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RESEARCH PAPER

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VISUALIZING POVERTY IN WORDSWORTH'S POETRY

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This paper departs from the assumption that Wordsworth's poetry is highly visual in its quality and it focuses on his three "great period" poems, "Michael", "The Old Cumberland Beggar" and "Resolution and Independence" (1798–1805) to show how Wordsworth represents poverty. By taking as its starting point some New Historicist readings of these poems (Simpson, Pfau, Connell, Liu) which highlighted Wordsworth's blindness to social reality of the poor, it wants to enlarge the scope of historicist readings by introducing the framework of the New Poverty Studies (Korte, Christ). Furthermore, it insists on the assumption that the Romantic need to visualize landscape in the picturesque form becomes an important strategy of "configuring" (Korte) the reality of the poor. In other words, the way in which the poor are represented in Wordsworth's poetry tells us something about practical engagements with poverty in late eighteenth-century England. Also, Wordsworth's position of a middle-class observer who builds the tension between the seen and the deliberately unseen aspects of his social surrounding, show us how Wordsworth unconsciously falls under the spell of a larger class-related sensibility and thus fails in his humanitarian project.

Key words: William Wordsworth, New Historicism, New Poverty Studies, the picturesque

This essay takes its orientation from the assumption that Wordsworth's poetry is visual, specifically in the sense that Coleridge linked his inspiration to the "despotism of the eye". Indeed, for Wordsworth eyes and ears were gates of perception and the visual quality of his best poetry is summarized by his lines from "Expostulation and Reply" in which "The eye—it cannot choose but see" (17). In that sense there is a clear link between words and images that these words convey to a late eighteenth-century middle-class reader. If Wordsworth was at the time "sketching his intellectual landscape" (in Keats's phrase), he was able to do so from the position of material security and his middle-class aesthetic competence. Therefore, it becomes essential

to examine how such competence relates to the poor characters, he so often depicted in his poetry. The paper examines three poems belonging to his great period poems (1798–1805): "Michael", "The Old Cumberland Beggar" and "Resolution and Independence". In Wordsworthian criticism these poems are usually seen as the embodiment of his revolutionary poetics, his allegiance to the goals of the French Revolution and the advocacy for the various categories of the rural poor. However, upon closer look, they lament the world of idealized rural bliss which, under the pressures of the Industrial Revolution and the Poor Laws debates, is soon to vanish. Wordsworth found himself in an ethical dilemma, insisting on poor people's dignity, but also endorsing their necessity, both for the spiritual elevation of himself and his Lake District community. Furthermore, this paper examines what Wordsworth chose *not* to see, and how the strategy of *un*seeing links to the Romantic need to visualize landscape in picturesque form. By addressing some New Historicist readings of such poems (Simpson, Pfau, Connell, Liu) together with the philosophical framework of the so-called New Poverty Studies, the essay dismantles the concept of a unified Romantic selfhood in order to demonstrate its class-related existence. New Historicism and the New Poverty Studies are compatible approaches because historicists pay attention to what is not there, being alert to "absences", "erasures", "exclusions" and "denials" (Liu 1996: 556), while the New Poverty Studies wants to discuss literary representations of poverty through "the history of representational templates" (Christ 2014: 32) which situate poverty in a wider socio-historical context. As Birte Christ explains, the "new poverty studies is a field in the making" (32) and apart from the historical context necessary to approach representations of poverty it seeks to read texts closely to explore the relationship between the observer and the observed, the genres used and stereotypical ways of representing poverty. Historicist readings of Wordsworth's poems could thus be redefined in the light of the New Poverty Studies framework, viewing poverty as primarily material and economic but also subjective and physical.

I will start with David Simpson's contention that Wordsworth is primarily a poet of "displacement" (1987: 77). For Simpson, an influential New Historicist American critic, Wordsworth is "displaced from the very social units that he celebrates as a healthful paradigm of communal life" (1987: 77). In order to explain this contention we have to go back to Wordsworth's Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) where, in this manifesto of British Romantic literature, he promises to "choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them in

a selection of language really used by men" (Wordsworth qtd. in Stilinger 1965: 446). Wordsworth explains the rationale of this decision by noting that

> humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity. (Wordsworth qtd. in Stilinger 1965: 447)

In that sense, the poet is "a man speaking to men" (Wordsworth qtd. in Stilinger 1965: 453) and Wordsworth, as many critics have pointed out, embarks on the project of humanization and democratization. By humanizing the "figures of deprivation" (Paul de Man's term) such as mad mothers, idiot boys, discharged soldiers, blind beggars and destitute fathers, Wordsworth is trying to show that these people can feel as intensely as anyone and that they are an indispensable part of their natural habitat. Wordsworth's democratic principle consists in making these humble people the main subject of his poetry and the main protagonists of his vision of humanity. This vision involves the feelings of sympathy and morality in general, those "little unremembered acts / Of kindness and of love" ("Tintern Abbey", lines 35–36) that lead him from the love of nature to the love of mankind. In the centre of Wordsworth's democratic universe lies the idea of the dignity of man, of his unalienable natural rights where a dispossessed individual could still retain the dignity of soul.

That said, it must be added that in many of the poems addressing "figures of deprivation", Wordsworth is not breaking off with tradition but is using the traditional modes of expression of bourgeois culture in order to humanize and democratize the rural poor. A case in point is his usage of the eighteenth-century trope of locodescriptive poetry and the aesthetic framework of the picturesque. Though Wordsworth himself spoke against the picturesque, those "rules of mimic art transferred / To things above all art" (*The Prelude*, Book XI), and many critics have noted his departure from this "strong infection of the age" (*The Prelude*, Book XI), it is vital to examine those aspects of picturesque aesthetics that are present in his poetry.

It is interesting, for instance, how the picturesque functions when juxtaposed with the idea of class, or more specifically, in Wordsworth's case, with the rural people who work on the land. In a recent study devoted to an increased interest in poverty studies, Barbara Korte claims that literature can enhance our understanding of the experience of poverty, since literature "de-anonymises poverty by giving it faces and voices, and it permits readers

to empathize with the poor" (2012: 77). This new mode of poverty analysis, resulting from both the economic crisis and the rising social inequality in the world, seeks to demonstrate an important element in practical engagements with poverty. Having in mind works of fiction, Korte says that literature configures the world in a specific way, and she proposes three strategies of configuration (2012: 79–81):

1) Configuring the lifeworlds, (the experiential facets of poverty that are addressed in a text);
2) Configuring through textual form and style (the choice of mode has a significant impact on reader's potential reactions and attitudes concerning poverty);
3) Configuring agencies of articulation (the text's ideological configuration).

Hence, the intention of the paper is to question Wordsworth's potential for democratization in his poetry about the poor through the three strategies of literary configuration proposed by Korte, and by historicizing Wordsworthian humanity through his usage of the picturesque.

"MICHAEL"

"Michael", a pastoral poem dating from Wordsworth's great period poems, opens with lines that recall his *Guide to the Lakes*, in which the reader is immediately inserted into the world of the picturesque:

> If from the public way you turn your steps
> Up *the tumultuous brook* of Green-head Gill,
> You will suppose that with *an upright path*
> Your feet must struggle; in such *bold ascent*
> *The pastoral Mountains* front you, face to face.
> But courage! for beside that *boisterous brook*
> The mountains have all open'd out themselves,
> And made *a hidden valley* of their own.
> *No habitation* there is seen; but such
> As journey thither find themselves alone
> With *a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites*
> that overhead are sailing in the sky. (lines 1–12, emphasis mine)

"The tumultuous brook", "an upright path", "bold ascent", "the pastoral Mountains", "a hidden valley" and "a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites" remind the reader of Wordsworth's first engagement with the picturesque in "An Evening Walk," in which he visualizes the Lake District where he grew up according to the best models of the picturesque tour. As Nicola Trott explains, the Grand Tour (the obligatory tour of the European Continent for all English gentlemen) was replaced by the "domestic tour" by the end of the eighteenth century and it became just as fashionable (as well as the Lake District, it included the North Wales, the river Wye and the Scottish Highlands) (1999: 74–75). Though Wordsworth repudiated hordes of tourists coming to the Lake District driven by "the craze of the Picturesque", he still worked under the very impression of this "mimetic" representation, the way of looking at landscape by criteria drawn from painting.

Michael is a shepherd and a hill farmer in the Lake District. He is the owner of his own land that has been passed down from generation to generation, and he hopes that his son Luke will continue working on the land as he did. However, Michael lost money as he allowed himself to be a bondsman for a nephew who found himself in debt. By giving away "[...] little less / Than half his substance" (lines 226–227), he is almost ruined and therefore sends his son Luke to the city to work. Before his departure, Michael shows him "a straggling heap of unhewn stones" (17) to remind him of his thwarted desire to built a sheepfold, a symbol of rural life within a happy family. However, Luke never returns to his father's land and the estate is sold to a stranger as the consequence of the great changes wrought in all neighborhoods.

In this poem, Wordsworth clearly anticipates industrialization and the consequences it would have for the subsistence economy of small farmers who owned the land; through enclosures the families will be torn apart and the children will have to find new jobs in urban areas. In a letter to a Whig representative in Parliament, Charles James Fox, Wordsworth wrote about the shepherds' land which "serves as a kind of permanent rallying point for their domestic feelings, as a tablet upon which they are written, which makes them objects of memory in a thousand instances when they would otherwise be forgotten" (qtd. in Cosgrove and Daniels 1988: 87). This was an important gesture of warning to Fox, the leading parliamentary advocate of religious tolerance and individual liberty and the arch-rival of William Pitt the Younger, concerning the special category of the poor who owned the land and a respect owed to them by politicians in the Parliament. Nevertheless, the letter never addressed the culprit, or proposed measures to alleviate poverty. It would not speak against enclosures, the chief cause

of the disappearance of small freeholders, as Goldsmith would have done before Wordsworth in his well-known poem "The Deserted Village" (1770).

Owing to New Historicist readings which have accustomed readers to think of Wordsworth in the light of the political economy of his day, we have to pay attention to financial issues in "Michael". To use David Simpson's term, it is also a poem which exemplifies Wordsworth's "displacement" from his surroundings in several ways. First, the poem relies on a story that Wordsworth overheard as a boy and he transfigures the facts to suit his needs. Luke, Michael's son became dissolute before "giving himself away to debauchery" in London and Wordsworth decides to put the blame on the urban environment (Simpson 1987: 141). Second, the picturesque is an odd choice for this poem if it was to draw attention to the vanishing of small farmers and their ensuing poverty. If we take the aesthetic form to be a kind of "social capital", to use Thomas Pfau's term, it is essential to recognize that the core sensibility of picturesque contemplation "has in fact been produced by historically specific and often curiously elaborate modes of formal aesthetic practices" (Pfau 1997: 20). Though Wordsworth repudiated picturesque aesthetics, he still unconsciously worked under a specific period-related "sensibility", which was by no means individual or subjective, but rather class-related. Instead of showing the real consequences of "enclosures" inflicted by the local gentry, whom elsewhere Wordsworth describes as the "blessing to these vales" (*Two Addresses*), he talks about a self-inflicted family ruin.

In order to appreciate the pertinence of Korte's ideas to the way in which Wordsworth's poem presents "the experiential facets of poverty", we have to take a look at "the milieus and personality traits ascribed to the poor and the social relationships in which the poor are portrayed" (Korte 2012: 79). After the initial passage which sets the representational practice of the picturesque in motion with the "boisterous brook" (6) and "bold ascent" (4) to the "hidden valley" (8), we learn that it is a place of "utter solitude" (13) with a "heap of unhewn stones" (17) in the middle, the ruin of the sheepfold Michael was to build. This heap of stones triggers the poet's memory of a tale he overheard while still a young boy. Since the story told is set in the past, we clearly see that the rural world depicted in the poem is no longer there – it is a poem about the vanishing world that Wordsworth would like to bring back to life. In a typical Wordsworthian manner, which distinguishes him from the eighteenth century locodescriptive poets, he talks about the unity of man and nature – the shepherd loved the vale and it "impressed / So many incidents upon his mind / Of hardship, skill and courage, joy or

fear" (67–69). The poet is concerned with the loss of "authentic pleasure" (Simpson 1987: 64) one gains from observing the well-known landscape, from manual work and from seeing the products of that work. Man and nature are the embodiment of what Wordsworth called "the fitting and the fitted" – the mind of man works harmoniously with his natural surroundings and this connection can only exist in the pre-commercial phase:

> [...] these fields, these hills,
> Which were his living being even more
> Than his own blood (what could they less?), had laid
> Strong hold on his affections, were to him
> A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
> The pleasure which there is in life itself. (74–79)

Interestingly, apart from Isabel's remembrance of a parish boy who went up to London and grew rich, Wordsworth never talks about the shepherd's relation to his neighbours. If it was such a perfect commonwealth, why doesn't he talk about intersubjective relationships, the willingness of people to help the shepherd? All we know is that Michael's house used to be visible from every corner of the village and was named by the locals "The Evening Star".

Furthermore, Wordsworth's choice of the pastoral signals the vanishing, idyllic world. In placing the shepherd in his authentic surroundings and by focusing on the importance of his family, the affection he has for the land "which had impressed /so many incidents upon his mind" (lines 67–68), for his wife "a woman of a stirring life / Whose heart was in her house" (83–84), and for Luke from whom "there came / Feelings and emanations" (lines 210–211), Wordsworth recreates the vanishing pastoral. Reminiscent of Virgil's *Georgics*, the Lake District becomes a trope for an idyllic place, a frozen ideal of the past. By using a specific genre, the pastoral, and by idealizing the relationship between the shepherd and his surroundings, the Wordsworth of 1800 is not a young radical, fervently supporting the French Revolution, but rather "an agrarian idealist" (Simpson's term), contradictory in his appeal to Tory conservatism and the preservation of the economic *status quo*, and in his attempt to appeal to a Whig representative in Parliament in order to change the condition of the rural poor. Rather, Michael sacrifices his son for the land, by exposing him to the temptations of city life; a sacrifice which, according to Annabel Patterson, was completely unnecessary. Patterson is right in saying that "the only forces that control the poem are personal weakness, parental grief and natural decay, that

which has transformed the ruined sheepfold into an object of aesthetic and imaginative interest" (1987: 76). Therefore, this pastoral is visualized through the lens of the picturesque: the subject of the scene becomes a non-subject (Michael's destiny is subsumed under the heap of unhewn stones), the atmosphere is multiplied in excessive range (the boisterous brook, the mountains encompassing a valley, the cottage is gone but the oak is still there), and Michael is an anonymous old man who could be just anyone. It can be seen here how the picturesque departs from Classical art in depicting ordinary men rather than historical subjects (see Liu 1989: 76–80).

The picturesque is disciplinary in force since it relies on setting rules before the viewer, who in turn would exert command over the landscape (see Liu 1989: 94). In Wordsworth's poem, it functions as a command given to the reader – if ever you pass by the heap of stones, stop and think about the story it has to tell. The Lake District abounds in such stories and though at first sight they attract us by their universality, Wordsworth is not just talking about any place. He is talking about those "spots" that "British ground commands" (5) – the oak that is left preserved being a British national tree ("View from the Top of Black Comb", 1813). There is certainly a patriotic strain in his nostalgic longing to preserve the past. Yet, in re-creating the "perfect republic", he decides to leave aside the ambiguities of behavior of the great families and fails to explain that the shepherd's position was as much a necessity as it was a choice (Simpson 1987: 94). From his middle-class position, it seemed vital to aestheticize the feelings of rural people brought to ruin in order to vindicate the *status quo*. In this, Wordsworth was defending his own middle-class status as the picturesque observer and what David Simpson called the "mellowed feudality": the interests of the landed gentry are to be defended at any cost since they govern gently and no reform is necessary (1987: 72). Even though, the picturesque initially points to a subjective and thus, authentic, experience of a Romantic self, this self soon becomes "a subsidiary of a larger 'sensibility' that is to solicit the reflexive identification of a demographic subject, a 'class'" (Pfau 1997: 35).

Furthermore, though Wordsworth gives Michael and his wife, Isabel, a voice – which, according to Barbara Korte, is an important strategy of agency (2012: 80) – these voices remain secondary to the narrative voice of the poet himself. The husband and wife discuss the idea of Michael's leaving for the city – Michael believes it is the only solution as Luke would certainly help him build the sheepfold, once he earns some money, while Isabel believes it to be a disastrous choice as they would both die broken-hearted and without their only son. These voices are set within a clear ideological configuration

– the city is the place of corruption, full of people with "fickle tastes and fickle appetites" (Preface, 1800), the country must therefore remain the sane counterpart. Wordsworth uses the reactionary politics to vindicate his arguments – the natural man belongs to the rural parts and should remain there. If his reactionary politics are put in question by Wordsworth's sending a letter to Fox together with a volume of *Lyrical Ballads* and asking him to pay attention to "Michael" and "The Brothers", the poems dealing with issues of lost property, it is still difficult to read "Michael" as a poem embodying Wordsworth's humanitarianism. One of his later pastorals "Repentance: A Pastoral Ballad" (1829) clearly synthesizes Wordsworth's idea that the shepherd is guilty of his own ruin and condemned to the life of wandering abroad (Patterson 1987: 77). Though such political argument might not come out clearly in "Michael", this poem still shows Wordsworth's blindness to a wider socio-economic context.

"THE OLD CUMBERLAND BEGGAR"

The idea of the natural man brings us closer to another poem worth considering – "The Old Cumberland Beggar". To Harold Bloom this natural man is "stripped to the nakedness of primordial condition and exposed as still powerful in dignity, still infinite in value" (1971: 173). In many ways this assertion connects the beggar with the leech gatherer from Wordsworth's poem "Resolution and Independence", a man who perseveres in gathering leeches and serves as an emblem of endurance and courage. In both poems, Wordsworth is a detached observer who advocates the idea that such men are not useless anomalies within society. On the contrary, they act as bonding agents for the entire neighborhoods:

> Where'er the aged Beggar takes his rounds,
> The mild necessity of use compels
> To acts of love;
> [...]
> Still let him prompt the unlettered villagers
> To tender offices and pensive thoughts. (lines 98–100, 169–170)

The beggar is not useless because he serves as a moral edification for the entire village and Wordsworth fears that the class of beggars will soon be extinct if alms giving is channeled into a local workhouse. As Toby R. Benis claims,

> [...] people's engagement with the beggar never deepens beyond the exchange of food for complacency: he repeatedly is said to be in "solitude" (15) or "a solitary man" (24, 44). The combination of superficial familiarity and a deeper isolation allows the beggar's village to view him as an object, a servant of local custom and unity. The potential challenge to stability encoded in his homelessness is transformed into a prop of community. (116)

In a way, Wordsworth is accepting the utilitarian notion of "mutual uselfulness", but without utilitarian "unsympathetic rationalism" (Dick 2000: 371). He vindicates his position through the well-known Romantic *topoi:* memory and place. It is essential that the old man remains in his precarious condition because "Him from my childhood have I known; and then/ He was so old, he seems not older now" (lines 22–23). If he forms a part of Wordsworth's childhood memories, he must be a part of the communal memory – and by changing his condition this rural society would no longer be the same. Furthermore, it is equally essential that the old man remains visible in nature. He thus becomes the embodiment of the unity of man and nature that Wordsworth praises as the most worthy subject of all poetry. In that sense, the poem could be read as a commentary upon the late-eighteenth-century poor law debate and a direct attack upon the cold-hearted rationality of Malthus and Bentham.

Indeed, Wordsworth makes his point clear in the final stanza, where he openly attacks the overcrowded, noisy workhouse:

> May never HOUSE, misnamed of INDUSTRY,
> Make him a captive! – for that pent-up din,
> Those life-consuming sounds that clog the air,
> Be his the natural silence of old age! (179–182)

The beneficence of private as opposed to public charity work was further emphasized by Wordsworth himself when in the Fenwick notes of 1843 he observed that "the political economists were about that time beginning their war against mendacity in all its forms and by implication, if not directly, on Alms giving also" (Connell 2001: 22). However, as Philip Connell has noted, even though he situates "The Old Cumberland Beggar" within a specific historical moment, the reader must stay alert to two problems. First, the poem never talks about the political economists as the scourge of charitable feeling, and second, Wordsworth's idea about the social visibility of suffering, when read against the fervent political debate on the poor law at the time, was neither subversive nor new (2001: 16–25). Joseph Townsend (abolitionist), Frederick Morton Eden (administrative reformer, *State of the*

Poor, 1797), William Godwin (his essay "On Beggars") and William Paley (moral philosopher, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, 1785), to name just a few, discussed the benefits and drawbacks of charitable benevolence (Connell 2001: 23–24). Thus, Wordsworth's ideas bear a resemblance to ideas that Malthus had previously formulated. In fact, as Philip Connell has convincingly argued, Wordsworth and Malthus could be brought together on a number of points concerning politics and society: they both resented the decline of agrarian independence and linked the provision of organized public poor relief with the high price of provisions (Connell 2001: 29). The uncomfortable proximity of Wordsworth and Malthus should not surprise us at all as Wordsworth's agreement with Malthus on a number of issues was his typically belated reaction to Malthus's work (his *Essay on Population* was published in 1798 and Coleridge and Wordsworth first read it in 1804–1805). The Old Cumberland Beggar keeps in motion the idealized economy of gift exchange, and what remains perhaps the most hard-hearted and self-interested idea in the poem is that the poor should remain poor in order to inspire instant sympathy and in order for the gift economy to stay alive.

The overall debate on the Poor Laws which culminated in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 would give relief only to the truly destitute and unable to work, transferring it from the outdoor relief to the workhouse. By writing the poetry of suffering, Wordsworth certainly reacted against such a poor relief system, which to him seemed to be an alienated form of commodity. However, he never mentioned possible causes for the beggar's destitution: the tendency of landowners to clear estates of the cottages thus restricting the cottage accommodation of the poor. As nineteenth-century English economist Robert Pashley explains, the consequences of the law of settlement passed in 1662 were strongly felt towards the end of the eighteenth century. At this time, under the influence of Malthus and Bentham, a lack of decent accommodation would not only turn many labourers into beggars, but would also be a material check on marriage, further neutralized by the workhouse relief system (1852: 248). Since the major cause for the poor law reform was to restrain the political unrest of the 1790s due to a prolonged war with France which caused high food prices, unemployment and inflation, the poem might also "cast the beggar as Pitt's accomplice rather than his critic" (Benis 2000: 116). Since the beggar invites positive human qualities such as pity and compassion, he provides peace for the entire community willing to share their food with him. By not engaging with the above issues, Wordsworth's poetry prefers the status quo, and the visual

details in "The Old Cumberland Beggar" only add to that idea: the old man is bent double and has palsied hands, he is drawing scraps and fragments of food from his dirty bag and he is eating in silence, seated by the highway side. Though he is trying hard to prevent the waste, the crumbs fall on the ground and thus feed the mountain birds. He is anonymous, voiceless and utterly passive. His humanity is thus rendered inhuman and "seeing still, / And seldom knowing what he sees" (lines 53–54). He becomes the living ghost of this rural area. Wordsworth's visualization of poverty thus recalls again his comment on the exigencies of the picturesque effect: the fact that the figures appearing in landscape should be accidental and entirely anonymous. The beggar thus becomes "a beautiful silent sufferer", resigned to fate, a stylized ideal rather than material reality (Harrison qtd in Dick 2000: 371). For this reason, it is my contention, in line with Pfau's argument, that Wordsworth worked under a particular late-eighteenth century sensibility which espoused the picturesque as its legitimate practice – the sensibility typical of the middle-classes and their "demographic unconscious" (Pfau 1997: 35). The picturesque thus begins as an appreciation of natural beauty, but it turns people into figures represented in a painting or in a literary work. In the words of David Marshall, "coinciding with the discovery of the natural world, anticipating an imaginative projection of self into the landscape through an act of transport or identification, (the picturesque) assumes an attitude that seems to depend on distance and separation" (2002: 414). This is the same distance and separation visible in the poem "I know an Old Man Constrained to Dwell" where Wordsworth pleads for the aged man's natural state and companionship with birds.

To return to Korte's idea of how poverty is configured in this poem, the reader is left with a sense of the dehumanization rather than humanization of the beggar, despite Wordsworth's touching exclamation "But deem not this Man useless. – Statesmen!" (67). Interpersonal relations amount to people letting the old man pass in the woody lane, and to giving him alms on certain fixed days out of habit. As much as David Bromwich insisted on vindicating Wordsworth's position precisely on account that the poet praises habitual actions of the villagers, who "by giving to him, [...] come to feel gifted" (154), it seems to me that the habit stands in the way of any real engagement with poverty. If the final message of the poem should be read as "all we should ask for is to think about the beggar" (157), as Bromwich concludes, it certainly does not read as a protest against the rationality of any laissez-faire system. Since there is no poetic engagement with the beggar's inward world – on the contrary, he is seen from the outside as a

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limited, anonymous, almost animal creature who ultimately blends with the landscape – the poem could be read as a manifestation of the picturesque, which, in turn, is a cumulative manifestation of a collective sensibility of the middle classes. In other words, when Wordsworth says that the beggar should appeal to people with "lofty minds / And meditative" (98–99), he is advocating the idea of a cultivated response to poverty, the type of response that would gradually generate the effect of a collective sensibility, and it is the same type of seemingly "spontaneous" and "natural" symbolic practice that we find in the picturesque.

"RESOLUTION AND INDEPENDENCE"

The final poem to be analysed in this paper was not a part of *Lyrical Ballads* but was written in 1802, and appeared in Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807). As Harold Bloom has noted, this poem owes much to Edmund Spenser's *Prothalamion* in the sense that a poet walks out into the country feeling depressed, until a visionary sight restores his poetic powers. This visionary sight is a random encounter with the leech gatherer who gathers leeches to earn his living and it turns into one of Wordsworth's "spots of time" – scenes to remember for both their spatial and timely significance. Wordsworth relies on an entry in his sister's journal where Dorothy describes the encounter with "an old man almost double" (605) who told them the story of his life. He was of Scotch parents and was born in the army. He lost his ten children, and complained about the leeches being scarce owing to a dry season. The entry in Dorothy's *Grasmere Journals* is significant not only because it confirms how much Dorothy's brother owed to her own experiences and insights, but also because it is dated October 1800 and Wordsworth's poem will be composed some eighteenth month later, in May 1802. Therefore, all the poems chosen in this paper were written before June 18, 1802, the day when the Wordsworths received word that the long contested debt owed to their family by the Earl of Londsdale was to be settled. Relying on Pamela Woof's sources, Heidi Snow claims the settlement was no small affair as the Wordsworths were to be paid £8500, all in one year. In this sense, they would certainly not share the destiny of solitary wanderers and leech gatherers in their neighbourhood. Besides, Dove Cottage was a two-story house with a garden, and Dorothy and William employed

two local laborers and a servant to help with both the house and the yard. Yet, they would consider themselves poor, or at least, in the liminal position of those who were unable to live according to the expectations of their rank. The leech gatherer thus reminds Wordsworth of his own precarious position and the possibility that he might share the future of Thomas Chatterton, the mythical poet who committed suicide at the age of seventeen, not being able to support himself by his writing.

This solitary figure appears on a beautiful, sunny morning after a night of tempestuous winds and heavy rain in the Lake District. The whole atmosphere is again very visual and the sky rejoicing "in the morning's birth" (line 9), the grass "bright with rain-drops" (line 10), some hares running about, and the distant waters roaring, it conforms to the standards of the picturesque. Wordsworth encounters the leech gatherer "unawares" (line 55) and thus helps us visualize his ghostly figure – he is bent double, his head is nearing his feet and yet, he has enormous dignity. His dignity is the consequence of his "stately speech" (103), while his "utterance" sounds like "a stream scarce heard" (line 114). The leech gatherer thus acquires a sort of archetypal value, being "like a man from some far region sent / to give me human strength, and strong admonishment" (lines 118–119). The importance of the encounter is unquestionable since "utterance" would reappear in the *Intimations Ode* and "admonishment" in the Blind Beggar episode of *The Prelude*. His monotonous, repetitive words have a mesmerizing effect upon the poet who experiences the recurrence of the very experience in the projected future time: "In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace / About the weary moors continually" (lines 136–137). Thus, at first sight, Wordsworth talks about what Korte terms "experiential facets of poverty": the old man has been roaming from moor to moor to gather leeches all his life, he has no steady place to live and is still capable of gaining "an honest maintenance" (line 112). In this sense, his attempt to talk to the man might seem a humanitarian gesture. Indeed, as some critics have noted, the reader is supposedly humbled and humanized as "the act of charity springs from a shared understanding of what it is to be a man" (Sheats 1975: 137), or by Wordsworth's "commitment to the realities of human suffering" (Jacobus 1976: 134). Gary Lee Harrison pointed out that the poet finds the identification with the poor characters to be both troubling and sympathetic, enabling the reader to imagine herself in the same situation and thus evoking sympathy (1994: 20). "His representations of the poor", Harrison continues, "make possible, if they do not necessitate, an uneasy literary identification between the spectator and the working

poor" (1994: 20). Though the voice of the leech gatherer could be seen as the Wordsworthian stratagem of low-class empowerment, to evoke Korte's "agencies of articulation", and thus a sign of protest against the social inequality and the hardships of the rural poor, still we are told that the poet hardly heard his words:

> And now not knowing what the old man had said,
> My question eagerly did I renew,
> How is it that you live, and what is it you do?
> He with a smile did then his words repeat;
> And said, that, gathering leeches, far and wide
> He travelled; stirring thus about his feet
> The waters of the ponds where they abide. (lines 124–130)

Though the lines evoke Wordsworth's idea of the dignity of man and his unalienable natural rights, still the poet remains deaf to his uttered words. Geoffrey Hartman suggests that the unintelligible words of the old man should not be deemed as a failure of communication between the poet and the leech gatherer (80–90) because it is a visionary moment for Wordsworth; the poet realizes that the leech-gatherer is that figure of resolution and independence, a solitary figure with a firm mind, persevering in gathering leeches though they are so hard to find. However, Hartman's reading remains oblivious to the fact that, at the beginning of the poem, Wordsworth voices his fears about the future, his utmost fear being poverty. Therefore Wordsworth compares himself to Coleridge, whom he sees as an irresponsible poet, guilty of the precarious position he found himself in, and Chatterton who died in "despondency and madness" (49). The leech gatherer thus becomes a backdrop to Wordsworth's project of effective self-presentation, his on-going project of building up an authentic Romantic bourgeois selfhood, which relies on both cognitive and affective investment (see Pfau 1997: 182). The poet is again a silent observer who, in the manner of his "egotistical sublime" (Keat's phrase), is eager to draw a lesson from this visionary sight about his own, rather than the leech gatherer's future and in educating himself, he hopes to educate his middle-class readers. The lesson drawn is that he has no reason to complain when there are people living in far worse conditions. Yet, they are not afraid of poverty and persevere in whatever they are doing. It is significant that the leech gatherer almost disappears from the poet's view at the end of the poem and one could imagine a silent observer of a picturesque view retreating from the scene of observation to give way to dreams and visions:

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
The old man's shape, and speech, all troubled me:
In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently. (lines 134–138, emphasis mine)

If anything, Wordsworth is capable of visualizing the leech gatherer over and over in his mind, and this picture reminds him that his whole life he has lived "in pleasant thought / As if life's business were a summer mood" (lines 35–36), while some of his neighbours have been suffering continuously. It could be argued that, through the description of the leech gatherer's dignity and perseverance, the poem aims to waken up "the primary laws of our nature" (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800), the affective base which makes us human in sympathizing with the others. However, the failure of communication between the poet and the leech gatherer, as well as the repetitive poet's "gaze" at the poor man in his "mind's eye" (136) show that the poem's ideological configuration is problematic – in fact, as stated earlier, it shows that Wordsworth worked under a specific period-related "sensibility" which was by no means individual or subjective, but rather class-related.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the chosen poems Wordsworth is more concerned with keeping the agrarian ideal of the past than with the plight of the poor. In this agrarian commonwealth, poverty should not be erased, it should be made visible for the community to feel united. The core of such attitude to poverty is class-related as it insists upon both ethics and aesthetics as the vital prerequisites for the middle-class "demographic unconscious" (Pfau). One could say that in insisting upon the moral edification of the rural communities and upon the visualization of "figures of deprivation", Wordsworth unconsciously falls under the spell of a larger class-related sensibility and thus fails in his humanitarian project. Wordsworth's poetry "makes nothing happen" to echo W. H. Auden's line from his poem "In Memory of W. B. Yeats", and one feels disappointed that this is so. After all Wordsworth said in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) that "the poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure" (Stilinger 1965: 454) whereby "we not only wish to

be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased" (464). In using human suffering as the stuff of aesthetic pleasure, he counts on the reader's willingness to embrace his metaphysics of suffering as a legitimate end to moral edification and thus participates in the creation of the middle-class unconscious. In line with New Historicist readings of Wordsworth's poetry, his poems about the poor are poems of historical denial, participating in an ideological moment and the configurations proposed by Korte only strengthen this point. Thus, the shepherds losing their land like Michael, wandering beggars and leech gatherers have less to do with their experience as people on the margins of the British late eighteenth-century society desperately needing help than with their symbolic meaning for the poet himself.

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RESEARCH PAPER

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GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS AND THE ECOLOGICAL BALANCE OF WILDNESS

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In the nineteenth century, the swing of anthropocentric forces wrought profoundly deleterious changes upon the face of the natural environment. Witnessing these metamorphic processes at work was Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose unique sensibility found the despoilment of nature by human hand no less than extremely dispiriting. Against a backdrop of the vanishing beauty, Hopkins fervidly engaged with the transforming world in his ecopoetical ruminations. He was not the first poet of ecological dissent, for during the Romantic period John Clare had poignantly expressed the anguish at what had then been the incipient stages of nature being disrobed of its inherent singularity. Being quite familiar with Clare's ecopoetical meditations, the Jesuit poet was able to further elaborate upon Clare's vision, while proving successful in presciently observing the discrepancies between wilderness as a cultural construct and a wildness whose emphasis upon the appreciation of the global through the local corresponds closely to the present-day awareness concerning the fragility of ecosystems. Most vividly and extensively, Hopkins explores the dyad of wildness and wilderness in poems like "Inversnaid," "Duns Scotus' Oxford," and "Binsey Poplars," wherein he truly establishes himself as one of the essential forerunners of modern ecological science.

Keywords: Gerard Manley Hopkins, ecopoetics, wildness, wilderness, ecology

I

Hopkins swung in suspension between elected (*fullness of absence*) and involuntary (*absence of fullness*) silence. Delving into silence should not be misjudged as escapism or withdrawal, for by virtue of lighting upon the silent mode of being-in-the-world, one is not rendered impermeable to the world but unfurled unto it. Silence can be kindred to bounteous solitude as opposed to loneliness, whose scourge grows in shadowy prominence when