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0521641160 - The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth  
Edited by Stephen Gill  
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## The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth

*The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth* provides a wide-ranging account of one of the most famous Romantic poets. Specially commissioned essays cover all the important aspects of this multi-faceted writer; the volume examines his poetic achievement with a chapter on poetic craft, other chapters focus on the origin of his poetry and on the challenges it presented and continues to present. The volume ensures that students will be grounded in the history of Wordsworth's career and his critical reception. Further contributions include discussions of *The Prelude* and *The Recluse*, Wordsworth as philosophic poet, his writing in relation to European Romanticism, and Wordsworth as Nature poet. The collection, by an international team of established specialists, concludes with a lucid account of the history of Wordsworth's texts, and offers students invaluable reference material including a chronology and guides to further reading.

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THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
WORDSWORTH

EDITED BY  
STEPHEN GILL



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## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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DUNCAN WU is a Fellow of St Catherine's College, Oxford, and Professor of English Literature. His books include *Wordsworth's Reading 1770–1815* (2 vols., 1993–5) and *Wordsworth: An Inner Life* (2002).



## CHRONOLOGY

- 1770 William Wordsworth (WW) born 7 April at Cockermouth, Cumberland, in the English Lake District.
- 1771 Dorothy Wordsworth (DW) born 25 September at Cockermouth.
- 1778 Mother, Ann Wordsworth, dies *c.* 8 March.
- 1779 WW enters Hawkshead Grammar School, lodging with Hugh and Ann Tyson.
- 1783 Father, John Wordsworth, dies 30 December.
- 1785–6 First surviving verse, ‘Lines Written as a School Exercise at Hawkshead’ (1785) and composition towards *The Vale of Esthwaite*, not published by WW.
- 1787 WW’s first published poem, ‘Sonnet on Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress’ appears in *The European Magazine* in March. WW enters St John’s College, Cambridge.
- 1788–9 Composition of *An Evening Walk*, published 1793. Storming of the Bastille, 14 July 1789.
- 1790 Walking tour in France and Switzerland with Robert Jones, July–October. Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* published.
- 1791–2 WW in London. In November 1791 returns to France and sees Revolutionary fervour in Paris. Is influenced by Michel Beupuy. Love affair with Annette Vallon and birth of their daughter, Caroline, 15 December 1792. Composes *Descriptive Sketches*, published 1793. Returns to England to seek a livelihood.
- 1793 Louis XVI executed in January. War declared between England and France in February. WW feels an outcast in his own country. Writes but does not publish a seditious *Letter to*

## CHRONOLOGY

- the Bishop of Llandaff*. After wandering across Salisbury Plain in a journey to Wales, WW composes *Salisbury Plain*. Sees Tintern Abbey. William Godwin's *Political Justice* published, as Government suppression of dissent intensifies.
- 1794 WW reunited with DW in stay at Windy Brow, Keswick in Cumberland. In August–September stays at Rampside on the southern coastal tip of the Lake District and sees Peele Castle. Nurses Raisley Calvert, who leaves W £900 on his death in January 1795. Execution of Robespierre 28 July.
- 1795 Samuel Taylor Coleridge (STC) lectures in Bristol on politics and religion. WW a familiar figure in radical circles in London in spring and summer and regularly meets Godwin. Meets STC and Robert Southey in Bristol in August. Settles with DW at Racedown in Dorset and rewrites *Salisbury Plain*.
- 1797 Completes play, *The Borderers* and moves to Alfoxden to be nearer STC. First version of *The Ruined Cottage* and plans for joint composition with STC.
- 1798 The year remembered at the end of *The Prelude* as the *annus mirabilis*. WW completes *The Ruined Cottage* (incorporated eventually into *The Excursion*, 1814), and composes the bulk of the verse published anonymously in September as *Lyrical Ballads*. Plans for *The Recluse* first mentioned. WW, DW, and STC go to Germany and over winter WW writes autobiographical verse, the foundation of *The Prelude*.
- 1799 By end of April WW back in England. Move into Dove Cottage, Grasmere, in December.
- 1800 Begins *Home at Grasmere* (not published in WW's lifetime) and probably composes lines printed in 1814 as a 'Prospectus' to *The Recluse*. Works on poems for second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, published January 1801, and writes 'Preface'.
- 1802 Much lyrical poetry composed. Publication in April of further edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, with revised 'Preface'. Peace of Amiens enables WW and DW to visit Annette and Caroline in August. WW marries Mary Hutchinson (b. 1770, d. 1859) 4 October.
- 1803 War resumes and fear of invasion grows. Birth of first son, John. WW, DW, and STC tour Scotland from mid-August. The Ws meet Sir Walter Scott 17 September. STC ill and planning to leave for better climate.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1804 Much composition, especially on *The Prelude*, enlarged after March from planned five-book structure. ‘Ode to Duty’ and completion of ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’. STC sails to Malta. 18 May Napoleon crowned Emperor. Daughter, Dorothy (always known as Dora) born.
- 1805 WW’s brother John, b. 1772, drowned in the wreck of his ship, *The Earl of Abergavenny*. The Wordsworth circle very deeply affected. WW completes *The Prelude*.
- 1806–7 Birth of son, Thomas, 1806. Visits London. The Wordsworths spend winter in a house of Sir George Beaumont at Coleorton, Leicestershire. STC at last returns, much changed by ill-health. WW reads *The Prelude* to him. *Poems, in Two Volumes* published in 1807. WW staggered by critical abuse. Composes *The White Doe of Rylstone*, but does not publish it until 1815.
- 1808–9 Birth of daughter, Catherine, 1808. The Wordsworths leave Dove Cottage for Allan Bank, a larger house but still in Grasmere. WW publishes, 1809, *The Convention of Cintra*.
- 1810 Son, William, born. Misunderstanding leads to breach with STC, not healed until 1812. First version of *Guide to the Lakes* published as anonymous Preface to Joseph Wilkinson’s *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire*.
- 1811–12 Death of children, Thomas and Catherine. The Wordsworths move from Allan Bank to Rectory, Grasmere.
- 1813 Appointed Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland (a post in the revenue service). Moves to Rydal Mount, home for the rest of his life. Completes *The Excursion*.
- 1814 *The Excursion* published; the project of *The Recluse* announced in the Preface. Poem attacked by reviewers. Tour of Scotland, including a visit to the Yarrow.
- 1815 First collected edition of poems published, with new Preface. *The White Doe of Rylstone* (written 1807) published.
- 1816 Publishes prose *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*.
- 1817 STC’s *Biographia Literaria* published. WW moves more widely in London circles; meets Keats.
- 1818 For the General Election WW campaigns energetically for the Tory interest in Westmorland, to the distress of family and many admirers.
- 1819 Publishes *The Waggoner* and *Peter Bell*, poems written long before in 1806 and 1798 respectively.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1820 Publishes *The River Duddon* sonnet sequence and a further collected works. Regular updating of his collected edition now becomes a feature of WW's writing life – 1827, 1832, 1836, 1845, 1849–50 being the most important editions. Tours Europe and revisits memorable places from the 1790 tour.
- 1822 *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent*, 1820 published and *Ecclesiastical Sketches*. First separate publication of *Description of the Scenery of the Lakes* (later *Guide to the Lakes*).
- 1829–35 Catholic Emancipation greatly troubles WW, as does the Reform Bill of 1832. Enters period of greatly exaggerated alarm at the state of the country. Tours Scotland once more, September–October 1831, and sees Sir Walter Scott (d. 1832) for the last time. Death of STC, 25 July 1834. *Yarrow Revisited* published 1835, with important prose Postscript.
- 1836–43 Tours France and Italy in 1837. Sonnets collected as one volume in 1838. In 1839 WW conducts last of many revisions of *The Prelude*. Poems written in youth, notably *The Borderers* and *Salisbury Plain*, revised for publication in *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years*, 1842. Resigns Stamp Distributorship in 1842 and following year becomes Poet Laureate on death of Robert Southey. WW now widely celebrated figure, receiving honorary degrees from Durham and Oxford.
- 1844–50 Supervises with great care one-volume collected edition in 1845. Deeply stricken by death of Dora, 9 July 1847. WW dies 23 April 1850. *The Prelude* published by his wife and executors.

WORDSWORTH ON POETRY AND IMAGINATION

- KEY 1800 The 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800)  
 1802 The revised 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* for the 1802 edition  
 1815 'Preface' to the *Poems* (1815)  
 1815 *Supplement* 'Essay Supplementary to the Preface to the  
*Poems*' (1815)  
 IF 'Isabella Fenwick Notes', 1843. *The Fenwick Notes of  
 William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (1993)

'There is little need to advise me against publishing; it is a thing which I dread as much death itself.' *Letter to James Tobin*, 6 March 1798

'I think publications in which we formally & systematically lay down rules for the actions of Men cannot be too long delayed... I know no book or system of moral philosophy written with sufficient power to melt into our affections, to incorporate itself with the blood & vital juices of our minds, & thence to have any influence worth our notice...' *Essay on Morals* 1798  
*in Prose I*

'It has been said of poets as their highest praise that they exhausted worlds and then imagined new, that existence saw them spurn her bounded reign, etc. But how much of the real excellence of Imagination consists in the capacity of exploring the world really existing...' *Annotation in Wordsworth's copy of 'Paradise Lost'*

'It is the honourable characteristic of Poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind.' *'Advertisement' to 'Lyrical Ballads'* (1798)

'Words, a Poet's words more particularly, ought to be weighed in the balance of feeling and not measured by the space which they occupy upon paper. For

## POETRY AND IMAGINATION

the Reader cannot be too often reminded that Poetry is passion: it is the history or science of feeling.' *Note to 'The Thorn' (1800)*

'Low and rustic life was generally chosen [for *Lyrical Ballads*], 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, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated...' 1800

'For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply.' 1800

'it is proper that I should mention one other circumstance which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and the situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.' 1800

'The end of Poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an over-balance of pleasure.' 1800

'... the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise... some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found strictly the language of prose, when prose is well written.' 1802

'What is a Poet?... He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.' 1802

'Among the qualities which I have enumerated as principally conducing to form a Poet, is implied nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree.' 1802

## POETRY AND IMAGINATION

‘Aristotle, I have been told, hath said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing; it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion . . .’ 1802

‘The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, that of the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer or a natural philosopher, but as a Man.’ 1802

‘The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science.’ 1802

‘. . . a great Poet ought . . . to a certain degree to rectify men’s feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane pure and permanent, in short more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things. He ought to travel before men occasionally as well as at their sides.’ *Letter to John Wilson, 7 June 1802.*

‘. . . if I were disposed to write a sermon . . . upon the subject of taste in natural beauty . . . all of which I had to say would begin and end in the human heart, as, under the direction of the divine Nature conferring value on the objects of the senses and pointing out what is valuable in them.’ *Letter to Sir George Beaumont, 17 and 24 October 1805*

‘. . . to be incapable of a feeling of Poetry in my sense of the word is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God.’ *Letter to Lady Beaumont, 21 May 1807*

‘never forget what I believe was observed to you by Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen . . .’ *ibid.*

‘Every great Poet is a Teacher: I wish either to be considered as a Teacher, or as nothing.’ *Letter to Sir George Beaumont [Feb. 1808]*

## POETRY AND IMAGINATION

‘Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with: they hold above all other external powers a dominion over thoughts . . . Language, if it do not uphold, and feed, and leave in quiet, like the power of gravitation or the air we breathe, is a counter-spirit, unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste, to vitiate, and to dissolve.’ *Essays upon Epitaphs*, III, 1810

‘. . . the mighty difference between seeing & perceiving.’ *The Sublime and the Beautiful*, 1811–1812. *Prose II*

‘. . . the mind gains consciousness of its strength to undergo only by exercise among materials which admit the impression of its power . . .’ *The Convention of Cintra*, 1809

‘. . . the range of poetic feeling is far wider than is ordinarily supposed, and the furnishing new proofs of this fact is the only *incontestable* demonstration of genuine poetic genius.’ *Letter to R. P. Gillies*, 22 December 1814

‘[Imagination] recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite.’ 1815

‘Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our Nature, Imagination to incite and to support the eternal.’ 1815

‘The appropriate business of poetry (which, nevertheless, if genuine, is as permanent as pure science), her appropriate employment, her privilege and her *duty*, is to treat of things not as they *are*, but as they *appear*; not as they exist in themselves, but as they *seem* to exist to the *senses*, and to the *passions*.’ 1815 *Supplement*

‘Thus the Poetry, if there be any in the work [*The White Doe of Rylstone*], proceeds whence it ought to do from the soul of Man, communicating its creative energies to the images of the external world.’ *Letter to Francis Wrangham*, 18 January 1816

‘. . . even in poetry it is the imaginative only, viz., that which is conversant [with], or turns upon infinity, that powerfully affects me, – I mean to say that, unless in those passages where things are lost in each other, and limits vanish, and aspirations are raised, I read with something too much like indifference . . .’ *Letter to W. S. Landor*, 21 January 1824



## POETRY AND IMAGINATION

‘... the logical faculty has infinitely more to do with Poetry than the Young and the inexperienced, whether writer or critic, ever dreams of. Indeed, as the materials upon which that faculty is exercised in Poetry are so subtle, so plastic, so complex, the application of it requires an adroitness which can proceed from nothing but practice, a discernment, which emotion is so far from bestowing that at first it is ever in the way of it.’ *Letter to William Rowan Hamilton, 24 September 1827*

‘blank verse... is infinitely the most difficult metre to manage...’ *Letter to Catherine Grace Godwin [Spring 1829]*

‘words are not a mere *vehicle*, but they are *powers* either to kill or to animate.’ *Letter to William Rowan Hamilton, 23 December 1829*

‘If my writings are to last, it will I myself believe, be mainly owing to this characteristic. They will please for the single cause, That we have all of us one human heart!’ *Letter to Henry Crabb Robinson [c. 27 April 1835]*

‘Admiration & love, to which all knowledge truly vital must tend, are felt by men of real genius in proportion as their discoveries in Natural Philosophy are enlarged; and the beauty in form of a plant or an animal is not made less but more apparent as a whole by a more accurate insight into its constituent properties & powers.’ *IF note to ‘This Lawn’*

## SOURCES AND SHORT FORMS OF CITATION

The authoritative edition of Wordsworth's poetry is the Cornell Wordsworth, general editor Stephen Parrish. Wherever possible quotation from the poems throughout this *Companion* will be keyed to the 'Reading Text' in the relevant volume of this multi-volume edition, but where there can be no mistaking what is being referred to, quotations will not be encumbered with unnecessary citation notes. Line numbers will only be added at the end of quotations from longer poems – no one needs a line number to find a quotation from a sonnet. Bibliographical details for each volume of the Cornell Wordsworth referred to are given below in the list of short forms of citation. As this *Companion* goes to press the Cornell Wordsworth is not yet complete and for certain poems – most notably *The Excursion* – it is necessary to refer to the previously standard edition of Wordsworth's poetry, edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, details of which appear below.

### *Short Forms of Citation*

Place of publication is London unless otherwise noted.

- 1799 *The Prelude, 1798–1799*, ed. Stephen Parrish [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1977)
- 1805 *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed [Cornell Wordsworth] (2 vols.; Ithaca, 1991)
- 1850 *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, ed. W. J. B. Owen [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1985)
- BL Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (2 vols.; 1983)
- DS *Descriptive Sketches*, ed. Eric Birdsall [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1984)
- Borderers *The Borderers*, ed. Robert Osborn [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1982)
- BW *Benjamin the Waggoner*, ed. Paul F. Betz [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1981)

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- DW Dorothy Wordsworth  
 EP *Early Poems and Fragments, 1785–1797*, ed. Carol Landon and Jared Curtis [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1997)  
 H@G *Home at Grasmere*, ed. Beth Darlington [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1977)  
 LB *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797–1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1992)  
 LP *Last Poems, 1821–1850*, ed. Jared Curtis [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1999)  
 PB *Peter Bell*, ed. John E. Jordan [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1985)  
 P2V *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. Jared Curtis [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1983)  
 Prose *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols.; Oxford, 1974)  
 PW *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (5 vols.; Oxford, 1940–9)  
 RC *The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar*, ed. James Butler [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1979)  
 SP *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1975)  
 SPoems *Shorter Poems, 1807–1820*, ed. Carl H. Ketcham [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1989)  
 STC Samuel Taylor Coleridge  
 STCL *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (6 vols.; Oxford, 1956–71)  
 TT Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring (2 vols.; London, 1990).  
 Tuft *The Tuft of Primroses, with Other Late Poems for The Recluse*, ed. Joseph F. Kishel [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1986)  
 WD *The White Doe of Rylstone*, ed. Kristine Dugas [Cornell Wordsworth] (Ithaca, 1988)  
 WL The Wordsworth Library, Grasmere.  
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