth indicates Hartley's difficulties in negotiating Wordsworth's poetic legacy. The sonnet appears to acknowledge his pride about Wordsworth's increasing readership and resultant fame:

There have been poets that in verse display
The elemental forms of human passions:
Poets have been, to whom the fickle fashions
And all the wilful humours of the day
Have furnished matter for a polish'd lay:
And many are the smooth elaborate tribe
Who, emulous of thee, the shape describe,
And fain would every shifting hue pourtray
Of restless Nature. But, thou mighty Seer!
'Tis thine to celebrate the thoughts that make
The life of souls, the truths for whose sweet sake
We to ourselves and to our God are dear.
Of Nature's inner shrine thou art the priest,
Where most she works when we perceive her least (*HCP* I. 19).

Andrew Keanie thinks that this sonnet "is the cohobated juice of an incisive critique [...] it is a more condensed blend of the primary aspects of a master essayist: intimacy and critical distance" (99). It also combines poetic praise with the essayist's subtle wit: this is a sonnet from the poet

²⁹ William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. I, edited by W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 138.

who in another mood wrote that, if Shakespeare was the Swan of Avon, Wordsworth – “being born at Cockermouth” – should be referred to as the “great Goose of Cocker” (*New Poems* 101).

The sonnet’s critique of Wordsworth’s egotistical sublime implies that Wordsworth can see into the life of things, but that there is a danger in doing so: in looking inward, Hartley suggests, Wordsworth might neglect to look outwards, and misunderstand human nature as a result. In light of Hartley’s letters from this period, we might suspect him of a certain degree of irreverent irony when he declares Wordsworth to be a “mighty Seer.” This epithet is borrowed from the *Intimations Ode* where – as I suggested earlier – it referred to Hartley himself. In this sonnet, Hartley revises Wordsworth’s description of the “six years’ darling” and applies it, instead, to a sixty years’ bard. The “mighty Seer” in Wordsworth’s poem was “deaf and silent,” and when read through these lines Hartley’s epithet becomes less than complimentary.

In a note to the sonnet’s last two lines, Hartley acknowledges that they were inspired by one of Wordsworth’s sonnets, “It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free.” Wordsworth’s sonnet describes a “holy time” that finds “the gentleness of heaven [...] on the sea” (1-5). Wordsworth impels his reader:

Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder – everlastingly.
Dear child! dear girl, that walkest with me here!
If thou appearest untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not, therefore, less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham’s bosom all the year,
And worshipp’st at the temple’s inner shrine,
God being with thee when we knew it not (6-14 in *Major Works* 281).

This sonnet, like “To H.C. Six Years Old” and the *Intimations Ode*, was composed in 1802; according to Gill, the “dear child” is Caroline Vallon (*Major Works* 709). This poem reveals an alternative to the “faery voyager;” both poems consider a child who seems thoughtless, but who is nevertheless deeply connected to God (in Caroline’s case) or nature (in Hartley’s). Like “To H.C.” and the *Intimations Ode*, Gill suggests that this sonnet begins to consider how the “shades of the prison house” close in on the growing child (*Major Works* 709). Both children suggest to Wordsworth that something divine is omnipresent, so long as the mind is open enough to perceive it.

A manuscript version of Hartley’s sonnet, unpublished in his lifetime, offers a more mature reflection on Wordsworth’s poetic vision that is more generous about the lessons Hartley attributes to his reading of Wordsworth. If Hartley as a “little child” – as the final stanza of *Christabel* suggests – “always finds and never seeks” (659), the adult Hartley suggests that it was Wordsworth who taught him how to seek. In other words, reading Wordsworth taught Hartley how to discover meaning in nature. The revised sonnet ends:

But thou mighty Seer
Ill can they know, thy own peculiar merit –
Who cannot find, in all things that appear
The hidden might of aye-creating spirit;
Thankful am I – to thee, and such as thee,
For more than half the beauty that I see (9-14 in *New Poems* 4).

This version of the Seer is able to uncover hidden divinities in everyday things in the way that Hartley identified as being a primary role of the poet. Without the hyperbole of the published version, this ending quietly acknowledges Wordsworth’s influence over the way that Hartley sees – and writes – the world.

A later sonnet, written about Rydal in 1842, develops this concluding thought: “’Tis Nature teaching what she never knew; | The beautiful is good, the good is true” (“Rydal” 13-14 in *HCP* II. 19). Hartley uses Wordsworthian thinking to explain why beauty should be truth, and truth beauty. As Hartley put it in his essay “On the Poetical Use of Heathen Mythology,” the “beautiful imaginations” inspired by Platonic philosophy seek in their “own great soul[s] for the substance of all shadows” and discover “something that elevates; something that calls man out of himself, and persuades him to make interest with nature” (*Essays and Marginalia* I. 32). The couplet realises this Platonic thought by combining a Wordsworthian vision with a Keatsian axiom to generate a Hartley Coleridgean interpretation of the relationship between man and nature. To get from the simmering resentment of the original sonnet from the 1833 *Poems* to this confident declaration of autonomous poetic intent, Hartley needed to discover a creative stance that conversed with Wordsworth’s, but remained independent from it.

Hartley’s confidence in his own poetic powers grew as his publications began to gain attention. When he returned from a short residence in Leeds in 1833 as a widely praised published poet, his relations with the Wordsworths entered a more peaceable phase. The *Quarterly Review* had gone so far as to declare him the best new poet since Byron’s death seven years before (Healey “The Reception” 25). Wordsworth was also complimentary about Hartley’s collection; he wrote to Alexander Dyce in December 1833 that he thought it a great shame that none of Hartley’s poems had been published prior to 1833, when Dyce’s *Specimens of English Sonnets* appeared, since he considered several of Hartley’s sonnets to be “well worthy of a place in it” (Hill V. 665). Indeed, for the remainder of the nineteenth century, Hartley was recognised as being an important Lake Poet in his own right. In 1874, a lecture by the Reverend W. G. Beardmore placed Hartley alongside Wordsworth and Southey as the region’s three most important poets; the *York Review* summarised that he claimed for Hartley “a social, and poetic,

and domestic interest scarcely inferior” to his uncle and Wordsworth.³⁰ By 1891, Samuel Waddington, the editor of a collection of the most significant English sonnets, could make the uncontested declaration that Hartley was the second best English sonneteer after Shakespeare (Healey “The Reception” 25).

The commendations Hartley had begun to receive about his poetry combined with another important fact: Wordsworth was getting older, and from the mid-1830s the tables steadily turned in their poetic relationship – in private, at least, if not in the eyes of reviewers and critics. When the *Quarterly Review* scolded Hartley for his “overweening worship of Wordsworth” (Healey “The Reception” 25), Hartley was incensed on Wordsworth’s behalf as well as his own: he raged, “why, in the Devil’s name cannot they review my book, gentle or simple [*sic*], without a fling at poor Wordsworth, who by the way is sadly afflicted in his eyes?” (Letter to Henry Nelson Coleridge: September 29 1833 in *HCL* 151-2). That epithet – “poor Wordsworth” – mimics the term that, as Hartley well knew, was ordinarily used of him. It indicates a shift in the dynamics, as well as what Healey calls the “poetics,” of their relationship as both men aged (*Poetics* 11).

Hartley was significantly more magnanimous about Wordsworth from the mid-1830s. He thought that Wordsworth’s “character, like his poetry, [was] much softened by age” (Letter to Sarah Coleridge: January 1836 in *HCL* 186). While this was partly a critique on Wordsworth’s abilities, it was also a comment on the gentleness Hartley perceived in Wordsworth’s poems and character in this decade. He declared to his mother that the poems in *Yarrow Revisited* (1835) were:

nothing like the Ode on Immortality or the finer parts of the Excursion, there is
neither the same profundity of thought nor the same solar warmth of feeling – but
there is a vein of tenderness, sweetness, and beauty which is almost new. It is

³⁰ Nicola Healey, “‘In weakness strength:’ The Problem of Alcohol in the Reception of Hartley Coleridge’s Life and Work,” *Coleridge Bulletin* NS 48 (2016): 57-80; 77.

natural for an old man, and such our revered friend now is, to withdraw alike from intensity of intellectual exertion and perturbation of feeling. [...] Most delightful it is that Wordsworth has opened for himself a path so well suited to his declining years (Letter to Sarah Coleridge: January 1836 in *HCL* 186).

It is this version of the poet – a “tender” and “sweet” old man – that Hartley celebrates in his later poems to Wordsworth. Rather than an ailing, superannuated figure, Wordsworth emerges in Hartley’s later works as a bard whose age provides him with a new perspective on the relationship between life and poetry.

In the sonnet titled “To William Wordsworth” (1839), Hartley describes the kind of joy that became a central tenet of Victorian appreciations of Wordsworth. Published for the first time in the posthumous 1851 edition of Hartley’s poems, the sonnet seemed to confirm his status as a worshipper of Wordsworth:

Yes, mighty Poet, we have read thy lines,
And felt our hearts the better for the reading.
A friendly spirit, from thy soul proceeding,
Unites our souls; the light from thee that shines
Like the first break of morn, dissolves, combines
All creatures with a living flood of beauty.
For thou hast proved that purest joy is duty,
And love a fondling, that the trunk entwines
Of sternest fortitude. Oh, what must be
Thy glory here, and what the huge reward
In that blest region of thy poesy?
For as long as man exists, immortal Bard,

Friends, husbands, wives, in sadness or in glee,
Shall love each other more for loving thee (*HCP* II. 17).

This sonnet's primary focus is on the "love" that Wordsworth's poetry communicates. Hartley suggests here that Wordsworth's playful claim to Dorothy in 1798 that joy "from heart to heart is stealing" ("Lines Written at a Small Distance From My House" 22 in *Major Works* 55) has expanded to include the huge community of Wordsworth's readers. A manuscript version of this poem, dated 1842, suggested that the "friendly spirit" proceeded from Wordsworth's "lines." By contrast, in the version Derwent published Hartley's claim is more personal: the "light" shines from Wordsworth's very soul. Another change from the manuscript is similarly telling. In the fourth line, a full stop is changed to a semi-colon, affirming a union between Wordsworth's soul and his readers'. It is in that union that Hartley discovers the kind of joy that Matthew Arnold described eloquently a couple of decades later:

Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties; and because of the extraordinary power with which, in case after case, he shows us this joy, and renders it so as to make us share it.³¹

What Christopher Rovee suggests of Arnold's comment is applicable, too, to Hartley's sonnet: that is, for Arnold and this older, more settled Hartley, the intensity of Wordsworthian experience is such that "even in its inwardness, it is outward" (9). In other words, like in the revised version of the earlier poem, in the second sonnet Hartley suggests that Wordsworth's portrayals of his own subjective experiences are so powerful that they become universally

³¹ Quoted in Christopher Rovee, "Solitude and Sociability: *Wordsworth on Helvellyn*," *Literature Compass* 1 (2004): 1-14; 8.

applicable through their capacity to teach readers how, like him, to discover joy in the natural world.

In a manuscript draft, this sonnet is one third of a triple sonnet. Derwent published them as three distinct sonnets – “To Wordsworth,” “To the Same” and “Rydal” – in the 1851 collection. The manuscript, dated April 24-27 1842, suggests that Hartley wrote – or at least revised – these poems in honour of Wordsworth’s seventy-second birthday. “To the Same” expands on the sentiments of “To Wordsworth” in a tone of affectionate hyperbole. Hartley places Wordsworth alongside Homer, the archetypal bard:

And those whose lot may never be to meet
Kin souls combined in bodies sever’d far,
As if thy Genius were a potent star,
Ruling their life at solemn hours and sweet
Of secret sympathy, do they not greet
Each other kindly, when the deep full line
Hath ravish’d both – high as the haunt divine
And presence of celestial Paraclete?
Three thousand years have passed since Homer spake,
And many thousand hearts have bless’d his name,
And yet I love them all for Homer’s sake,
Child, woman, man, that e’er have felt his flame:
And thine, great Poet, is like power to bind
In love far distant ages of mankind (*HCP* II. 18).

Hartley declares that Wordsworth’s influence is like Homer’s, in that it creates a community of readers who are bound together in love. Hartley continues to be gently ironic, though; here, the “deep full line” that unites Wordsworth’s readers is described in a line that is not full, since it is

not end-stopped. The poem plays with Hartley's earlier resentments towards Wordsworth; the enjambment that separates "bind" from "In love" in the final couplet creates a moment of suspense wherein to be bound appears to imply imprisonment, before the revelation that this is a benign, even willing, entrapment.

The final poem in Hartley's series maintains this celebratory tone, and was addressed to "W.W., on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday." This poem – a playful lyric in rhyming couplets – is a less complicated, more generous celebration of a man whom, Hartley suggests, would be great even without his poetic fame:

Happy the year, the month that finds alive
A worthy man in health at seventy-five.
Were he a man no further known than loved,
And but for unremember'd deeds approved,
A gracious boon it were from God to earth
To leave that good man by his humble hearth.
But if the man be one whose virtuous youth,
Loving all Nature, was in love with truth;
And with the fervour of religious duty
Sought in all shapes the very form of beauty; -
Feeling the current of the tuneful strain,
Joy in his heart, and light upon his brain,
Knew that the gift was given, and not in vain;
Whose careful manhood never spared to prune
Too wise to be ashamed to grow more wise;
Culling the truth from specious fallacies: –

Then may the world rejoice to find alive

So good, so great a man, at seventy-five (*HCP* II. 149).

Hartley again affirms a Wordsworthian-Keatsian-Coleridgean connection between joy, beauty and truth. Here, though, he makes clear the difference between Wordsworth and Keats. Whereas Keats equates truth and beauty, Hartley's neo-Platonic reading finds that Wordsworth could discover truth as an inherent part of nature. Beauty, in Hartley's assessment, is a by-product of the Wordsworthian quest after truth. This is a joyful sonnet: it is a celebration of Wordsworth's long life and much-beloved capacity to inspire joy in others. It is a celebration, too, of the fact that the poet should have lived long enough to be revered in an old age that, in Hartley's opinion, had focused on a long-overdue recognition of his youthful successes. More than that, Hartley celebrates Wordsworth's ongoing capacity to "grow more wise;" he indicates that the poetic faculties that defined Wordsworth's youth are still evident in age, notwithstanding popular opinions to the contrary.³² Hartley's main claim here is that Wordsworth is still as "good" and "great" at seventy-five as he had been half a century earlier.

When Hartley died of pneumonia in January 1849, a devastated Wordsworth organised for him to be buried in a plot just beside his family's, where Wordsworth himself was buried a little over a year later. Derwent approved, writing in the "Memoir" that it was appropriate that Hartley should "spend his latter days, as it were, under the shadow and at the foot of that great poet, his father's friend [...] with whom his own infancy and boyhood had been so closely linked" (*HCP* cxxx). As I have revealed here, Hartley's adulthood was also "closely linked" with Wordsworth. Although Hartley has remained in Wordsworth's formidable poetic shadow, the extent to which he has been dismissed as a mere imitator of Wordsworth is unjust. In fact, Hartley was one of Wordsworth's earliest critical readers. Hartley's poetic assessments of

³² Samantha Matthews, "Wordsworth's Mortal Remains," *The Wordsworth Circle* 34, no. 1 (2002): 35-39; 35.

Wordsworth reveal a writer who discovered his own poetic power in part through negotiating this complicated relationship. More than that, Hartley offers incisive commentaries on Wordsworth that open up new lines of inquiry into the late Wordsworth and, indeed, late Romanticism.

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