

WORDSWORTH AND THE POETICS OF AIR

Before the ideas we now define as Romanticism took hold the word ‘atmosphere’ meant only the physical stuff of air; afterwards, it could mean almost anything, from a historical mood or spirit to the character or style of an artwork. Thomas H. Ford traces this shift of meaning back to its first occurrence in the poetics of William Wordsworth. Gradually ‘air’ and ‘atmosphere’ took on the new status of metaphor as Wordsworth and other poets reimagined poetry as a textual vehicle of aerial communication that could convey the breath of a transitory moment to other times and places via the printed page. Reading Romantic poetry through this ecological and ecocritical lens, Ford goes on to ask what the poems of the Romantic period mean for us now in a time of climate change, when the relationship between physical climates and cultural, political and literary atmospheres is once again being transformed.

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WORDSWORTH AND THE
POETICS OF AIR

Atmospheric Romanticism in a Time of Climate Change

THOMAS H. FORD

University of Melbourne



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Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-42495-0 — Wordsworth and the Poetics of Air
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 Frontmatter
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CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108424950
 DOI: 10.1017/9781108569316

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First published 2018

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ford, Thomas H. (Literary historian), author.

Title: Wordsworth and the poetics of air / Thomas H. Ford.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018. | Series: Cambridge studies in Romanticism |

Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018000226 | ISBN 9781108424950 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Wordsworth, William, 1770–1850 – Criticism and interpretation. |

Literature and science – England – History–19th century. |

Air in literature. | Romanticism – England.

Classification: LCC PR5892.S3F67 2018 | DDC 821/.7–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018000226>

ISBN 978-1-108-42495-0 Hardback

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Acknowledgements

Acknowledging the many and varied debts to colleagues, teachers, friends and correspondents that I have accrued in writing this book would produce a cloud of names – Leslie Barnes, Linda Bree, Tom Bristow, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Justin Clemens, Deirdre Coleman, Simon During, Frances Ferguson, John Frow, Debjani Ganguly, Ken Gelder, Eric Gidal, Miriam Hansen, Nick Heron, Joe Hughes, Alex James, Adeline Johns-Putra, Jayne Lewis, Sandra Macpherson, Paul Magee, Anne Maxwell, Iain McCalman, Tobias Menely, Romi Mukherjee, Dalia Nassar, Peter Otto, Knox Peden, Paul Rae, Neil Ramsey, Lauren Rickards, Kate Rigby, Monique Rooney, Gillian Russell, Russell Smith, Jesse Oak Taylor, Clara Tuite, Linda Williams – that would be properly interminable, just as a cloud escapes precise circumscription. I am very grateful to all those named above and to many others besides for the invaluable advice, encouragement, suggestions and other assistance they offered towards making atmospheric Romanticism a more credible proposition.

I am especially grateful to Marion Campbell, James Chandler, Katie Fraser, Jenny Lee and the two anonymous readers of Cambridge University Press, who all read and commented on the full manuscript at various stages of its development, some multiple times. The book is immeasurably better thanks to the intellectual generosity of these tireless readers.

It is customary to acknowledge that any remaining errors, omissions, inconsistencies and so on are to be ascribed solely to the author. In the case of this book, such an acknowledgement is entirely warranted: it is all my fault.

Research for the book was supported by a grant on ‘Nineteenth-Century Climate Change’ from the Australian Research Council. It was written at the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University, and in the English & Theatre Studies program at the University of Melbourne.

The section ‘The Poetics of Air’ in Chapter 1 is derived in part from ‘Poetry’s Media’, published in *New Literary History* 44 (2013). A few paragraphs of the section ‘Faraday’s Atmospheric Action at a Distance’ in Chapter 2 also appeared in ‘Aura in the Anthropocene’, published in *symplokē* 21 (2013). The section ‘Goethe’s Meteorological Modification Translation’ in Chapter 3 appeared in a much curtailed form as ‘Cloud Modification Translation’, published in *European Romantic Review* 28 (2017). A somewhat altered version of one paragraph from the section ‘Atmospheric Textuality’ in the Conclusion appeared in my chapter ‘Punctuating History Circa 1800: The Air of *Jane Eyre*’ in Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (eds), *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).

Abbreviations

Unless otherwise noted, all citations from Wordsworth's poetic works are by line number to the reading text presented in the following volumes of the Cornell Wordsworth series:

Descriptive Sketches, ed. Eric Birdsall and Paul M. Zall (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

The Excursion, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007). Abbreviated *Excursion*.

Home at Grasmere, ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977). Abbreviated *Grasmere*.

Last Poems. 1821–1850, ed. Jared Curtis, Apryl Lea Denny-Ferris and Jillian Heydt-Stevenson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). Abbreviated *Last Poems*.

Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797–1800, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992). Abbreviated *Lyrical Ballads*.

Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983). Abbreviated *Poems in Two Volumes*.

The Thirteen-Book Prelude (2 vols), ed. Mark L. Reed (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). Abbreviated *Prelude*. References are to the AB-Stage reading text.

Shorter Poems, 1807–1820, ed. Carl Ketcham (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). Abbreviated *Shorter Poems*.

References to Wordsworth's prose works are by volume and page number of *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). Abbreviated *Prose Works*.

References to letters from William and Dorothy Wordsworth are by page number to *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787–1805*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). Abbreviated *Letters 1*; and to *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, Part II 1812–1820*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd edn, rev. M. Moorman and A.G. Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). Abbreviated *Letters 3*.

Unless otherwise noted, references to the works of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, including to correspondence between Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, are by volume and page number to the Munich edition:

Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens, 21 vols, ed. Karl Richter, Herbert G. Göpfert, Norbert Miller and Gerhard Sauder (Munich: C. Hanser, 1985–97). Abbreviated *Werke*.